THE PHENOMENA OF CHANGE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

While change has been extensively examined from the view of the leader and numerous prescriptions developed for successful change, a review of the literature revealed that little focus has been placed upon the perspective of the non-managerial organizational citizen tasked with carrying out change. This phenomenological study fills this void by exploring the question of how organizational citizens perceive and experience the phenomena of change. Four focus groups were conducted with 21 organizational citizens from a variety of organizations, large and small. Through the interaction of the focus groups, 10 major themes emerged: (a) how change is presented, (b) communication, (c) planning, (d) participation in decision making, (e) technology, (f) leadership changes, (g) training, (h) positive aspects of change, (i) resistance, and (j) negative aspects of change. A written essence of change narrative was prepared and confirmed by over half the participants in the study. The research reveals that organizational citizens see change as an event, not a process. This research also demonstrates the value of exploring change holistically as organization citizens do not separate change from the event and their reactions are complex. Focus group participants responded that resistance to change is not necessarily inherent, rather dependent upon the situation which led to continued optimism that a new change may bring improvement. Focus group participants expressed a desire for partnership with their organizations through participation in decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Change in its various forms is a continual process in organizations today. The pace of change and its complexity are also greater than in times past (Burnes & James, 1994). IBM's Global Study (2004) of over 400 business leaders from around the world indicated that only 10% of change initiatives, from implementing new systems to mergers of major corporations, were successful. Other researchers (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Burke, & Biggart, 1997; LaClair & Rao, 2002) stated that, at best, there has been a 30 – 50% success rate for organizational change while Burnes and James (2011) suggest a 70% failure rate. Estimates show 75% of American organizations will reengineer, achieving substantial improvement in performance "by starting from scratch in designing the core business process" (Attaran, 2000, p.794). The 2006 IBM Global CEO study of 765 CEO's stated that two-thirds of those interviewed were expecting to be inundated with change over the next two years" (p. 71).

These statistics combine to demonstrate that stakeholders in organizations must find a way to improve the success rate of change initiatives. Hundreds of books and articles have already been published about the importance of leadership during change and the practices that will foster success in such initiatives (Beach, 2006; Bridges & Mitchell, 2002; Carter, Ulrich, & Goldsmith, 2005; Harvey, 1995; Hesselbein (2002); Kotter, 1996, 2002; McGreevy, 2009; Sirkin, Keenan, & Jackson, 2005; Ward, 2003; Williams, Woodward, & Dobson, 2002). It is evident that the focus on change has been directed almost entirely to the leadership of change. The missing element in change literature appears to be in the area of research at the organizational citizen level

that contributes to understanding of how the phenomena of change is experienced by those ultimately tasked with incorporating the change into their everyday lives. Consequently, this exploratory study will focus on how organizational citizens perceive and experience the phenomena of change.

BACKGROUND

As shown in a search on Amazon.com, well over 50,000 books have been published on the topic. Additionally, there are hundreds of research articles found in journals discussing the issue of organizational change. Why, then, does change continue to meet with little success as revealed in the success rates reported by business executives and researchers? Both the literature and conversations with top consultants revealed the dichotomy of thought regarding the underlying factors in the lack of success in change initiatives.

Beer and Nohria (2000), Marshall and Conner (2000) and J. Kotter (personal communication, August 4, 2006) suggested that part of the problem lies in the focus of change initiatives. Kotter stated that organizations are not good at change because the leaders tend to think in terms of issues such as technology and strategy while Beer and Nohria wrote that "…managers end up immersing themselves in an alphabet soup of initiatives. They lose focus and become mesmerized by all the advice available in print and on-line about why companies should change…and how they should do it" (p. 133). Similarly, Marshall and Conner concluded that a major part of the problem lies in the abstract focus on change rather than on helping individuals or groups assimilate the change which raises the specter of feelings. In a study of emotional intelligence and its importance in leadership, Cox (2001) sharpened the need for a focus on feelings stating:

> Until relatively recently, any suggestion that emotions are a significant factor in workplace and leadership effectiveness would have met with scorn and the concept discarded as 'touchy-feely'. That attitude is finally being challenged as leaders take a second look at the creative synthesis emerging between business and the behavioral sciences. (p. 36).

Although researchers (Ferres & Connell, 2004; Ivancevich & Matteson, 2002; Jarrett, 2004; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Quinn, 1996; Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004) list many repercussions for organizational citizens encountering change, the listed repercussions are usually found in an overview of change, not actionable advice for dealing with emotions.

Decker, Durand, Mayfield, McCormack, Skinner and Perdue (2012) explored change management literature and suggested "there is no common currency to facilitate the communication of possible causes of failure between decision analysis, implementation control and CM efforts" (p. 34). Other studies suggested that leaders are inexperienced in leading change at the rapidly increasing rate at which it occurs today. Both R. Koup (personal communication, July 28, 2006) and J. Kotter (personal communication, August 4, 2006) stated that leaders do not have models that show them how to deal with change at the magnitude and speed that it occurs. Hey and Moore (1998) suggested that leaders revert to past practices that are not in tune with today's worker:

> The old mentality, which developed out of post-World War II experience, is confronting a new mentality which emerged out of the changing realities of the past decade. When responding to difficult times, the old mentality resorts to past practices: work longer hours, increase advertising, create more brand-name 'buzz,' cut costs. None of these approaches connects with an individual passing through a personal reassessment process, and it actually encourages disconnect (a separation from the organization) for those who have finished the process. (pp. 15-16).

Several authors appear to disagree with the concept that leaders do not have models to follow. Sull (2003) stated that leaders use actions that were successful in the past and use them too quickly. Instead of examining interaction of the current systems, leaders react with formulas that actually create dissonance between leadership practices and follower mentality. Beach (2006) agreed, writing:

> Prevailing wisdom is that the business environment changes so quickly that only draconian, revolutionary measures can induct the organizational changes necessary for survival. …In short, businesses in particular and organizations in general have endured wrenching changes, many of which in hindsight, seem to have been done more for the sake of change than for any sound business reason. (pp. 41-41)

An example of such a change formula is the trend in downsizing. Although downsizing may employ strategies such as eliminating functions, work reduction or reduction of employee numbers through attrition, outplacement or early retirement, downsizing is usually thought of as a direct reduction in workforce. Between 1987 and 1991, white-collar employees were downsized in 85% of Fortune 1000 firms (Cameron, Freeman, & Mishra, 1991). The current economy impacts this practice as over 127,000 workers were downsized in 1,300 layoff actions (over 50 workers each) in May of 2013 alone (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

> Downsizing spreads, despite increasing evidence that it may not be effective in achieving goals of cost reduction, increased productivity, and greater profitability. Studies suggest that downsizing has a number of negative consequences for the morale, commitment, and work effort of survivors. (McKinley, Sanchez, & Schick, 1995, p. 33)

Yet, many leaders look at the trends in their industry or the global marketplace and engage in follow-the-(perceived) leader to the detriment of both the individual worker and the organization as a whole. The reaction of organizational citizens to downsizing, mergers, acquisitions or any other type of change where wounding may occur is that there will be hurt, alienation (Moore, 2001), scapegoating, conflict, low morale, loss of trust, rigidity (Cameron, et al., 1991), confusion, mental fatigue, hostility, depressing and paralysis (Belasen, 2000). "At the end of the day, those feelings make it difficult for employees to care, trust or believe in what management is trying to do. The result is often resistance, contempt, lethargy and passive-aggressive foot-dragging, which compromises both morale and productivity" (Moore, p. 6). In a study reporting the effects of two significant change events, a corporate-wide restructuring and a 10% reduction in salaried work force in a Fortune 100 company, Mossholder, Settoon, Harris and Armenakis (1995) reported that even though the work force reduction was limited to 10% of the organization, the impact emotionally was far reaching.

Both Sull (2003) and Beach (2000) supported Hey and Moore's (1998) conclusion that the implementation of old methods for managing change creates dissonance between leadership practices and follower mentality. Sull noted that leaders use actions that were successful in the past and use them too quickly, terming these actions "active inertia". Beach emphasized that the mentality regarding change has resulted in the use of draconian measures expected to bring success, but resulting instead in change for the sake of change. Although these researchers acknowledge that the old methods do not appear to meet with success, there appears to be little research to gain understanding of how the organizational citizen deals with these old methods as organizations and environments have been revolutionized. Burnes and Jackson (2011) suggested the role of alignment of values is important between the change intervention and the values of those in the organization affected by the change as a potential cause of lack of successful change initiatives.

Identifying change as a departmentalized event also adds to disconnect between leaders and followers. Malott (2003) pointed out that "We tend to treat change as if the 'thing' to be changed is a closed system" (p. 23), when in reality, the heart of change lies in the followers. Senge (1990) was one of the forerunners in this area stating that leaders need to understand change as a process, to identify "underlying 'structures' rather than 'events'" (p. 65). In describing the complexity of organizational responses, Stacey (2005) stated that actions cannot be separated from history. Therefore, attempts to examine change without acknowledging the individual's history and the current context of the change reveal only partial parameters of the impact of a change event. A phenomenological study provides the platform for organizational citizens to share their perspectives on the system in which they work, its history and influence, if any.

Research on change is often focused on specific management activities such as shaping behavior, framing change and creating capacity (Higgs & Rowland, 2005) or the emotional intelligence of the leader (Huy, 1999; Scott-Ladd, & Chan, 2004). Studies that include a measure of the attitudes of followers have done so primarily to test hypotheses related to leadership characteristics such as emotional intelligence (Ferres & Connell, 2004) or personality characteristics (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). Other studies explore the connection between change and communication (Khalid & Rehman, 2011; Qian & Daniels, 2008).

Stacey (2003) posed two important questions at the beginning of *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics* "What are the phenomena that are being talked about when the terms 'strategy' and 'organisational change' are used? And "How do humans make sense of phenomena….?" Stacey concluded:

> Strategic choice theory holds that an organization changes because its top
> managers choose new strategic directions. Learning organization and knowledge management theories hold that organizations develop in new ways because top managers identify leverage points in the systems from which they can control it or they develop systems through which they can capture the knowledge of individuals. These theories also hold that new directions flow from changes in the mental models of people in an organization and that these changes can be managed….The insights coming from heterogeneous complex adaptive systems suggest a completely different possibility. Managers may be making strategic choices, operating at leverage points and managing boundaries. However, from a radical complexity perspective they are agents in the system, not external observers of it. They cannot therefore know the long-term outcome of the choices they are making. (p. 263).

Stacey (2003) continued with an examination of chaos and complexity theories, concluding that the prescriptions formulated from strategic choice, learning organization and knowledge management, and chaos and complexity theories, place the manager in the position of creating and implementing the rules that will successfully functionalize the strategy for change. Stacy's question regarding the phenomena of change is one of the few instances found in the literature where change is viewed with this approach and suggests that further exploration of change from the perspective of the organizational citizen is needed. The research of Nastase, Giuclea and Bold (2012) supports this approach as they acknowledge "organizations are…open social systems, and changes undoubtedly are made only by people, the human dimension of change is critical (p. 15).

A few researchers have begun to examine the impact of change on the follower in more direct ways. Brennan-Rowe (2006) conducted a study with 15 MBA students and eight faculty

members concerning what leadership practices, from Kouzes and Posner's (2002) five practices of exemplary leadership and Connor's organizational change practices, they perceived to be important for managers and leaders during mergers and acquisitions. Schraeder (2004) completed an organizational assessment that involved 59 respondents in support, managerial and clinical positions during a period of high change within an organization. The study was conducted to measure organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, job stress, intent to leave the organization, performance and productivity, etc. Indicative of the research on change, these studies included management. While managers at many levels may not be the decision-makers for a specific change, they are still frequently implementers, as well as receivers of a change. Gilmore, Shea and Useem (1997) stated, "This dynamic rests on a combination of fact (who holds the power) and emotion (who feels the greater vulnerability)" (p. 176).

Chreim (2006) interviewed 22 non-managerial employees of Canadian federally chartered banks that had experienced major changes for the decade of the 1990's. Participants had survived multiple job cuts and had over 10 years of experience in the banking industry. Contrary to much of the research that begins with the assumption that employees resist change, Chreim's qualitative research revealed through interviews that "they welcomed and/or accepted the changes that: were compatible with personal goals; provided the opportunity to experience variety and personal growth; which were seen as enjoyable; and/or led to organizational prosperity or success" (p. 321). This finding is in direct opposition to much of the existing research that assumes resistance and attempts to either measure it or overcome it to create readiness for change.

Wagner (2006) used qualitative methods and examined a planned change in the Department of Defense using phenomenographic analysis. Wagner applied Weick's seven properties of sensemaking and reached several findings: (a) individuals in the planner/implementer stakeholder group tended to perceive more support for their sensemaking compared to those in the contributor/recipients stakeholder group; (b) the planner/implementer stakeholder group expressed more positive emotions, whereas, the contributor/recipient stakeholder group expressed fewer positive and more negative emotions; (c) experience varied by the participant's role in the planned organizational change; and, (d) the study culminated in identifying four qualitatively different ways of experiencing planned organizational change: aligned, conflicted, disillusioned, and dysfunctional (p. 209). Although Wagner's research focused on a specific planned change in a single organization, it offers a rare in-depth look at the experiences of internal stakeholders in change.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the initial research stages of this study, a paragraph in *The Caterpillar Doesn't Know* (Hey & Moore, 1998) resonated:

> Our observations tell us that much of the disparity between management's focus on globalization and technology on the one hand, and the consultant's fix on tactical problems within the organization on the other, occurs because the organization lacks an overall context for what is taking place in society. Consequently, planning new-market and human-resource strategies without first looking at the new context that individuals have developed for themselves is nothing more than mental aerobics. (p. 18)

Through the literature review and interviews with organizational consultants, the idea began to emerge that the change literature has not addressed the context of change that individuals have developed for themselves. The focus in change remains on the leader, as in past research, rather than on the internal stakeholders. How can a leader prepare organizational citizens for change without understanding their worldview regarding the phenomena? As briefly outlined in this

introduction, the majority of books and research studies written about change magnify this focus on the leader in terms of leader qualities and leadership practices. Little research could be located that directly addressed the human side of change through the experiences of non-managerial organizational citizens other than measurements of followers reactions to or readiness for specific events. Thus the need for this multi-stakeholder research was acknowledged by Farias and Johnson (2000), Rowley (2006), and Wagner (2006). Further, the low success rate of change initiatives (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Burke & Biggart, 1997; LaClair & Rao, 2002) supported the need for this study.

PURPOSE

The objective of the research was to gain paramount insights regarding the phenomena of change and to capture and give voice to organizational citizens who are not decision makers and have been underrepresented in prior research on change. This study combined organizational citizens from a variety of companies in a focus group setting maximizing their experiences through their interaction in the group.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The exploratory research question for this study asked: "How do non-managerial organizational citizens perceive and experience the phenomena of change?" Sub-questions were: What have been your experiences with organizational change? What impacts how you respond to change? What seems important or significant about change events?

METHODOLOGY

This question was addressed through qualitative inquiry, specifically phenomenology, for a number of reasons. Qualitative research provided both depth and detail in responses, rather than attempting to fit the experiences of individuals into pre-determined answers (Patton, 2002). Change, as demonstrated in the literature review, is a complex topic. Flick (2002) stated qualitative design methods are open and "do justice to the complexity of the object under study" (p. 5).

Specifically, a phenomenological study focusing on the descriptions of change by organizational citizens and an attempt to interpret how they experience change was conducted. Husserl (as cited in Moran, 2000) stressed that phenomenology operates from a "principle of presuppositionlessness…that is, the claim to have discarded philosophical theorizing in favour of careful description of phenomena themselves…" (p. 9). Patton (2002) stated, "The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person's reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience" (p. 106). Bracketing, or epoche was used to set aside assumptions that the researcher may have had about the phenomena to examine it in its fullness.

Focus groups were selected as a method of obtaining descriptions of change. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that focus group are appropriate when (a) the researcher is looking for a range of ideas or feelings, (b) the purpose is to uncover factors that influence opinions, behavior, or motivation, provide insight into complicated topics, (c) the researcher wants ideas to emerge from a group, and (d) there is value in capturing the comments or language used by the target audience. Gibbs (1997) suggested that focus groups offer the researcher the opportunity to gain several perspectives about the topic at one time, and to gain additional insights through the shared interaction of the participants. Focus groups do not limit the participants to the typical "A,

B, C" choices that surveys provide (Grudens-Schuck, Allen, & Larson, 2004), expanding the variety of responses that the researcher will receive and providing an opportunity to listen for "emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions…to enable the researcher to learn or confirm not just the facts, but the meaning behind the facts" (p. 2).

Although the suggested size of focus groups varied from 3 to 12, Krueger and Casey (2000) presented solid reasoning for 6 to 8 participants as an ideal size for most topics. A group of this size provided opportunities for all participants to share their experiences but was not so large that it will be difficult to control in terms of side conversations. According to Krueger (1998), the quality of the study is not dependent upon the size of the sample, but rather upon achieving theoretical saturation or redundancy. This can usually be achieved with three to four focus groups (Krueger, 1998); therefore four focus groups were conducted. The participants were asked open-ended questions such as "What is the first thing that comes to mind when I say the word 'change'?" and "Tell me about a recent experience with change in your organization." Responses were captured both on audio and video tape and transcribed. Subsequently, content analysis was conducted to probe for themes in the descriptions provided by participants.

Participant selection. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, based on the purpose of the study which was to gain understanding of the perceptions of change of people in non-managerial roles in organizations of many sizes.

Reliability of data. The following qualitative procedures were used to establish reliability. First, the focus group proceedings were captured via both field notes and electronic recording that was reviewed and analyzed, accepted procedures for data collection, handling and analysis (Krueger, 1998). Tapes and transcripts provide a public record that can be replayed and reanalyzed (Silverman, 2000). Second, multiple focus groups were conducted which allowed the researcher to compare the findings from group to group. This follows the model suggested by Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Flick, 2002) that demonstrated qualitative research as circular and repetitive in nature. NVIVO7 software was used to assist in coding and organizing data.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Change. For the purposes of this paper, change will be defined as an event that requires adjustment by individuals to either internal or external forces and subsequent mobilization to realize common goals of the organization.

Organizational citizen or follower. Non-managerial, internal stakeholder in an organization.

FINDINGS

Upon conclusion of the analysis, 10 major themes were drawn from the words of the co-researchers: how change is presented, planning, communication, participation in decision making, training, technology, leadership changes, negative change, resistance, and positive change.

Theme 1: How Change is Presented: The importance of how change is presented to all levels of the workforce emerged as one of the top themes. All four groups referred to "how it is presented" and supported the theme through over 50 references connected to the topic. Co-researchers acknowledged that they seek internal and external alignment of a change message. For example, when change is announced, are resources and training available to make the change successful? What prompted the change? Who planned it? The theme of how change is presented

was thickly layered with description, establishing the complexity of reaction to change. Participants indicated that cognitive dissonance may be triggered by a number of factors including: a poor track record of change with either the person presenting/implementing the change or the organization, participation in the decision making process, continual change that is not necessarily progressive, change that appears to be implemented because the leader is new and perceived as desiring to establish authority, and incongruity between leadership talk and leadership action. Focus group participants made it clear that they were asking to be part of the organization, to connect with the vision and goals.

Theme 2: Planning: While it seems a foregone conclusion that leaders and managers would plan, organizational citizens asserted that poor planning often left them frustrated. They acknowledged that poor planning resulted in additional changes, unnecessary expenditures, and created resistance. Frequently those in the focus groups made a link between poor planning and the choice of leadership not to involve organizational citizens ultimately responsible for the work. Lack of involvement in planning often led to the impression that change has arrived "out of the blue". Focus group participants demonstrated through their change stories their desire to know that change is thoroughly planned and communicated.

Theme 3: Communication: Every group of co-researchers discussed in detail the importance of communicating change properly and the resulting frustration of employees if change is not communicated thoroughly and in a timely manner. A word query yielded 31 mentions of communication and an additional 14 for the word communicate. As a theme, communication is comprised of a variety of meaning units including listening, discrepancy (is the change needed), participation in decision making, and informing organizational citizens of the impact of change on them as individuals (personal valence). Focus group members indicated the most important variant in communication was the importance of receiving the message that promoted understanding of discrepancies and the ensuing steps in the change process. Whether the change was perceived as positive for them personally was subservient in most cases to their perception of good for the organization. They suggested that the activity of dialogue is, for the most part, missing in organizational change events.

Theme 4: Participation in Decision Making: Overall, the phenomena of the change experience is positively enhanced by employee involvement, whether through input on decisions already under consideration or change driven by "bubble-up" process of suggestions by work force level organizational citizens. Participation in the decision making process helped employees develop a feeling of ownership of the change as well. Focus groups discussed the feeling of resistance engendered by having change "forced" upon them, devoid of participation in the decision making process. There was widespread agreement among the group that changes that appear suddenly create resistance among employees. The comments from focus group members demonstrated commitment to their organizations, desire for involvement, and desire to create a partnership with their organization.

Theme 5: Training: Although training received enough emphasis through frequency and intensity of responses to emerge as a theme, it is infrequently mentioned in change literature. Focus group members viewed training as commitment to supporting the change, as a factor in reducing fear, and in increasing comfort level.

Theme 6: Technology: Technology emerged as a theme in all four focus groups, without in-depth discussion surrounding it in some cases, but acknowledged by participants in several ways: the rapid pace of advances in technology and the changes it brings about; technology

updates necessitating training; and, age as a potential factor in resistance to technology changes. Groups pointed out that frequently changing technology presents difficult learning curves and generates frustration for those who are still adjusting to previous changes. The co-researchers experiences demonstrated that communication about the new technology and training both increased the comfort level and reduced the frustration of workers tasked with utilizing it.

Theme 7: Leadership Changes: Change in leadership was derived as a theme from a series of comments expressed by participants in all four focus groups. The range of variants included negativity with frequent changes, hope for improvement, change implemented because a new leader establishes authority, management fads, and general acknowledgement of changes in vision with new leaders. Appreciation was expressed for leaders who adopt a "let me see what is good" attitude without making hurried decisions.

Theme 8: Negativity regarding Change: Co-researchers were asked to respond to the question, "Would you think for a moment of a change that you have experienced, either in your current organization, or another company that you worked for that was unsuccessful and why it turned out that way?" Focus group participants were also asked "What affects how you react to change?" Comments from these two questions were combined to provide an overview of factors that may trigger negativity regarding change. Sub-themes included comfort zone, fear, suddenness of change, personality/age, and time factors. Fear shared occasional overlapping remarks with comfort zone. Participants made it clear that training and clear lines of communication are critical to reducing fear. They identified a variety of causes of fear including meeting new standards, workforce reduction, change in supervisors, and fear of the unknown. They also discussed abruptness of change in terms of a lack of foundation before a change is announced causes fear, anxiety, and resistance.

Theme 9: Resistance: The question, "Do you feel people are naturally resistant to change?" received eight positive responses that people are resistant to change; six responses that the statement is not true; and five responses that were neutral in some way, meaning that it depended upon the specific change. Their responses incorporated an understanding that people may at first resist because they do not want to move from a comfort zone, do not understand the change, or may have a change resistant personality. One comment indicated that those who are resistant to change are more vocal, making it appear that the opposition is greater than it is in actuality. Most indicated a willingness to step back from an initial negative reaction and see how change evolves.

Theme 10: Positive Change: The co-researchers were asked to describe an experience in their organization of a positive change and what made it positive. A number of the positive comments also arose independently of this question. The focus group participants appeared to welcome changes that: represented personal growth, challenge, and learning; they felt prepared for; were seen as desirable and needed; and change planned and communicated well.

Each focus group participant brought with them experiences, values, feelings, and beliefs developed from their years of experience in the world of work that filtered and possibly distorted their perceptions of change. Participants did not appear to present their comments in the same framework for each change initiative story, but instead, contextualized their response to the specific experience(s) they related.

What then was the essence of change phenomena? To the co-researchers, change is steeped in complexity that lies in a myriad of influences. While change was labeled stressful, a headache, causing skepticism, panic, or uncertainty, it was just as readily termed thrilling,

stimulating, an improvement, optimism, and an opportunity for personal growth. All definitions appeared to be situation based.

Three major themes captured most of the essence of change for the co-researchers: how change is presented, communication, and planning. The participants recognized and reacted to external and internal alignment in presentation of change. Participants indicated that cognitive dissonance about change may be triggered by a number of factors including: a poor track record of change with either the person presenting/implementing the change or the organization, continual change that is not necessarily progressive, change that appears to be suggested because the leader is new and perceived as designing to establish authority, and incongruity between leadership talk and leadership action.

The importance of early, clear, and thorough communication was apparent in the co-researchers descriptions. In statement after statement, they referred to the importance of understanding "why" a change is proposed. They advised seeking input from all levels regarding change and implementation. Several focus group participants used the word "forced" in describing change events that were usually top-down driven and devoid of input from other levels. They reacted as humans who felt that their value was diminished by a lack of recognition of their ideas and concern for the organization. It is important to note that in describing events revealing the essence of change, co-researchers were not only concerned for themselves, but for their co-workers and the organization itself. Their discernment that some changes were difficult for individuals or departments, but good for the company, was clear.

With each organizational change, the co-researchers acknowledge that they are always hopeful that a proposed change will be positive. The 21 co-researchers related both negative and positive change experiences, expressing optimism even during the negative experiences that improvement could arise, both for the individual and for the organization. While focus group participants initially responded that change is typically viewed as negative or that resistance in inherent, the participants did not appear to hold these statements as truths in the experiences they related. They readily added to their responses that the first reaction may be negative, but it is apparent that cognitive schema, built upon specific past changes, influences these first reactions. For example, a co-researcher stated that the initial reaction to change is usually negative, however, "the minute you know more, you can judge," indicating an openness and willingness to see what form change may take. The comments of the organizational citizens confirms the adage, "Hope springs eternal," even in regard to change.

LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this research is generalizability as qualitative research is not designed for generalizing across populations (Patton, 2002). The statements collected from the focus groups tell a story as the phenomena of change is constructed from the reality of a group of organizational citizens. It is a story derived from a specific group of people, their current impressions influenced by past change events and influences from other focus group participants who participated in these sessions. Although repetition was achieved in many of the comments, the story of change could be different if, for example, all participants were selected from large corporations or from other parts of the country or world.

Focus groups also have inherent limitations. The structure of the group may interfere with how an individual participant recalls or presents their memory of a particular change event. While none of the focus groups appeared to have a dominant individual, the possibility must be

acknowledged that responses by some co-researchers may have influenced the perceptions of others.

A limitation also lies within the individual researcher. Even though any researcher engages in epoche, attempting to put aside suppositions, past experiences with changes may still influence the researcher's though patterns throughout the process.

SIGNIFICANCE

In a phone interview with J. Kotter (personal communication, August 4, 2006), a leading researcher and author on the topic of organizational change, Kotter pointed out that organizations are not good at change because they think in terms of issues such as technology, strategy, etc., not in terms of the change itself. In *The Heart of Change (*2002)*,* Kotter and Cohen wrote that it is "…never strategy, structure, culture or systems. The core of the matter is changing the behavior of people and behavior change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people's feelings." How can leaders speak to people's feelings if inadequate research is available in this area?

This study contributes to the scholarly literature academically and practically in distinct ways. First, it adds depth to the few existing studies that incorporate the experiences of non-managerial organizational citizens regarding change. Second, it offers a unique methodology, the focus group, not found in the research literature on change. The structure of the focus groups provided interaction of participants from a variety of organizational settings that enhanced the anticipated focus group dialogue, broadening the depth of discovery. This study contributes to a body of knowledge to provide practical understanding of change from the organizational citizen's point-of-view to more fully prepare leaders for the effect their choices have and to provide guidance as to improving the change process. Finally, the voices of these organizational citizens provide a starting ground for improving the change conversation between leader and follower by suggesting a partnership approach.

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