



# Organizational change: The role of climate and job satisfaction in child welfare workers' perception of readiness for change<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** When organizations embark on deliberate efforts to increase effectiveness through organizational-level changes, those that demonstrate greater readiness for change tend to have better outcomes. In contrast, when the organization is not ready, a change effort may result in resistance, conflict and, eventually, failure. However, studies addressing how agency climate and job satisfaction influence workers' perception of the organization's readiness for change in child welfare or human service organizations are scarce.

**Methods:** Data for this study was obtained from a sample of 356 direct care and clinical child welfare workers employed at eight not-for-profit child welfare agencies under contract to provide a variety of services in a large northeastern state. Workers were surveyed on their agency's readiness for change, organizational climate, and job satisfaction. The Spector Job Satisfaction Survey measured nine subscales and Parker Organizational Climate survey measured four primary domains: role, job, supervision, and organizational dimensions. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on nine questions derived from the Organizational Readiness for Change survey that measured workers' perceptions of organizational readiness for change. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to determine climate and satisfaction influences on voluntary child welfare workers' readiness for change.

**Results:** The results of SEM confirmed that the exogenous independent indicators of role ambiguity, supervisor goal emphasis, organizational innovation, satisfaction with communication, and the number of years in current position were predictive of workers' perception of readiness for change with significant positive coefficients.

**Implications:** This study highlights the importance of certain organizational climate and job satisfaction factors that child welfare workers identify for the success of agency change efforts. Workers perceive that organizations may have a higher level of readiness to implement successful change initiatives when: (1) workers feel their role is clear, supervisors articulate change goals, and job performance is held to a high standard and is measurable; (2) agency leaders establish organizational communication that is explicate, and they encourage workers to develop ideas and try new ways of doing the job; and (3) the greater the number of years workers are in their current position, the more likely change initiatives are perceived to be successful. Most importantly, this study suggests that not all organizational climate or job satisfaction factors are recognized by workers as supporting change equally.

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## 1. Introduction to organizational readiness for change

When organizations embark on deliberate efforts to pursue organizational-level changes, those that demonstrate greater readiness for change tend to have better outcomes than those that are less ready in terms of the implementation of the proposed change, the effort invested in the change, the persistence for the change, and the degree

of cooperation among employees (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Kirch et al., 2005; Weiner, Amick & Lee, 2008). In contrast, when the organization is not ready, a change effort may result in resistance, conflict and eventually failure. Failed change initiatives often result in substantial loss of time and financial resources for organizations and their employees. Multiple factors are associated with readiness for change, including organization size, external environmental pressures, leadership commitment to change, availability of financial resources, worker attributes, clarity of goals, and community attitudes toward the change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Christianson, Taylor, & Knuitson, 1998; D'Aunno, Vaughn, & McElroy, 1999; Klein, Conn, & Sorra, 2001; Weiner, 2009; Weiner et al., 2008).

Organizational change has been broadly defined as any modification in organizational composition, structure or behavior (Bowditch & Bruono, 2001). Holt, Armenakis, Field & Harris (2007), utilizing Van de Ven and

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Poole's organizational change theory (1995), developed a conceptual framework to guide readiness measures. They identified four common factors: 1) change content (attributes of the initiative being implemented), 2) change process (the steps taken to implement the change), 3) internal context (attributes of the initiative's environment), and 4) individual attributes (employee's characteristics). Weiner et al.'s (2008) extensive literature review of organizational readiness for change identified two broad theoretical approaches. One approach drew upon Prochaska and DiClemente's trans-theoretical model of behavior changes. The second approach describes readiness in psychological terms, emphasizing employee's attitudes, beliefs and intentions; this second approach generally reflects an individual-level focus.

## 2. Workers' perception of organizational readiness for change

The purpose of this study is to understand child welfare workers' perception of the organization's readiness to change. Specifically, we are interested in the worker perceptions of the relationship of organizational climate and job satisfaction to organizational readiness for change. Researchers and practitioners concur that organizational climate plays a substantial role in the implementation of change. However, research regarding the relationship between climate, job satisfaction and readiness for change in child welfare organizations is scarce (Bouckennooghe, Devos & Van Den Broeck, 2009; Jones et al., 2005). Much of the readiness for change and organizational climate literature is concerned with linking climate to worker performance and the ability of the agency to achieve successful client outcomes (Glisson, 2002; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Gutierrez, GlenMaye & Delois, 1995; Wagner, van Reyk & Spence, 2001). Even fewer studies address organizational climate predictors of readiness for change in child welfare or human service organizations. Glisson's organizational culture and climate profiles (2007), although not a precise measurement of readiness for change, delineate factors associated with organizational implementation. These factors are worker turnover, service quality, and work attitudes. The culture profile indicates the level of the organization's proficiency, rigidity and resistance. The climate profile specifies the level of organizational employees' engagement, functioning, and stress.

A number of studies link organizational climate factors to job satisfaction (Claiborne et al., 2011; Ellett, 2009; Freund, 2005; Kadushin & Kulys, 1995; Parker et al., 2003). Decreased role of ambiguity, job importance, job autonomy, and job challenge climate factors have been found to have a negative relationship with job satisfaction (Baltes, Zhdanova & Parker, 2009). There appears to be no consensus in the literature regarding the relationships between organizational climate, job satisfaction, and organizational readiness for change. Understanding these factors is clearly important for resolving workforce challenges that will improve the quality and care to children and their families. We hypothesize that workers' perception of the organizational climate and their job satisfaction are directly related to their perception of the organization's readiness for change.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Sample and data collection

The sample included workers from eight of the not-for-profit child welfare agencies under contract with the public child welfare system in one state participating in the Children's Bureau supported child welfare workforce project. The agencies provide a wide-range of child welfare services (e.g., prevention, foster care, residential) and represent locations across the State with a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The entire workforce was invited to participate in the research, and surveys were collected on-site at each agency from June 2009 to April 2011. The informed consent process approved by a University institutional review board occurred prior to conducting

the survey. A total of 1008 employees responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 85%. A sub-sample of 356 workers was extracted for this study composed of direct service workers (residential care and child care workers) and clinicians (social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors).

### 3.2. Measures

The purpose of this analysis was to develop a model that determines how agency climate and job satisfaction influences workers' perceptions of agency readiness to change. While the Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) (Lehman, Greener, & Simpson, 2002) full survey measures a number of domains, the focus of this study is the worker's perception of the agency. Thus nine questions that asked respondents how they feel about the agency's willingness to change were selected and adapted from the survey. These nine items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with items such as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The scale included the following items:

1. *Staff understands that specific changes may improve outcomes for children & families.*
2. *Some staff members resist any type of change.*
3. *Some staff are too cautious or slow to make changes.*
4. *Most staff are willing to try new ideas.*
5. *It is easy to change procedures to meet new conditions.*
6. *Staff members ask questions and express concerns about changes.*
7. *When changes are necessary, management provides a clear plan for implementing.*
8. *Staff are encouraged to discuss and explore evidence-based practice techniques.*
9. *Staff adapts quickly when they have to shift focus to accommodate program changes.*

A composite mean score was created for each of the respondents. The mean and standard deviation were 3.1 and .5, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .76. The scale was also normally distributed as evidenced by a skewness score of .16.

Organizational climate was measured by the Parker et al. (2003) psychological climate survey, operationalized as individuals' perceptions of their work environment. This scale has been widely utilized and has been found to be both valid and reliable in human services (Claiborne et al., 2011; Hemmelgarn, Glisson, & James, 2006; Parker et al., 2003). A total of forty-eight items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with items such as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Four dimensions, each comprising three sub-scales, measure climate. The dimension compositions are as follows:

- (1). Role Dimension includes the ambiguity, conflict and overload sub-scales. Ambiguity is operationalized as: unclear authority for decision-making, unclear goals and objectives, and unclear job responsibilities and expectations. Conflict is operationalized as: rules and regulations interfere with doing a good job, workers must do things against their better judgment, too many people are directing the worker, and the worker is held responsible for things that they have no control. Overload is operationalized as: more work than workers can do, the amount of work interferes with doing a good job, and workers are constantly under too much pressure.
- (2). Job Dimension includes the importance, autonomy and challenge sub-scales. Importance is operationalized as: people outside the organization are affected by how workers do their job, the job is important to the workers' team functioning, and the work makes a meaningful contribution and is highly important. Autonomy is operationalized as: the freedom to decide how the job is done, control is assigned so that the worker has authority to

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