



Evidence and
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#18 - Uncovering Crucial Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Implementation and Sustainment: An Integrative Model of Organizational Change

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Objectives/aims

Implementing successful organizational change is challenging and to better understand it, researchers and practitioners have proposed a variety of models of change management. Paradoxically, while the behavior change of organizational members lies at the core of organizational change, theories and models of behavior change are rarely applied to organizational change management. Such knowledge could improve our understanding of underlying psychological mechanisms behind organizational change adoption and maintenance. To provide theoretical and practical guidance for those involved in the planning and implementation of organizational change, we developed an integrative model of organizational change to integrate knowledge across the organizational and behavior change fields by (i) unifying change practices derived from organizational change models and from behavior change techniques; (ii) identifying and unifying underlying psychological mechanisms derived from theories that explain how organizational and behavior change occurs; and (iii) linking change practices to psychological mechanisms.



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Methods

First, we established criteria for identifying relevant literature: (i) comprehensive coverage (could be, or has been, used for different types of change or contexts); (ii) focused on proposing a theory/framework/model (i.e., offers new concepts and operationalizations); (iii) based on either research evidence or recognized as efficient practice in the field. Two independent literature searches were conducted. The first used the key words “organi(s)zational change”, “change management”, and “organi(s)zational development” by themselves and in conjunction with the search terms “framework”, “theory”, “model” using Scopus, PsycInfo (Ovid), Google Scholar, and ProQuest. Additionally, we searched practitioner resources/websites that aim to provide training in the implementation of organizational change and materials from other institutions that provide advice on organizational change management and textbooks on organizational change. The second search was conducted with the keyword “behavio(u)r change” in MEDLINE and in the above-mentioned search engines. The organizational change search uncovered literature describing 14 prescriptive models of change (i.e., models that prescribe change-related managerial practices and organizational strategies), one process-oriented change model (i.e., model explaining how practices influence resistance and acceptance of organizational change), and three theories that describe psychological mechanisms that explain change adoption and maintenance. The behavior change literature uncovered the Human Behavior Change framework and four theories that describe psychological mechanisms that explain change adoption and maintenance.

To assess the degree of commonality in 32 psychological mechanisms that the seven theories propose, we used the Q-sort method to emulate the consensus method employed by Michie et al. (2013). The Q-sort method consists of two stages including judges running independent item groupings according to their similarities followed by in-depth discussions for items on which agreement is low (Stephenson, 1953).

In a second step, we identified the overlap between the identified organizational change practices and brought them down to 26. In a last step, we linked the practices to the three psychological mechanisms through another Q-sort process that was informed by existing empirical support.



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Three groupings emerged that the authors collectively agreed could not be collapsed any further without loss of internal consistency. They were labelled as self-efficacy, meaning, and belongingness, which we define as being state-level constructs that are malleable across time and settings.

Main findings

We created the Integrated Model of Organizational Change out of an analysis of overlap and complementarity between organizational change practice models, organizational change theories, and behavioral change research and theories. The model identifies three important psychological mechanisms that predict the adoption and maintenance of organizational change and links organizational change practices to these mechanisms. The IMOC can be useful in driving future research on organizational change and in guiding practitioners planning organizational change.

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