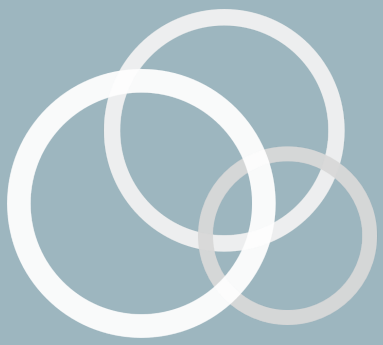

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Using Experiential Change Strategies During a Major Organizational Change

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USING EXPERIENTIAL CHANGE STRATEGIES DURING A MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore, through a case study, how an experiential change program contributes to the success of a change initiative. The paper explores the ideas of planned organizational change, experiential learning, experiential change programs, and organizational learning, drawing a logical path to argue that experiential change programs contribute to the body of knowledge on organizational learning and change in efforts to lessen the change failure rate.

Keywords: planned organizational change, experiential change programs, organizational learning, case study

OVERVIEW

Organizations today are facing the reality that change is an integral part of organizational life. Despite the need for change, and perhaps even senior leadership excitement about a planned change, up to 90% of change efforts fail (Grieves, 2000). This paper argues that incorporating experiential change programs into change management strategy increases the chances for success.

A recent phenomenon organizations face is the way employees work in new ways. These new ways of working consider people, places, and technology in approaches that provide both the organization and its people with an environment that lets them do their best work wherever they are located. There is a current debate about the workforce of the future and what it should look like. While research shows that increased flexibility is a benefit (www.globalworkplaceanalytics.com), some organizations once known for providing this flexibility are now rescinding their workplace flexibility policies to bring people back into the office (Pepitone, 2013). Even with some organizations reversing their flexibility policies, others are leading the way and moving towards a more flexible and agile work environment in hopes of reaping the benefits outlined in the research.

How does an organization undergo such an all-encompassing system change when history shows that failure is likely (Grieves, 2000)? Scholars suggest change adoption is enhanced through participatory and experiential change methods (Chin & Benne, 1989). However, prior studies, such as Russ (2010, 2011) focused on change agents and the organization's management, rather than the broader employee population. Evaluating the impact of change efforts at the organization-level of diagnosis also remains understudied. Thus, the opportunity to contribute to scholarly and practitioner literature on change is significant.

The purpose of this paper is to explore, through a case study, how an experiential change program contributes to the success of a change initiative. The paper explores the ideas of planned organizational change, experiential learning, experiential change programs, and organizational learning, drawing a

logical path to argue that experiential change programs contribute to the body of knowledge on change in efforts to lessen the change failure rate.

This paper examines first the literature, and then the organization's experiences, with both qualitative and quantitative data, to examine the impact of the experiential change program.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

There are various organizational change theories, ranging from simple to complex. For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on planned change. Planned change can include a change in process or organizational structure, changes in desired employee behavior, or a more transformational change involving a change in values, beliefs, and attitudes. (Chapman, 2002) Grieves (2000) defines organizational change as an initiative requiring change to critical organizational processes that, in turn, influence individual behaviors, which ultimately impact organizational outcomes.

One of the elements of change that is always a factor is the behavior and actions of the people in the organization. A meta-analysis of several change case studies showed a good link between actions and outcomes, while providing very little evidence that top down change is being successfully implemented throughout organizations. (Kakabadse, 2002) However, it is not just about the behaviors in a vacuum. Lewin (1951) talked about the "total situation". Knowledge is not only needed about the person or group, but also about the immediate situation the person or group is in. This context is needed in order to understand the behavior and for improvement to emerge. Lawrence, Dyck, Maitlis, & Mauws (2006) talks about context needed by the employee – the need for "strategic intuition". This intuition typically arises from employees' expertise and understanding built on deep experience.

Whether the organizational change is a first order change focusing on changing employee behavior or a transformational change with a goal of changing an organization's value system, managing human behaviors and actions are central to a successful change management strategy. As Burke (2011) said: "cognitive change follows behavioral change." (p 152) If this is true, the next logical question is how one goes about successfully influencing employee behavior.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

A traditional change management strategy advocates disseminating information and making a rational case for change from the top down (Chin & Benne, 1991). However, Armstrong (1982) found that even with evidence that an initiative or action worked for over 95 out of 100 people, that initiative or action was seldom used by others to change their own behavior. However, people were often willing to generalize from their own experience to say how they would act in the future and even to predict how others would act. This finding seems to indicate that the most rational and compelling business case does less to encourage change than letting people experience the benefits for themselves. In fact, the main assumption of experiential learning is that one learns best by doing, especially adult learners who favor a learning-from-experience approach (Walter & Marks, 1981; Rollag & Parise, 2005).

Experiential learning in business is not a new idea. The Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning (ABSEL) was founded in 1974 to promote the use of learning-by-doing in both higher education and corporate settings (http://absel2011.wordpress.com/). Experiential learning is now used to help "create new 'rituals', to learn new procedures, to test these in a safe environment, and to perfect them." (Geurts et al, 2000)

So, let us review. (1) If organizational change is a function of employee behaviors that impact organizational outcomes; and, (2) if experience is the best way to help adults learn new behaviors; then, (3) it makes sense that a change management program that includes experiential components might be more successful at creating and sustaining a desired organizational change, whether that change is a first order change or a transformational one.

EXPERIENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The idea that participation and action are strategies for implementing change is not a brand new idea. Chin & Benne (1989) outlined three strategies for change. One was the frequently used rational strategy – make a rational, logical case for change and everyone will fall in line. Another strategy was a power-based strategy – applying power, in one form or another, to get people to change. The third strategy, however, was called the "normative – re-educative" strategy for change. This strategy makes the link from patterns of action and practice. These patterns are supported by sociocultural norms, which are in turn supported by the attitude and value systems of the individual. According to this strategy, change occurs when individuals are "brought to change their normative orientations to old patterns and develop commitments to new ones" (p. 23).

Based on the concept that the visceral engagement found in experience-based methods is generally lacking in more traditional methods of change, like the rational or power-based approach, and the theoretical assumption that change is most successful when stakeholders are treated as active learners, Russ (2008, 2010, 2011) has developed two overarching, conceptual frameworks to define Experiential Change Programs (ECP): programmatic and participatory.

The objective of programmatic methods is knowledge transfer. These methods are content oriented and focus on mastery. This is more of a top down approach to convince the target population to comply and to communicate the leader's vision of the change. (Russ, 2008) This approach offers little opportunity for collaboration or input and risks not engaging the participants as fully as in the participatory methods.

In contrast, the objective of the participatory method is knowledge creation. Instead of specific, planned outcomes, the participatory method has overarching learning objectives. Instead of blind compliance, the participatory method emphasizes reflection and promotes process-driven change. (Russ, 2010) This method offers much more opportunity for employee engagement and feedback than the programmatic method and, as such, is much more complex and resource intensive.

Depending on the specific change initiative and objectives, both methods have their place in an organization. If the desired change is more of an implementation of a top-down vision or refines a behavior or process change, a programmatic experiential change program may be the best option. If instead the change is more transformational in nature, where the change involves solving a

problem with no one right answer or a change in organizational culture, a participatory experiential change program may be the better option.

As Russ (2011) began to empirically test his conceptual framework, he tested the assumption that learners' affective outcomes have a critical influence over the learning process. Throughout his research, he concluded that the nature and intensity of stakeholders' feelings during organizational transformation can mean the difference between short-term compliance with a change and long-term sustainability of that change. Experiential change programs, especially participatory experiential change programs, have the capability to foster emotional conditions that are likely to compel mid-level managers to make a concerted effort to bring about change in organizational settings. While Russ (2011) focused on managers in his research, the case study does seem to provide preliminary evidence that experience-based implementation approaches may prove useful in bringing about, and sustaining, a planned change.

There are several presumed benefits for experiential change programs, including: heightened organizational awareness, strengthened organizational culture and values, increased job performance, increased organizational learning, reinforced organizational structures, and enhanced decision-making based on policies and procedures. (Russ, 2010, 2011) Despite the presumed benefits, empirical research is practically nonexistent. However, the high levels of interactivity embedded within an experiential change program, one that encourages cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic engagement, might be a reason for success. Stakeholder engagement in the change process may decrease or eliminate resistance to change, enhance the motivation to change, and bolster commitment to change, all of which increase the likelihood of a successful change initiative. (Smollan, 2011)

So far, we have discussed how organizational change is, in one way or another, a function of employee behavior and that the best way for adult learners to learn new behaviors is through experience. Chin & Benne (1989) and Russ (2008, 2010, 2011) introduce us to the concept of experience as a strategy for change. One presumed benefit of an experiential change strategy is enhanced organizational learning.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

The body of research around organizational learning is varied and reaches very little consensus. However, there seem to be two main camps. The product-oriented camp focuses on The Learning Organization and on attributes that an ideal Learning Organization would possess (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). The other camp sees organizational learning as a process, not a product (Schwandt & Marquardt, 1999; March, 1991). The focus of this paper will be to look at the process of organizational learning, specifically March's (1991) definition of the adaptive process within organizations.

March (1991) talks about the adaptive process within organizations being the balance between exploration (experimentation, risk taking, discovery, innovation) and exploitation (refinement, efficiency, implementation). More plainly put, the balance between interactions within and outside the organization; the balance between being an open and closed system. He argues that being too open, focusing too much on exploration, makes the organization vulnerable – the return on investment is less certain and timely. Conversely, being too closed is

also detrimental to an organization, falling into the trap of not being able to adapt.

Of particular interest is March's (1991) concept of mutual learning. This is the idea that "individuals modify their beliefs continuously as a consequence of socialization into the organization and education into its code of beliefs…[while] at the same time, the organizational code adapts to the beliefs of those individuals whose beliefs correspond with reality on more dimensions than does the code" (p. 74).

Looking at these two concepts from March, the concept of balancing exploration and exploitation for an effective adaptive process as well as the concept of mutual learning between members of the organization and the organization code, the linkage begins to become clear. Organizational change, at some level, is a function of behavior. The best way for adults to learn new behaviors is through experience. Using an experiential strategy for change helps employees both experiment with new ways of working (exploration) *and* refine their strategies to increase efficiency (exploitation). This leads to the adaptive process found through a balance of exploration and exploitation as defined by March (1991). Finally, through the concept of mutual learning, the organizational code is updated to help create lasting change based on the experiences of its members.

In order to build on that research, the overarching research question addressed in this paper is: To what extent do experiential strategies for change impact organizational learning? To begin to answer this question, this paper examines one organization who implemented an experiential change strategy as part of the overarching change management strategy for a transformational planned change.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The head of a United States government agency of about 12,000 employees triggered the change by asking a single question: What would it take to have all Washington DC Metro employees collocated in our headquarters building? At the time the question was asked, about one third of the agency's employees worked in the Washington DC Metro area, dispersed among seven locations. Additionally, the headquarters building was not designed to hold more than 2,500 people.

After a significant amount of discussion and analysis, the answer had many layers. The historic headquarters building would need to be renovated to increase the space and convert into a more open-concept space. The concept of "hoteling" was introduced. Hoteling is a reservation-based method for supporting unassigned seating in an office environment. Much like at a hotel, you reserve space when you need it and someone else has access to it when you do not have it reserved. The organization would need to start encouraging and enabling a mobile workforce – changing the mobile working policy, having technology that supports mobile work, and making the default for every employee that they were eligible for telework unless otherwise justified. Management also recognized that it would be necessary to eliminate almost all private offices and 90% of assigned workstations in favor of bench seating and a hoteling concept in order to make the consolidation a success.

This change was going to affect both the operational and overhead functions within the Washington DC Metro area. One of the operational services was concerned that this level of change within such a short time frame (18 months) would affect the bottom line as employees and supervisors struggled with the change and lost sight of their customers and business objectives. In order to mitigate this risk, the executives of the operational service created a program management office (PMO) to manage the change for their people, including the *WAVE*.

This transition required that leaders, managers, and employees become agile—that is, that they learned how to manage performance, master mobile technologies, update paper-based processes, and maintain relationships with customers and teammates—without relying on the convention of owning an assigned workstation. This took extensive preparation, training, practice, teamwork, and self-awareness. The *WAVE* provided a structured, sustained program to guide teams through this transition. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the major *WAVE* phases.

Figure 1.

WAVE *Process Overview*

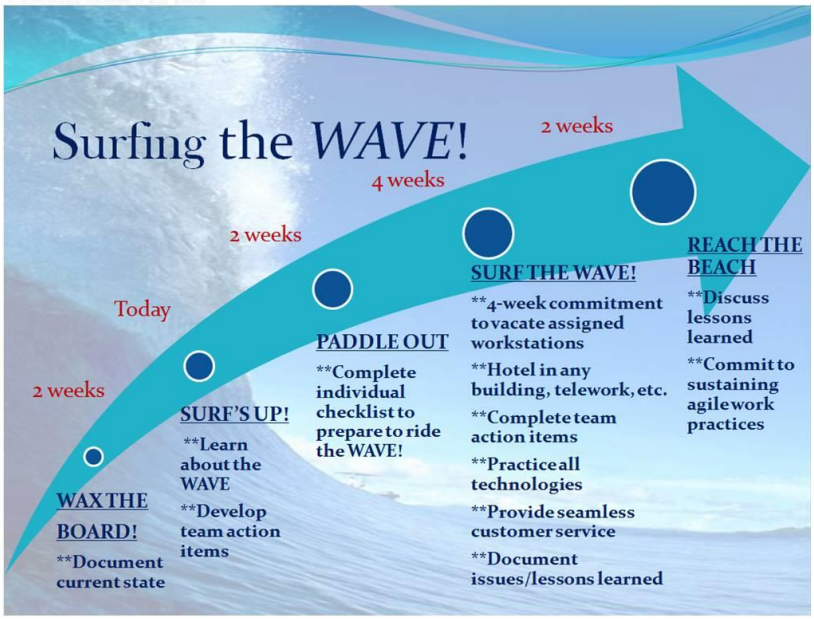

Figure 1. This graphic shows the five stages of the experiential change program called the WAVE.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Using a case study approach, the focus of this study was the *WAVE* program described above. Specifically, the perceptions and experiences of the intervention group and how those experiences and perceptions differed when compared to the rest of the population. Particular attention will be paid to the

perceptions of readiness and ease of change, along with the experiences discussed immediately after the move.

This study used data collected as part of the described organizational change effort. All data collection – surveys, focus groups, and interviews – were done anonymously. No names were recorded during the survey process, and all information collected from interviews and focus groups were consolidated and analyzed as a whole. Participants were made aware of the two main purposes for the data collection: for the benefit of the organization to improve the change management effort as needed; and, to provide data for research to share outside the organization to help others going through the same type of change. The decision to keep all responses anonymous was to protect the respondents and ensure a higher participation rate, given the potential visibility of the results, both inside and outside the organization.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. There were four phases to the data collection. The first phase was a pre- and post- survey with the intervention group to identify any changes because of the intervention. The second phase was a survey for the entire population, including the intervention group and the control group. The third phase consisted of post-move qualitative focus groups and interviews for both the intervention and control groups. The final phase was to collect any documents or other data that would help interpret the data collected from the previous three phases.

The survey data was analyzed using both a cross-sectional, 2x5 analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test. All statistical analysis was completed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. Qualitative data was coded and themes were identified to help explain the results from some of the statistical analyses.

The organizations were selected for participation in the intervention group through convenience sampling. The remainder of the population was put into the control group. The surveys sent to both the control and intervention group were sent to the entire population. For the ANOVA study, tetrad comparisons were not done since no statistical significance was found. Normal distribution of the dependent variable was met based on the central limit theorem. Homogeneity of variances was also tested and met.

For the independent t-test, a Bonferroni-adjusted α was used to determine significance. Normal distribution of the dependent variable was met based on the central limit theorem. Homogeneity of variances was also tested and met. Because it is unbiased and more conservative, the partial omega squared effect size was used.

All of the data was collected to answer one main research question: To what extent do experiential strategies for change impact organizational learning? In addition to that main research question, two sub-questions were posed:

A To what extent does an experiential strategy for change affect employee perceptions around readiness to change and ease of change?

- Hypothesis 1 Employee-perceived readiness increases after participating in an experiential intervention
- Hypothesis 2 Employee-perceived readiness is higher for those who have participated in an experiential intervention

Hypothesis 3 Employee-perceived ease of change is higher for those who participated in an experiential intervention

B To what extent does an experiential strategy for change affect employee commitment to and adoption of the behavior changes needed to support the desired "end state"?

Hypothesis 4 The commitment to the adoption of patterns and practices that support the desired "future state" of the change is higher for those who participated in an experiential intervention, when measured immediately post-change.

MEASURES

There are three main measures outlined in the four hypotheses above: employee-perceived preparedness, employee-perceived ease of change, and the adoption of patterns and practices. How these variables were measured in this study are outlined below.

Employee-perceived readiness was an equally weighted, averaged measure containing employee responses to three statements (five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree):

- I am fully prepared for the transition
- I am looking forward to working at [the new location]
- I am comfortable working away from my assigned workstation

Employee-perceived ease of change was measured solely with qualitative data. By conducting focus groups immediately after the move with both the intervention and control groups, the researcher coded the qualitative data, looking for themes and tone of responses to two main questions:

- For those who might go through the same type of change later, what were some of the things you and your teams did to make the move successful?
- What were some of the lessons learned or things you might do differently if you had to go through the move again?

Commitment to the adoption of new patterns and practices that support the change was measured with both quantitative and qualitative data. The actual adoption of behaviors (such as use of collaborative technology and requests for assistance during the move) were measured quantitatively. The commitment to adopting new behaviors was measured qualitatively, using the same data and response to questions outlined above for employee-percieved ease of change.

RESULTS

ANOVA. There was no significant effect of experiential change programs on employee readiness $F(1, 330) = .010$, $p = .922$. There was no significant effect of supervisor support on employee readiness $F(1, 330) = 1.124$, $p = .290$. (See Table 1.)

Table 1.

Supervisory Support and Employee Readiness Analysis of Variance

Source	Group	*df*	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	*p*
Supervisory Support	Between Groups	1	.881	.881	1.124	.290
	Within Groups	330	158.781	.784		
	Total	331	259.663			
Employee Readiness	Between Groups	1	.008	.008	.010	.922
	Within Groups	330	287.762	.872		
	Total	331	287.771			

Independent t-test. On average, participants whose organizations had the opportunity to participate in an experiential change program (M = 2.9, SE = .041) felt less prepared than those who did not have the opportunity to participate (M = 3.15, SE = .034). This difference was significant t (960) = -4.638, $p < .001$. (See Table 2) However, the effect size was relatively low at r = .148.

Table 2.

Results Comparing WAVE Impact on Self-Stated Employee Readiness

WAVE Participation	n	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*
Yes	433	2.90	.857	-4.638*	960	.000
No	529	3.15	.793			

Note: * *t-value was significant with an α value of .01*

Table 3.

Results Comparing WAVE Impact on Use of Collaborative Technology

WAVE Participation	n	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*
Yes	433	3.597	.473	2.540*	960	.011
No	529	3.517	.491			

Note: * *t-value was significant with an α value of .05*

Table 3 shows that the frequency with which the various collaborative tools were used were higher for those who had participated in the experiential change program (M = 3.60, SE = .022) compared to those who had not (M = 3.52, SE = .021). This difference was significant t (960) = 2.540, p=.011. However, the effect size was relatively low at r = .082.

Additionally, Table 4 shows that those who did not have the opportunity to participate in an experiential change program (M = .43, SE = .022) requested more support than those who did participate in an experiential change program (M = .29, SE = .022). This difference was significant t (960) = -4.421, p < .001. The effect size was again relatively low at r = .142.

Table 4.

Results Comparing WAVE Impact on Additional Support Requested

WAVE Participation	n	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*
Yes	433	.29	.456	-4.384*	960	.000
No	529	.43	.495			

Note: * *t-value was significant with an α value of .01*

In the focus groups and interviews conducted immediately post-move, the experiential change programs were regularly brought up as a best practice. A typical comment from an employee who did not have the opportunity to participate was:

"I wish I had had the opportunity to practice more before [the transition]. There's a pretty big learning curve and I know my productivity is not where it was."

In contrast, a typical comment from an employee who did have the opportunity to participate was:

"This [transition] would not have gone as smoothly if it weren't for the WAVE."

DISCUSSION

Let us look at the research hypotheses one at a time and discuss the results.

Hypothesis 1. Employee-perceived readiness increases after participating in an experiential intervention.

This hypothesis was not supported by the quantitative data. Even though there was no statistically significant difference in scores before and after the experiential change program, it is notable that the employee readiness score actually went down, instead of increasing as expected. Perhaps the *perception* of readiness is not the same as *actual* readiness, especially before the employee truly understands all of the changes involved. Even though the perception of readiness declined after the intervention, actual readiness, defined by things such as increased use of collaborative technologies and commitment to activities designed to prepare folks for the move, increased.

Hypothesis 2. Employee-perceived readiness is higher for those who have participated in an experiential intervention.

Again, this hypothesis was not supported by the quantitative data. In fact, looking at the data alone suggests that *not* participating in an experiential

intervention results in better preparedness scores. However, the supplemental qualitative data captured post-move showed that, for the intervention group, having the ability to "practice" the new behaviors and skills prior to the move was as a key success factor. For the control group, "more practice" seemed to emerge as a key lesson learned. This seems to suggest that the old adage "ignorance is bliss" might be true. For the control group, they scored their readiness high because they did not know what the move actually entailed. For the intervention group, they had a better understanding of the challenges ahead and so their perception of their readiness was lower, even if their actual readiness was higher.

The results for both hypothesis one and two were initially surprising. It seems to go against common sense that any intervention with the goal of increasing preparation for a change would actually have the opposite effect, no matter what the intervention was – one might think that any preparation is better than no preparation. However, Gordon Training International developed the four stages of learning over 30 years ago that helps to explain this phenomenon (Adams, n.d.).

The first stage of learning is unconsciously unskilled. At this stage, the learner does not know what they do not know; they are blissfully unaware of their incompetence, and therefore might feel more prepared than they should. This stage is presumably where the control group, and the intervention group pre-intervention, were sitting when they responded to the preparedness questions.

The second stage of learning is consciously unskilled. At this stage, the learner knows what they do not know and the learning begins when the learner reaches the sudden awareness of how much there is to learn before reaching the next stage. The consciously unskilled phase is most likely where the intervention group was post-intervention. The drop in preparedness scores seems to support this assumption.

The next stage is consciously skilled, where the learner knows how to do the skill the right way, but it still takes conscious effort. The final phase is unconsciously skilled, where the learned behavior has become second nature. While most employees in this study have probably not reached this level at the time of writing, this is ultimately the goal.

Hypothesis 3. Employee-perceived ease of change is higher for those who participated in an experiential intervention.

This was measured solely with qualitative data and the data seems to support the hypothesis. After the move, participants were asked to reflect on and describe their observations and top recommendations for future moves. After all of the data was coded, 20 major themes emerged (See Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Top 20 Lessons Learned

Figure 2. This graphic shows the top 20 lessons learned identified by the participants immediately after the move.

Out of the 20 themes, nine of them directly related to or were addressed by the experiential intervention, four were related to other strategic change management efforts done throughout the organization, and seven were logistical in nature. Interestingly enough, the themes were consistent between the intervention group and the control group. The difference was the tone. For instance, for the "practice, practice, practice" theme, the control group expressed a desire to have had the ability to practice while the intervention group expressed how important the practice was to their success. Overall, the qualitative data

supports hypothesis 3; the move seemed to go more smoothly overall for the intervention group, when compared to the control group.

Hypothesis 4. The commitment to the adoption of patterns and practices that support the desired "future state" of the change is higher for those who participated in an experiential intervention, when measured immediately post-change.

The data did seem to support this hypothesis. As shown in the analysis for the second hypothesis, behaviors and practices that support the desired "future state" of the change, such as use of collaborative tools, was higher for the intervention group. In addition, the intervention group became change agents and advocates for the experiential intervention within the organization. During some of the post-move focus groups, individuals from the intervention group interacted with members of the control group. During those casual interactions, the researcher observed conversations where the individual from the control group was complaining about the minutia of the move and the individual from the intervention group gave both practical and emotional support. This was especially the case when the topic of communication and leadership visibility came up. One of the biggest concerns of both groups, at least initially, was this idea of visibility – some managers do not know how to manage people they do not see every day and some employees were concerned that if they were not in the office they would not have the visibility they need to get recognition. In one informal conversation, the researcher observed a member of the intervention group share some very practical ways to stay visible in a dispersed work environment and then share some more general advice:

> *It really is not about whether you are face to face with someone. It is all about being deliberate with your communications. When we were all in adjoining cubicles, we could be lazy about our communication and just wait until we saw them next. Now we have to be deliberate. Call someone just to ask how their project is going and see if they want to talk through an issue they are having. When you are in the office, plan whom you sit next to so you can stay informed of related projects. Set up weekly meetings with your supervisor, even if they are just 15 minutes long. By being deliberate, you can avoid the feeling of isolation while working at home.*

While not everyone in the intervention group had become an expert in the new way of working by the time the move happened, the instances of problem solving, mentoring others, and making the new environment work for them were higher in the intervention group than in the control group. The distinction was even more apparent when observing senior leadership. While senior leaders in the control group tended to request exceptions to the rules, the senior leaders in the intervention group were more willing to work within the rules to make the current environment work for them.

The data seem to suggest that employees who participated in the *WAVE* process gained a full and deep understanding of what was about to happen and this understanding led to an increased perception that they were not ready for the

major changes they knew were coming. In contrast, the employees who did not participate in the *WAVE* process entered the relocation with a poor understanding as to what was really about to happen and how it might affect them. This lack of a full understanding allowed them to approach the move feeling more prepared, only to then have significantly more problems and issues once the move began. Overall, the experiential change program helped support change management efforts and provided employees with a smoother transition than employees who did not participate. Additionally, the experiential intervention seemed to encourage the commitment to changing the processes and practices that support the new way of working. This commitment will help foster the mutual learning that will eventually change the organizational code and help ensure a sustainable change.

CONCLUSION

As change becomes not only more commonplace in organizations but also more necessary in order for organizations to adapt and stay relevant and competitive, the need to increase the success rate is also necessary. The purpose of this paper was to explore experiential change programs as one potential solution to the abysmal success rate for organizational change. The literature showed that organizational change is, at its core, a change in behavior and that adults learn better through experience, including learning new behaviors. The specific agency examined in this research paper showed that experiential change programs could:

- provide a reality check regarding employee's self-stated readiness and preparedness for change,
- increase employee self-efficacy around new behaviors needed for the transition, reducing the need for tactical support,
- increase employee competency in new tools and behaviors needed post-transition, perhaps reducing productivity loss, and
- foster the commitment to the new patterns and practices that will help ensure a sustainable change effort

The transition for the agency being examined is still being implemented as the time of this paper's writing, although all experiential change programs are complete. It would be interesting to revisit the agency several months post-transition to see if the experiential change programs had any impact on business metrics and sustainability of the organizational change.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Even though espoused benefits of experiential change programs are plentiful, and the argument presented in this paper seems to connect the dots of logic, there is very little empirical research available that tests the idea that experiential change programs produce a better success rate than other methods for implementing planned organizational change.

The case study discussed in this paper is just the beginning. It shows that there can be benefits to implementing an experiential change program. It also shows that the anticipated measures, especially when self-stated by employees, can be misleading.

In order for the Organizational Development industry to improve the change management record of accomplishment of change initiatives, empirical

research testing the use of experiential change programs must be completed in various contexts. Testing the experiential change program principles in various industries, with different types of change initiatives, and different sizes and scopes of change will all help get to the ultimate goal of identifying critical success factors that improve the percentage of successful change initiatives in organizations. Additionally, longitudinal studies that show how experiential change programs affects the sustainability of change over a longer period are also needed.

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