Change in the Veterans Health Administration:
Theory and Applications

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Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the largest public healthcare system in the U.S.A, undergoes large-scale changes to address the needs of Veterans returning from two concurrent wars. The organizational approach to managing these changes is informed by Freedman's realistic managed-resistance model. We compare this model to five other organizational change theories, review its conceptual advantages which caused its adoption within VHA, summarize the conceptual account of the change process and its progression, illustrate these theoretical expectations with qualitative data from VHA employees' interviews, and present a new survey instrument created and used within VHA for assessing employees' response to organizational changes.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines transformational change at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the largest public healthcare system in the U.S.A. that currently undergoes large-scale changes to address the needs of Veterans returning from two concurrent wars. We briefly review five organization transformational change theories, then focus in greater detail on one theory, Freedman's (1997, 2010) realistic managed-resistance model, adopted as an organizing framework to implement and manage change in VHA. We illustrate Freedman's theory with qualitative data from VHA employees' interviews, exploring in depth how this theoretical framework captures their perceptions of change. Finally, we present a new organization development survey instrument created within VHA and used to assist leaders in assessing employees' response to organizational changes.

Change is critical to study because, as humans, we seek change yet also resist it. Consider New Year's Eve: resolutions are made only to be abandoned within a few months. Everyone wants change in some way for the better (i.e., lose weight, quit smoking, start exercising) yet failure to implement and

sustain changes is rampant. (While we are motivated to be different, it is also frightening to consider leaving our comfortable ways). As you read this paragraph, you may recall some of your failed New Year's Eve resolutions and chuckle: Who hasn't done this? Now, however, take a moment and put your individual change behavior into an organizational context: your workgroup has committed to becoming more civil in everyday interactions or the organization mandates a new policy for work processes. And while workgroups and organizations may have good reasons and genuine intentions to make changes, these entities consist of individual employees, all of whom share the same New Year's Eve resolution problem (resisting actual change even when the outcomes would be beneficial for them personally). When change is planned at the workgroup level, it requires individual employees to alter their own behavior, so that each person's contribution sums up to the wanted change in the group's behavior. When the entire organization is being transformed, the results of this effort depend on changes in the workgroups which all need to align with the new direction at the larger organizational level. In sum, successful changes within organizations are not easy or natural. The complexity and interdependency of the change process seriously hampers chances of its success unless measures are taken to ensure it. For change to occur, individuals and workgroups need to come together as does the organization as a whole.

Like individuals, organizations also seek change, yet struggle to implement it. Reasons organizations initiate change include competitive pressure (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Meyer, Brooks, & Goes, 1990), external environmental changes (Bayley, Wallace, Spurgeon, Barwell, & Mazelan, 2007), internal policy shifts (Cohen, 2003), cost reduction strategies (Woodward et al., 1999), mergers and acquisitions (Bellou, 2007; Henderson, 2002) and globalization (Fagenson-Eland, Ensher, & Burke, 2004; Peterson et al., 1995). For example, at Pepsi-Cola, in response to approaching competitive market pressures, the soft drink unit president undertook transformational change to ensure greater profits (Dess, Picken, & Lyon, 1998). Unfortunately, according to a McKinsey and Company (2008) global survey, two-thirds of all change initiatives fail, most often due to employee resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Deloitte & Touche, 1996, cited in Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001).

Resistance to change has been described as being positive or negative (Lines, 2005), with cognitive-affective components (Elias, 2009; Piderit, 2000) as well as behavioral dimensions (Giangreco & Peccei, 2005). As a positive influence, resistance may reflect employees' accurate perceptions that the proposed change is detrimental to the organization (Piderit, 2000), and by resisting change efforts, employees can prevent organizational destruction. As a negative influence, employees' resistance to change can delay or terminate change initiatives (Lines, 2004) which are perceived as personally threatening to the status quo (i.e., requiring different or harder work). Employee resistance can be simultaneously positive, negative, or ambivalent (both dimensions; Piderit, 2000). Organizational leaders need to harness and translate employee resistance to change, regardless of valence, into a force for effective change—e.g., employee participation (Galambos, Dulmus, & Wodarski, 2005); learning (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Understanding change at both the organizational and individual levels is critical for success. The transformation of VHA culture and climate impacts multiple work processes and work systems, in ways that address changing needs due to a rapidly growing population of Veterans from the recent wars. As an example of a large-scale transformational impact, in a major policy shift, VHA moved from provider-centered care to patient-centered care, and implemented system-wide *patient-aligned care teams* (PACT). Changes related to PACTs restructure organizational systems and processes (e.g., those involved in scheduling clinical appointments) around the needs and schedules of patients, rather than of clinical providers, which results in substantial modifications of how these systems work. The PACT and several other current large-scale change initiatives in VHA impact organizational and employee functioning, thus creating a need for an organizational framework through which to develop, implement, and manage those change efforts effectively.

Senior VHA leadership tasked its internal consulting organization, the VHA National Center for Organization Development (NCOD), with researching the available options and recommending a theoretical framework to best understand and manage change, and also devising and offering resources in support of change efforts within the VHA system. The services which NCOD typically provides within VHA (Osatuke et al., 2012) include 180°/360° feedback, executive coaching, team building and

development, administering and disseminating results from an organizational census of employee perceptions (the VA All Employee Survey; AES), offering a nation-wide program that supports civility in the workplace (Civility, Respect, Engagement in the Workplace; CREW—Osatuke et al., 2009), and other services, all of which provide general support to VHA transformational change initiatives. As additional, specific support to broad scope transformations within VHA, NCOD created a Change Management Task Force to review and recommend conceptual frameworks, to develop resources supporting large-scale changes in VHA organizations (e.g. in VHA hospitals, clinics, residential facilities), and to provide consultation to these same organizations.

Numerous theories have addressed transformational change, many of them, based upon the review, could potentially be used as a framework for the large-scale change experienced by VHA. We will summarize five of the more well-known theories, to explicate the essential background and conceptual thinking about organizational change: Porras and Robertson's (1992) dynamics of planned organizational change model, the Burke-Litwin (1992) change model, the punctuated equilibrium model (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985), Kotter's (1995) organization transformation model, and Freedman's (1997, 2010) realistic managed-resistance model. We will compare these theories and explain why the realistic managed-resistance model was chosen as a model for adoption by VHA. Finally, we will also present an assessment tool (Phases of Change Assessment; POCA) and related resources that have been created based on this model and are currently actively used within VHA.

Change Theories

Porras and Robertson's (1992) model of the dynamics of planned organizational change describes four interrelated subsystems: (1) Organizing arrangements (formal elements designed to coordinate organized activity), (2) social factors (individual and group characteristics, interaction patterns, organizational culture), (3) technology (work flow and job design), and (4) physical setting (organizational space). Changing one element impacts other elements. All four impact individual behavior, thereby affecting organizational performance and individual development. A benefit of this model is that its elements are empirically supported through a meta-analysis of 52 planned change interventions (Robertson, Roberts, & Porras, 1993). Missing from the model, however, is recognition of resistance to change and effects of change on leaders and employees.

The Burke-Litwin (1992) change model includes both transactional (first-order/climate) and transformational (second-order/culture) change. In first-order change, although some features of the organization change, the overall nature of the organization remains the same. The transactional factors include structure, management practices, and systems which bring work unit climate changes, leading to changes in individual and organizational performance. Second-order change results in fundamental and substantial altering of the organization. Transformational factors include changes to the mission and strategy, leadership styles, and organizational culture. Interventions aimed at these factors cause permanent change in culture and, ultimately, in individual/organizational performance. Elements of the model are empirically supported (e.g., culture - Gordon, 1985; climate – Rosenberg & Rosenstein, 1980; see Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 539, for a complete review). It acknowledges the impact of the external environment, including a feedback loop between the organizational performance and external environment. The advantage of recognizing the external influences notwithstanding, this model still does not recognize leader and employee reactions to change.

The punctuated equilibrium model of organizational transformation (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985) addresses change in organizations characterized by inertia. Organizations go through relatively long periods of stability (equilibrium) punctuated by short bursts of fundamental change. These revolutionary periods substantively disrupt established activity patterns, creating the platform for new equilibrium periods. Discontinuous change is needed to disrupt strong inertia. This model is empirically supported (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). While its underlying framework is realistic (organizations are largely unchanging except for extreme change periods), no specific stages are identified to explain the processes whereby change occurs.

Kotter's (1995) organizational transformation model includes eight steps. First, leaders establish a sense of urgency. Second, a guiding coalition is formed. Third, leaders create a vision; fourth, communicate the vision; fifth, empower employees to act; sixth, plan for and create short-term wins. In step seven, improvements are consolidated, producing more change. Finally, new approaches are institutionalized. This model, supported by analyses of organizational change initiatives over 15 years (Kotter, 1995), presents both the organization and individuals as transformed by change processes, and identifies clear-cut stages of change. Making change, however, is presented mainly from the leaders' standpoint: the model does not cover the employees' experience of change and does not address resistance.
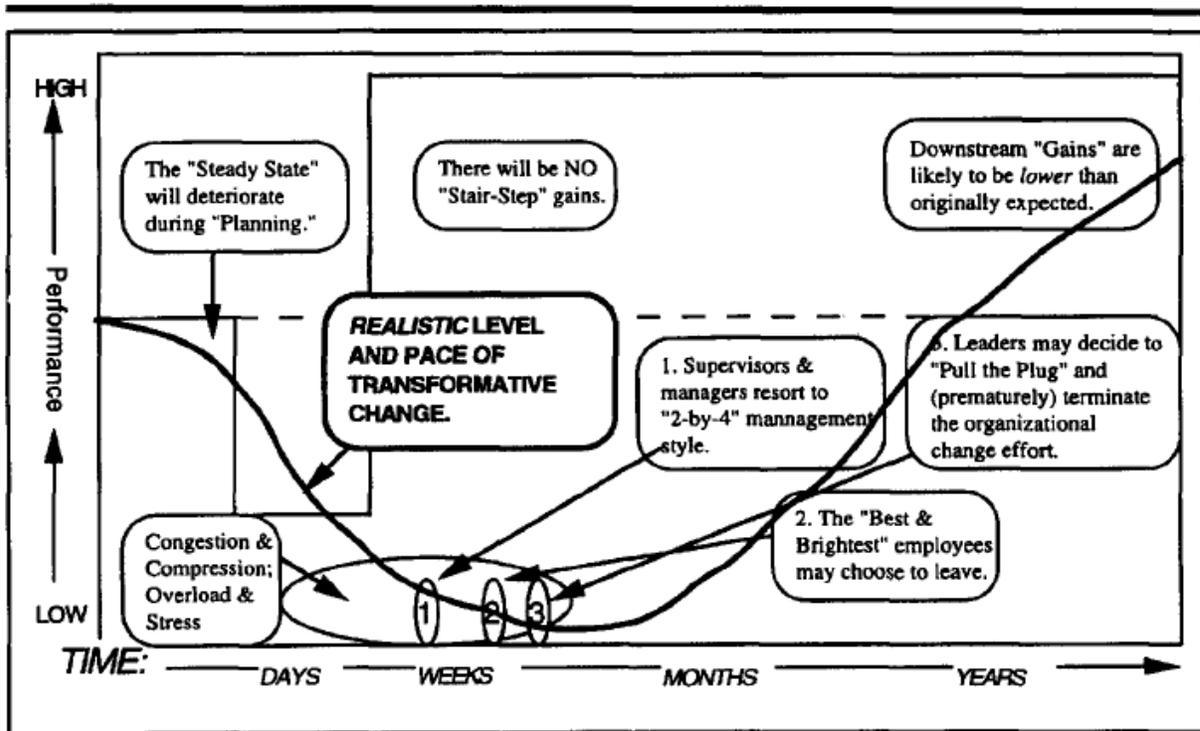
Freedman's (1997, 2010) realistic managed-resistance model of transformational change counters the widely accepted "reasonable Phoenix model" that depicts change as straightforward, efficient, and simple stair-step progress. Freedman describes transformational change as complex, messy, taking longer than a year, and proceeding in four stages. In the *Impact* (shock) stage, the change plans are publically released and the dismantling of targeted systems begins. The *Defensive Retreat* (recoil and turmoil) stage involves efforts to master installed organizational changes and cope with increased workload and stress. In the *Acknowledgement* (adjustment) phase, high workload and stress remain but employees begin to accept the changes. In the *Adaptive Change* (reconstruction) stage, individual and workgroup performance gradually improves. Most notably, this theory recognizes resistance to change and describes thoughts and feelings of leaders and employees as well as means to tackle these throughout the change process. This model is based on theoretical premises; it has not yet been tested empirically.

The five theories just briefly reviewed represent some of the most complete and well-known transformational change theories in the field. Each has its advantages, and most propose a series of stages for change, thus clarifying the process that organizations experience. Effectively applying these models (except one) however, might be challenging as they appear simplistic (unrealistic) in conceptualizing reactions to change. Freedman's model recognizes that change is experienced as difficult and provokes resistance. The model offers detailed descriptions of the change process along several dimensions, which include specifically addressing how employees might react and how leaders can respond. This comprehensive, flexible, realistic approach influenced the selection of this model as a framework for guiding VHA change initiatives.

Impact of Change on Organizations and Employees

We now turn to a detailed description of Freedman's (1997, 2010) realistic managed-resistance model (see Figure 1), incorporating VHA employees' interview excerpts to illustrate how this model accurately captures employees' reactions to VHA change initiatives. The interview data were collected during workplace assessments (20 workgroups, 800 respondents), conducted by NCOD organizational consultants (doctoral-level psychologists) in the context of planning organization development services requested by leaders of these organizations. In ½ hour interviews, employees individually, confidentially commented on strengths, weaknesses, and desired changes of their workgroup; their responses were recorded verbatim. Using an approach based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we generated themes specific to employees' experiences of change, as expressed in the assessment transcripts. In summarizing these themes (below), we used the key concepts that define each phase of change in the realistic managed-resistance model: i.e. how the organization behaves, how individual employees respond, and how leaders might react most helpfully. The theme descriptions below are followed by interview excerpts which provide representative examples of how employees experienced workplace environment during specific phases of change.

Phase I: Impact

Organizations. Organizations publicize the purpose and plan for the change initiative, beginning the process of disassembling the non-effective elements of the organization, and initiating the enactment process for new structures, processes, technologies, or philosophies. Trust in leadership is lost. Problem-solving and decision making are paralyzed. Goal setting and planning seem irrelevant and the focus is short-sighted and reactive. Employees' concern is their own group, and they are suspicious of other groups. The new system structure remains abstract; performance is unpredictable (Freedman, 2010).

Employees. Within hours (individuals) or days (workgroups), the shock of the announced change affects employees, leading to a range of emotions: Terror, panic, confusion, uncertainty, suspicion, and immobilization. They seek the lost base of safety and security, and attempt to satisfy immediate needs. Employees' thinking process is characterized as disoriented, distracted, and based on distorted perceptions (Freedman, 2010).

> *Theme – change as negative/disruptive*
> "And we've had new people make all these changes, and then leave right after they make changes and aren't here to see the mess they've made."
> "Teamwork, communication, quit changing. We just get adjusted to a certain way they want something done and bam they change to a different way....Every time you get used to doing something a certain way a new manager comes in and we have to do things a different way.…I am really frustrated and feel overwhelmed."

Leaders. Leaders can respond by preventing unnecessary workload, preventing emotional contamination, preserving functional subsystems, and maintaining boundaries, which may be accomplished by regulating the onset and sequence of changes, validating employees' feelings, avoiding

surprises, and developing mechanisms to create clarity. Leaders can also express interest, be highly responsive, and friendly. Mismanagement of this phase results in lower effectiveness and slower progress (Freedman, 2007, 2010).

Theme – communication

"Making sure that when you make decisions that you let them know before the changes are made and elicit feedback from employees. Some people don't feel valued."

"People saying "that is not my job." or I do not have time to do that. For the whole facility, I think there is a lack of communication. For example, you don't know new staff, employee of the month. There seems to be a lot of meetings on PACT, but nothing is disseminated on what happened at the meeting so lots of people do not know what is happening or what changes are being made."

In Freedman's model, the clock of change is set in motion from the moment when the organizational members become aware of their initial reaction to change aspects that personally affect them at work. The model allows for this reaction to be emotional and does not assume that the impact of change is necessarily well processed or thought through. Including these reactions into the theoretical account (i.e. the model of change) allows leaders and consultants to plan ahead how to offer the desired influence at these early stages, for example how to reduce the experience of change as confusing. Employees' experience of change at its early stages is not usually a part of change models. For example, Porras and Robertson (1992) suggest that change begins with interventions that create behavior change, where the intervention impacts some or all of the organizational work setting variables; organizations are considered to change when individual members' behavior changes. In contrast, Freedman's model considers members' *awareness* (i.e. clarity regarding the nature and direction of change) to be the first achievement; it precedes behavioral change and constitutes an early marker of progress in the change process. Whereas Porras and Robertson (1992) acknowledge the role employees play in the change process and the potential for this process to go awry (e.g. these authors note that an intervention may result in negative behavior change), their theory focuses less on the potentially disruptive nature of change as perceived by employees. This focus, when present in a conceptual model, creates a realistic expectation that change will not be necessarily embraced from the start. This highlights the need for organizational leaders to widely explain, advocate and support the desired change at this critical phase.

Phase II: Defensive Retreat

Organizations. Organization members experience "transformational congestion and compression" (Freedman, 1997). Congestion is metaphorically similar to gridlock – people are trying to understand and master what appears like an overwhelming amount and variety of tasks, functions, and activities, discontinuous with their past experience. Compression means that employees lose perspective regarding their job priorities, and feel torn by uncontrollable external forces (Freedman, 1997).

Theme – overwhelmed with amount of change

"So many changes- I know change is good, but when it's too much and there isn't a good reason for it. It's wearing the staff out. Everything is emergent- must do it by COB today. That can't be done sometimes. Everything can't be emergent."

"It's not that fun…haha, it's not that bad. Just so much change. The way we serve patients has changed. It's supposed to be home-style but we don't see it that way. We don't know why we switched. But we're the night crew, we are young and new, but don't understand. Policies from the top don't make as much sense."

"Getting the extra help for PACT team has helped tremendously. We desperately need a lab person for PACT team. They say there isn't money in the budget for a lab person. We have to pick up that load along with the other stuff that I'm doing. We also have to take retinal imaging, which takes extra time out of my day. It gets overwhelming for us and not getting paid extra for it. We just need more staff. Patients get frustrated because they call and don't get a return call, but it is hard when you only have 2 people answering the phone. It is very frustrating. We desperately need someone just to answer phones and triage rather than interrupt the nurse."

Organizations are challenged to recognize the demands of changing situations and conditions, identify risk factors and opportunities for the total system and all members within it, and avoid early termination of the change initiative. The key tasks are to survey the system, gather and organize relevant information, determine sources of problematic issues, and identify the organizational members who are affected and their reactions. Goal planning in this phase is typically expedient; organizational members may ignore the mission and strategic plans of the change initiative, the organizational values, and the relationship between objectives and consequences. The system structure becomes steeply hierarchical, and the policies and procedures become highly traditional.

Employees. This phase can last for several days (individuals) or several weeks (workgroups). Employees experience self-doubt, resulting in anxiety, guilt, rage, sadness, and they reminisce about the loss of certainty. Employees detach from others, are preoccupied with the self, and search for someone or something to blame. Their thinking process is confused by the presence of ambiguity.

> *Theme – change as negative/disruptive*
>
> "We are all for the PACT Stuff, but we all seem to be confused about what we are doing and what are roles. Need to be more concrete. We need more of a defined thing. We are not sure exactly what we are supposed to be doing. We don't have anything to go by. With PACT, it has changed our roles; need to know how that affects are day-to-day routine."
>
> "There is a lot of disagreement about how PACTS split up. There are people who were working together who are no longer working together and they are mad. They don't feel that it was done fairly. There is a real disconnect between clerks disconnect and nurses. You are scared to ask them to do something and it is a real imposition. Not necessarily scared; just not worth the hassle."
>
> *Theme – resistance to change*
>
> "I think that the #1 reason is resistance to change and a strong tendency to maintain the status quo. Especially the operations component. That is the largest component. That is 190 of the 220 employees and that is where I see the resistance in seeing and tying new and innovative processes."
>
> "Mostly I think it's good. We have a lot of employees who are fairly enthusiastic, undercurrent of resistance to change, hesitancy to step up. That makes it harder to work here. Some of it relates to neglect. We've always done it that way."

Leaders. Leaders redirect anger toward instrumental activities by repeatedly presenting a compelling vision of the attainable desired state, meeting with all organizational members, reinforcing confidence, focusing on identifying change-related issues, and creating incentives for adopting the change. Leaders' attitudes should be certain, gentle, patient, and persistent (Freedman, 2010).

In Freedman's model, catching up with the full scope of change constitutes a separate phase of the change process. The concept of a defensive retreat (phase II) identifies a common denominator in the otherwise broad spectrum of emotional intensity and negativity that may characterize employees' reactions to change. The model explicates these reactions as reflecting the members' efforts to reposition themselves towards a changing reality and understand how to do their work given the new systems and processes. The model thus formulates resistance in terms of employees' developmental *needs,* in the context of integrating the new organizational process. Needs are not right or wrong; they reflect reality that is experienced by organizational members (therefore telling them to stop resisting would not help). Resistance is thus realistically cast as both natural and understandable, yet a stage which needs to be overcome for the change to move forward. This concept clarifies the kind of support needed from leaders at phase II. Members need support in learning how to cope with the amount of change in their specific work functions. Resistance behaviors serve as indicators of areas where this task has not yet been mastered. In addition to clarifying the reasons for resistance, the description of phase II implies the value of empathy and support for employees who have difficult times with change. Freedman's model casts employee resistance as an element in the process that must be addressed for change to succeed. Other change models tend to view resistance mainly as an impediment (i.e. negative force only). One exception is Tushman and Romanelli's (1985) model. It suggests there are bursts of revolutionary change in

organizations that disrupt established activity periods. Resistance works to prevent small incremental changes within units from accumulating to large scale change within organizations; therefore, large scale change only works when accomplished by a revolutionary transformation. This model acknowledges the role of employee resistance during change efforts, but does not address ways of managing or reducing resistance.

Phase III: Acknowledgement

Organizations. Congestion and compression initially continue, creating work overload and stress. Supervisors are more authoritarian; top employees may leave; there is movement toward terminating the change effort. Challenges include designing alternative, desired states for the organization with a comparison to the current state; identifying alternative states; and developing and implementing action plans. Assessment and evaluation of available information is needed, including obtaining more information from relevant parties and selecting a 'desired state' for the organization. The organizational system structure flattens, and work goes across lateral boundaries. Relevant parties have input into policies and procedures.

Employees. This phase can last for weeks for individuals, and months for workgroups. Employees experience ambivalence, expressing dichotomous emotions: Impulsiveness/anxiety, suspicion/cautious optimism. They search for ways to contribute, and a new base of safety and security. They become goal and problem solving oriented, as well as inclined toward systematic decision-making; concern about addressing organizational stakeholders' needs increases.

> *Theme – change is continuous*
> "We roll out something like PACT and then it is constantly changing. You walk in and they tell you one thing and it's gonna change, you just gotta roll with it."
> *Theme – commitment to change*
> "I can't really tell you about nursing service because I only work in the clinic. We are doing PACT and everybody has been willing and working hard to make PACT work. I have worked overtime on the floor and those employees work pretty closely together."

Leaders. Leaders can address these organizational changes by inducing self-discipline, a sense of responsibility for the entire organization, appreciating and respecting differences, and valuing necessary interdependence. Goal setting is lengthier in time and more comprehensive. Leaders should offer reassurance and maintain high yet achievable goals (Freedman, 2010).

Phase III underscores psychological dynamics of the change process as organizational members shift to leaving the old reality in the past and accept that they have to live with the new reality now. This point in Freedman's model is where other change models typically *start* their account of change processes, as this is when behavioral changes first become apparent. One of the benefits offered by Freedman's model is, we suggest, its coverage of precursors of the behavioral change. Of note, other reviewed change models do not contain any postulates incompatible with Freedman's model, but they do not focus on the detailed dynamics of employee experience of change. For example, Burke and Litwin's (1992) model does not indicate how change "starts," but instead emphasizes that change is influenced by the external environment. Similar to Freedman's model, leaders and managers are seen as playing a role in implementing and cultivating change, but little is said in Burke and Litwin's model about the impact of change on employees.

Psychological dynamics of change in phase III present an opportunity for those leading the change to align resources, support, work processes, and communications. Missing these opportunities creates serious risks for failure of the transformational change. Resources for addressing these tasks are generally available to leaders; e.g., if the change requires more work in teams, then practices covered in the organizational development literature such as team learning, "teaming," and team coaching will be relevant to teach and implement (Emondson, 2003; Hawkins, 2011; West & Lyubovnikova, 2012; West & Markiewicz). Freedman's Phase III may be compared to the Preparation and Action phases in Prochaska et al.'s the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (TTM; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, 1992, 1994; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2002; Velicer, 1998). Although the TTM

addresses individual change, it is a resource for organizational leaders supporting employees through transformational change. The five stages of change in the TTM include: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance. When moving from Precontemplation (where there is no intention of consistently engaging in the target behavior) to Maintenance (where target behaviors are consistently adopted and regular), individuals often relapse, i.e. recycle back to previous stages. Acknowledgement (in Freedman's model) and Preparation and Action (in TTM) share the key resemblance of being a make-it or break-it phases. Their dynamics are associated with a major transition where a person (in TTM) or organization (in Freedman's model) is on the cusp of either relapsing back to more familiar behaviors and practices, or advancing to new target behaviors and practices. As the resemblance implies, organizations which reach the Acknowledgement phase in their change process may consider applying selected methods, techniques and resources previously developed to facilitate individual change transitions in TTM Preparation and Action stages.

Be it Freedman's or Prochaska et al.'s model, those leading change need to match their actions and resource support to the level of resistance, anxiety, or uncertainty about the change. Employees and teams in earlier phases and stages respond more positively to emotional, affective, and cognitive evaluation of the benefits of change, whereas employees and teams in later phases and stages respond more positively to cognitive-behavioral approaches such as counter conditioning, stimulus control, feedback strategies, and reinforcement management (Levesque, Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999). Once employees are entering Phase III, leadership and resource support needs to shift away from explaining why the change is important and emotional appeals to get involved, to offering more behavioral, skill-based, action-oriented support and resources. In TTM terms, this is a shift toward interventions of forming teams (Preparation stage), and training team leaders to facilitate commitment and provident counter-conditioning strategies to prevent relapse (Action stage). Eventually (at TTM Maintenance stage), this is followed by providing helping relationships, e.g. team coaches, which build self-efficacy skills by teaching new ways to interact at work and support the planned change (Prochaska, Prochaska & Levesque, 2001). At Phase III, supporting change means providing clear guidance, concrete tools for describing and tracking the status of change efforts, and coaching and support to meet as a team to review the progress and efforts. This kind of support specifically and positively reinforces the new business practices for employees and teams, which allows taking the change into the next phase. If employees and teams do not experience this kind of support from those managing the change in their organization, then doubts of sustainability and importance will likely arise, willingness to exert the efforts will diminish, and the change will fail.

Phase IV: Adaptive Change

Organizations. Results of the change process become more apparent. Performance gradually improves; employees feel more competent, confident, and comfortable with the changes. Organizational challenges at this stage include executing action plans, evaluating progress, comparing emerging results with desired states, and integrating implementation across the organization. The focal tasks include creating and preserving intact workgroups, encouraging intergroup cooperation, identifying and dealing with unintended side effects, and determining the lessons that have been learned through the change process. The system structure shows an evolutionary trend toward lateral business processes.

Theme – accepting change

"Another [strength] has been through these process is that staff have been willing to accept change and make it right. There is not as much push back as I would have thought. Outwardly they have not shown much push back."

"Outpatient pharmacy is a great place to work. I think the new chief is doing some good things. Everything she is asking us to do is about the job. She treats us fairly. When you get new administration, things are going to be the same. We have to accept change and do our job. It isn't about us, it is about doing the job for the veteran."

Employees. This phase can take months for individuals and years for workgroups. Employees exhibit optimism, commitment, patience, reserved judgment, pride, and regard for others, and shift attachment to

new or revitalized sources of safety and security. Thinking focuses on results-oriented issue identification and problem solving, engaging in systematic decision-making from a comprehensive, systemic perspective with broad time horizons. Leadership is more situational, depending on organizational conditions. Problem solving is flexible and functional, with a data-based diagnostic approach.

> *Theme – accepting change*
> "I think that with the new PACT teams, things are starting to get better, more organization, etc. I think things are changing for the better as far as patient care"
> "I think part would be accepting change. Working at the VA there are huge initiatives that come down and some are reluctant to accept those. So I think accepting change."

Leaders. Leaders in this stage must lock in and reinforce functional achievements and prevent complacency. They should exhibit an attitude of active friendliness, approval, and should discourage inappropriate attitudes or expectations (Freedman, 2010).

Kotter (1995) suggests leaders are central to transformational change. From instilling a sense of urgency to initiate the change process to communicating the vision to institutionalizing new approaches, leaders' roles are critical. While Freedman's model likewise suggests leaders are an important aspect of implementing change, it additionally incorporates the roles of the overall organization as well as individual employees, making it a more realistic framework for change.

We have explained how Freedman's model summarizes the developmental process of change while following its impact on both organizations *and* employees, a unique element of this theory. Adopting this model to guide VHA in its change initiatives provided NCOD with the basis for developing a transformational change survey instrument for leaders to assess employees' engagement in the change process and a series of resources to assist with managing the change process. The next section details this instrument and a selection of available resources.

APPLICATIONS

This final section presents applications the NCOD Change Management Task Force developed to assist organizational leaders with implementing change initiatives. We start with a transformational change survey instrument based on Freedman's model: the Phases of Change Assessment (POCA; Appendix A). The POCA assists leaders in understanding employees' perceptions of change, then directs them to resources (overviewed below) that support change at each given phase, according to the model.

The POCA is a 21-item instrument measuring workers' individual perceptions of a specific change effort. Each question measures a content area (e.g. communication, purpose) and uses a unique response scale, reflecting reactions consistent with each of the four phases of change. The POCA can help leaders evaluate where their organization, group, or team is within the change process, so they can effectively plan the relevant support for organizational members.

The POCA can be used once or multiple times within a transformational change process—e.g., first during the planning phase, then 4-6 months after initial implementation, and finally one year post-implementation. The POCA assessment results in a detailed report that shows where (at which stage) the organization is on the change continuum, shows the variation of responses, and provides model-based descriptions of each phase, associated reactions, and suggestions for how to best manage change through each phase.

At the time of this writing, NCOD is in the process of administering the POCA nationwide across the VHA. The POCA is used primarily to support transformational change, i.e. as a means for local workplace leaders to share the collected data and start a conversation with their employees, based on results. The initial collected data are also being used to validate the measure and establish VHA baselines.

The value of the POCA is that of being the first existing measure associated with the managed-resistance model, which in turn is unique by the virtue of comprehensively addressing employees' experience of organizational change. Both the model and tool posit employees at the center of the change

process, a highly recommended (e.g. Argyris & Schon, 1996), yet an atypical practice in organizational transformation initiatives (*cf* Bartunek et al., 2006). POCA is available for free public use by interested leaders and organizations (note: please contact NCOD for information related to using the instrument).

Whereas the POCA can help leaders assess employee engagement during the change process, the resources noted below are shared with all members of the organization in transition. (Note: contact NCOD for a full description of resources: e.g. tip-sheets, worksheets, activities.)

Phase 1: Impact
- *Developing a Vision for Change***:** Designed for leaders; offers information about leadership vision planning, including developing the vision, developing goals, and communicating to stakeholders.
- *Decisional Balance Exercise*: Increases participants' awareness about reasons for change. Helps participants consider the pros and cons of changing.
- *Stress Management Activity***:** Helps all staff members effectively cope with stress related to changes in the workplace.

Phase 2: Defensive Retreat
- *Managing Self through Change*: Helps participants understand and explore reactions typically associated with change initiatives.
- *Empower Yourself Through Change*: Offers suggestions for controlling emotional responses to change, empowering the user through the change process.
- *Managing Resistance Tips Sheet***:** A tip sheet for mid-level and senior leaders in the second stage in the change process.

Phase 3: Acknowledgement
- *Building Resilience Exercise*: Helps participants recognize their setbacks in trying to change; demonstrates their resilience; generalizes skills to cope with change outcomes.
- *Helping Exercise***:** Increases the understanding of helping behavior in teams, allowing team members to explore how to offer, give, and receive help as a team member.

Phase 4: Adaptive Change
- *Appreciating Positive Changes*: Asks questions related to aspects of the change process, so teams can recognize positive changes and identify keys to success.
- *Celebrating Successes*: This document includes summaries of different ways leaders can engage their staff in celebrating the successes achieved in the change process.

These resources can assist leaders and employees with the change process, and ideally would be used with the POCA, providing a full range of support for leaders and employees.

CONCLUSION

We conclude by suggesting that leaders and employees can actively plan to address organizational change. Leaders' proactive questions about change may include: How and when will we measure the success of the change effort? What will we do *when* (not *if*) the change process flounders, in ways typical of specific phases? How will we engage employees and reduce resistance? Ideally, assessment of change progress would occur every 4-6 months, using tools like the POCA and also bottom-line business measures such as profitability and customer satisfaction. If problems in the change process are revealed, leaders should reassess their implementation strategy, possibly slightly altering or revamping it altogether. In general, leaders should regularly meet to discuss the progress of change and their supportive roles in it, as well as meet with mid-level managers to learn about their experiences and suggestions.

Employees' questions about change may include: Why do I have to change? What if I don't want to change? How can I avoid this change altogether? Without support and clear answers, these questions can translate into employee resistance.
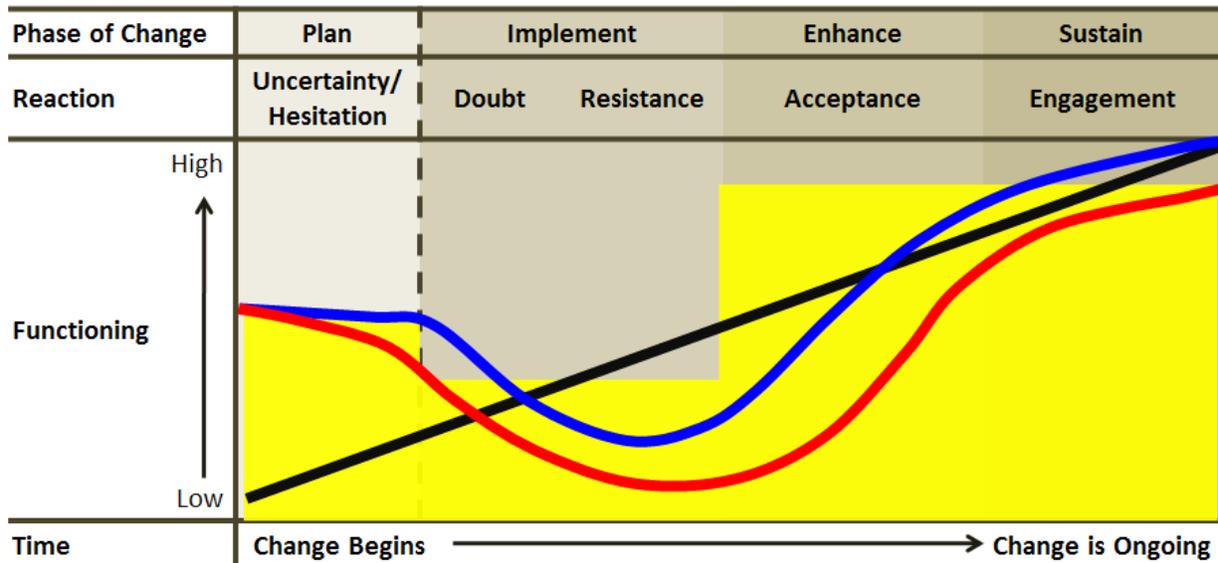
How can leaders persuade employees, who will more than likely resist change, on board with the process? First, seek genuine feedback about employees' reactions to change (i.e. using anonymous suggestion boxes, confidential surveys, etc.). Second, have regular meetings where change initiative and its progress are discussed; assign one or several informal leaders to guide the discussion. Third, encourage employees to look for when change works; e.g. keep checklists of new, expected behaviors and routines and track how these changes effectively improve their work and workplace.

This paper emphasized theory more than application. We overviewed several best-known transformational change theories, indicating the reasons that Freedman's realistic managed-resistance model was selected as a framework within VHA. A detailed overview of Freedman's theory also gave us an opportunity to share VHA employees' experiences of change, as expressed through individual interviews, thus showing that this model accurately captures VHA employees' experience of transformational change. Finally, we presented the contents of the POCA based upon the concepts of the Freedman model and, in turn, informed additional resources, now used within VHA to manage and support organizational change.

Why bother with change? It may appear overwhelming personally, and come to be experienced as next to impossible organizationally. Considering different levels of change in the VHA, from personal to organizational (which ultimately impacts us as individuals), we believe that there is much to gain from doing things in new ways. The first and foremost reason to work hard to make change within VHA reflects the difference that it makes for its organizational mission: providing an improved, more accessible and consistent care for our nation's Veterans.

Our paper may raise more questions for workplace leaders than we have answers: "What if my employees hate me because their work changed? What if they never get back to peak performance levels? What if some of them lose their jobs? What if I lose my job? What if, after all the change happens, we find out it was a really bad idea?" In response to these questions, one thought we can share is that seeing the challenge and correctly sizing its scope is the beginning of an answer. Change is not easy. Seeking to manage it successfully creates a temptation for leaders to simplify things by choosing to ignore the complexity. In the short run, denial and avoidance seem like easier paths to take than planning and following the steep road of realistically managed change initiatives. The choice of Freedman's model as a framework puts the VHA on the path of managing transformational changes that likely will include some ups and downs. We have conceptual reasons to suggest that these fluctuations will be realistic, manageable, and consistent with those described in the model. The good news is that the organization foresees these challenges. We suggest that looking ahead for large scope initiatives (i.e. applying the framework to inform the expectations of needs, problems and sensitivities at each phase) will help the organization plan and provide appropriate, need-sensitive supports for its employees and leaders. This is an important conceptual implication suggested by the realistic managed resistance model, and emphasized by how the change process is communicated about in VHA. For example, Figure 2 (VA adaptation of Friedman's model) displays the realistically expected change trajectory when the process is managed within organizations (versus left to run its natural course), and contrasts both of these with the common but unrealistic assumption of a linear upward progress. This communicates a beneficial impact of managing change as well as the realistic expectation that even when managed, the progress will not be instant or linear.

FIGURE 2
**VA DEPICTION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE ADOPTED FROM
FREEDMAN'S MODEL**

Adapted from A.M. Freedman (1997, 2000): Realistic Managed-Resistance Model

(*Note*: Black line shows the frequent but unrealistic expectation held for the organizational change process. Red line shows the likely trajectory of organizational change when left unmanaged. Blue line shows the likely trajectory of the change process when closely attended to and realistically managed by organizations.)

There are few things that frighten us more than change. While personally you can seek support when struggling with changes (i.e., from friends, family), offering support for organizational change can be more challenging. This paper presented information that may assist leaders and consultants in successfully guiding organizations, and their employees, though the change process. We provide one final quote from a VHA employee, suggesting hope in the difficult process of managing change:

> "They are actually trying to do something. Doesn't mean that it will work, but they are trying. They need to get the people involved. They need to get input, they know what they are doing and what will work. Some of them have some pretty good ideas…."

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PHASES OF CHANGE ASSESSMENT (POCA)

Instruction to respondents:
In responding to the questions below, please think of the following specific change currently occurring within your organization: (specific change being managed is inserted here).
For each question, please select *one* response that *best* describes your experience of this change at this present time. There are no right or wrong answers—the focus is on your experience of this change.

Clarity of need for the change:
1. What is your level of clarity regarding the need for this change?
☐ The need for this change has not been explained to me very well
☐ Though it has been explained, I do not agree that this change needs to happen
☐ I understand the need for this change
☐ I understand why this change is critical for our continued success

Clarity regarding the purpose of the change:
2. What is your understanding of the purpose of this change?
☐ I have a difficult time explaining the purpose of this change to others
☐ I disagree with the purpose of this change
☐ I am beginning to see the purpose of this change
☐ I think this change has an important purpose

Faith in change outcome
3. Do you believe this change will produce positive outcomes?
☐ I am not sure whether this change will produce positive outcomes
☐ I do not believe this change will produce positive outcomes
☐ I believe this change may produce positive outcomes
☐ I am confident this change will produce positive outcomes

Impact of personal actions on change outcome/effort
4. Are you helping this change be successful?
☐ I do not know what actions I need to take to help this change be successful
☐ My actions are not helping this change be successful
☐ What I am doing may help this change be successful
☐ My actions are currently contributing to the success of this change

Expected Individual role within the change
5. How accepting are you of your expected role in this change?
☐ I do not understand my expected role in this change
☐ I do not agree with the role I am expected to play in this change
☐ My expected role in this change makes sense to me
☐ I am happy to fulfill my expected role in this change

Adjustment to the change
6. How are you reacting to this change now?
☐ I am unsettled or confused about this change
☐ I am upset about this change
☐ I am hopeful about this change
☐ I am confident this change is a positive one

Perceived value of the change to self
7. How will this change affect your work satisfaction?
☐ I am not sure how this change will affect my work satisfaction
☐ This change will not improve my work satisfaction
☐ I believe this change may improve my work satisfaction
☐ This change is already improving my work satisfaction

Trust in the motivation behind the change process

8. What do you think of the reason for this change?
☐ I do not know the reason – it is a mystery to me.
☐ I think the reason has little to do with improving things
☐ I think this change is intended to improve things
☐ I think this change is necessary to improve things

Level of behavioral participation/endorsement of change

9. How does this change impact your behaviors?
☐ I am waiting to see what really happens before I get involved in this change
☐ I am doing things the same way because I think it works best
☐ I am changing some of the ways I work
☐ I have made the necessary adjustments in my work to ensure the success of this change

Self -efficacy

10. What do you think of your ability to carry out this change?
☐ I am not sure what skills are necessary to support this change
☐ I have little interest in learning how to support this change
☐ I am learning the skills necessary to support this change
☐ I am confident I have the skills necessary to support this change

Confidence in senior management to see change through

11. How confident are you that senior management can make this change successful?
☐ I am currently unsure whether they can make this change successful
☐ They probably cannot make this change successful
☐ They probably can make this change successful
☐ I am confident they will make this change successful

Confidence in your direct supervisor to see change through

12. How confident are you that your direct supervisor can make this change successful?
☐ I am currently unsure whether my direct supervisor will make this change successful
☐ They probably cannot make this change successful given how things are currently
☐ They probably can make this change successful
☐ I am confident they will make this change successful

Rule Structure

13. Are the rules at your workplace consistent with this change?
☐ I am not sure if the change will be in conflict with our rules
☐ This change is inconsistent with our rules
☐ Our rules are being changed in an attempt to be more consistent with this change
☐ Our rules are consistent with this change

Manner of communication about change

14. What is being communicated to you about this change?
☐ I do not hear much about this change
☐ The more I hear about it the more I wish this change would NOT occur
☐ Communications I receive ease my concerns about this change
☐ Communications I receive help guide my work actions in support of this change

Perceived workload

15. How does this change impact your workload?
☐ I am unsure of the impact of this change on my workload
☐ This change causes unreasonable workload increases
☐ I am okay with how this change impacts my workload
☐ The impact of this change on my workload has been worthwhile

Coworker reaction to change:

16. How are your coworkers reacting to this change?
☐ They seem unsettled or confused about this change
☐ They seem resistant to this change
☐ They seem hopeful about this change
☐ They seem confident this change is a positive one

Communication about change

17. What are people saying about this change?
☐ There are a lot of rumors about what this change means
☐ People are criticizing the change
☐ People are starting to discuss the value of this change
☐ People are sharing success stories about this change

Level of others' faith in change outcome

18. Do your coworkers believe this change will produce positive outcomes?
☐ My coworkers are unsure whether this change will produce positive outcomes
☐ My coworkers do not believe this change will produce positive outcomes
☐ My coworkers believe this change may produce positive outcomes
☐ My coworkers are confident this change will produce positive outcomes

Clarity of others' roles in change (Expected roles of others within the change)

19. How accepting are your coworkers of their expected role in this change
☐ My coworkers do not seem to understand their expected role in this change
☐ My coworkers do not seem to agree with the role they are expected to play in this change
☐ My coworkers seem to understand their expected role in this change
☐ My coworkers seem happy to fulfill their expected role in this change

Impact of coworker actions on change outcome/effort

20. Are your coworkers helping this change be successful?
☐ It is not clear whether my coworkers' actions are helping this change succeed
☐ My coworkers' actions are not helping this change be successful
☐ What my coworkers are doing may help this change be successful
☐ My coworkers' actions are currently contributing to the success of this change

Confidence in coworkers skills and abilities to carry out change

21. How confident are you that your coworkers can help this change be successful?
☐ I am unsure whether my coworkers have the skills and abilities to help this change be successful
☐ My coworkers do not have the skills and abilities to help this change be successful
☐ My coworkers probably have the skills and abilities to help this change be successful
☐ I am confident my coworkers have the skills and abilities to help this change be successful

Final demographic items:

My level of involvement in this change:
☐ None at all
☐ Very little involvement
☐ Little involvement
☐ Some involvement
☐ Very much involvement

In the change process, I currently view myself as a(n):

☐ Skeptic – I actively advocate for not changing
☐ Observer – I am waiting to see what happens
☐ Follower – I am going along with the changes
☐ Supporter – I actively advocate for the change
☐ Change Agent – I am actively engaged in implementing the change and encouraging others to change
☐ Champion – I actively promote and support the change and take responsibility for setting the direction, motivating others, and aligning resources

To what degree will/has the change impact(ed) you?
☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ Moderate
☐ Significant
☐ Don't Know

Overall, where are you personally in regards to this change (select the one best response)?
☐ Thinking about and/or making plans to change
☐ Implementing the plan to change
☐ Enhancing the changes made
☐ Actively sustaining this change and continuously seeking improvement opportunities

Thank you for your time and responses.