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Organizational Change Tactics: The Evidence Base in the Literature

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Planned organizational change processes can be used to address the many challenges facing human service organizations (HSOs) and improve organizational outcomes. There is massive literature on organizational change, ranging from popular management books to academic research on specific aspects of change. Regarding HSOs, there is a growing literature, including increasing attention to implementation science and evidence-based practices. However, research which offers generalizable, evidence-based guidelines for implementing change is not common. The purpose of the authors was to assess the evidence base in this organizational change literature to lay the groundwork for more systematic knowledge development in this important field.

Keywords: Organizational change, change tactics, administration, management, evidence-based management

A vast literature on organizational change, mainly in the general business or organizational behavior fields, has become even more extensive and complex in recent years, ranging from books in the popular management press to scholarly articles. However, the books are typically based on only authors' experiences as consultants or on profiles of allegedly successful change leaders, with little empirical support beyond case narratives, and limited or nonexistent conceptual models. Conversely, the academic literature often focuses on theory development or on only a limited number of possible variables. An exception is a relatively rare quantitative study with multiple variables (Parish, Cadwallader, & Busch, 2008), which examined relationships among individual-level variables including job motivation, role autonomy, commitment to change, and perceived change outcomes. There is a growing literature on change readiness (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007) and capacity for change (Judge & Douglas, 2009), but these studies do not often include variables regarding change interventions or outcomes.

Summaries of the literature on organizational change have been published by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), Robertson and Seneviratne (1995), and Weick and Quinn (1999). In addition to the generic organizational change literature, there is a growing literature in public administration and, to a lesser extent, nonprofit organizations. As noted below, this literature is also growing in the human services field specifically. A particularly rich literature is growing in the area of implementation science; but often focuses only on implementation of evidence-based practices, with less consideration of broader aspects of organizational change.

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These literatures include, but rarely in the same source, conceptual frameworks, theoretical considerations, studies of selected variables in the change process, qualitative and quantitative methods, and practice guidelines. Conceptual frameworks (e.g., Burke, 2011) have been developed, but these are not often used to guide research. Practice guidelines are often presented without a conceptual framework and with evidence limited to the author's authority and experiences as a consultant or to findings from a single case study. Specific organizational change strategies, tactics, and methods are rarely examined in a detailed and systematic way.

Finally, defining and measuring success is particularly complex and challenging; and perhaps for that reason success is rarely documented adequately. For example, in a study by Parish and colleagues (2008), the variables of "implementation success" and "improved performance" were based on only respondent opinion statements on a Likert scale.

As a consequence, with some exceptions noted below, the evidence in this literature which can guide practitioners or consultants wanting to change organizations must be considered to be limited according to evidence-based practice (EBP) standards which are applied to service delivery programs and to principles of evidence-based management (Briggs & McBeath, 2009). Thoughtful and learning-oriented practitioners, typically agency administrators needing to change or improve some aspect of their organizations, want to know what "works" in organizational change; and researchers can help by providing valid, relevant, evidence-based knowledge for such practitioners.

The fragmented nature of this literature suggests that this topic warrants much more attention than it receives. By (2007) has noted the weaknesses in approaches to studying organizational change, suggesting exploratory studies to identify critical success factors for change management. Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron (2001) eloquently discussed some of these issues and made suggestions for advancing research in this area, some of which will be addressed here. Regarding perhaps the most promising area for study—organizational change tactics—there is still a great deal to be learned about what factors are essential or valuable in creating successful organizational change, and what activities, in what sequences, contribute to success.

The purpose of the authors in this article is to lay the groundwork for more systematic knowledge development regarding organizational change by assessing the existing evidence base and identifying opportunities for further research which can more authoritatively inform practice. This study can be seen in the spirit of evidence-based management (EBM) (Briggs & McBeath, 2009): "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best reasoning and experience in making decisions about strategic interventions" (Kovner, Elton, & Billings, 2000, p. 10, cited in Briggs & McBeath, 2009, p. 245). Briggs and McBeath identified three EBM models, including one which parallels a typical EBP process, with the first step being "Identify a researchable question pertaining to an agency problem or issue" (2009, p. 246). For the current discussion, a question could be something like "What organizational change principles or methods are likely to be successful when implementing organizational change to develop an outcomes-based management information system?"

After defining organizational change and briefly reviewing the literature on organizational change in HSOs, findings from a review of two streams of research will be presented and analyzed. One stream is based on a comprehensive review of the literature on organizational change from a public administration perspective, and the other examines similar research in the HSO literature in recent years. This analysis will be followed by suggestions for further research which can inform practice.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Several theories are commonly used to frame discussions of organizational change (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Schmid, 2010). The focus of the authors as presented here, which examines the

use of organizational change tactics used by administrators as change leaders, is best supported by the *rational adaptation* approach, which suggests that managers can use their human agency to respond to external and internal forces for change. This approach can serve as a foundation for discovering effective change strategies and tactics that can be proactively used by administrators and consultants.

Schmid (2010, p. 456) has defined organizational change as “the process that occurs in an HSO as a result of external constraints imposed on it or as a result of internal pressures that cause alterations and modifications in the organization’s core activity, goals, strategies, structures, and service programs.” More specifically for purposes here, *planned* organizational change involves leadership and the mobilizing of staff in such alterations and modifications, to move the organization to a desired future state, using change processes which involve both human and technical aspects of the organization (French & Bell, 1999).

Organizations are, of course, changing on a constant basis, from daily adaptations to problems or needs to multi-year efforts to make major changes in agency operations. Beyond daily changes, there are three levels of increasing intensity of change, recently described by Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010). *Developmental change* involves adjustments to existing operations or improving a skill, method, or process that does not currently meet the organization’s standard. Examples include simple problem solving, routine training, and improving communications. *Transitional change* involves implementing something new and abandoning old ways of functioning. Examples include basic reorganizations, new technology systems, and implementing a new program. The most extreme form of change is *transformational change*, which requires major shifts in vision, strategy, structure, or systems. This might evolve out of necessity, for example, as a result of major policy changes such as managed care or a shift to outcomes measurement or performance-based contracting required by funding organizations. The focus here will be on transformational change and perhaps large-scale transitional change, which are both likely to benefit from the use of evidence-based knowledge on how to lead and manage change.

Organizational change can also be described based on the distinctions between change *content* and change *process*. Change *content*, according to Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) looks at “what in the organization needs to change, such as structure, systems, business processes, technology, products, or services” (p. 52). In HSOs, this may include issues such as implementing EBPs or new outcomes measurement systems. Change *process* includes generic strategies, tactics, and methods such as organization development (Burke, 2011). While the HSO literature as a whole addresses both change content and change process, most writing focuses more heavily on the content of change in a particular case, with less attention, with some exceptions as noted in the literature review below, to change processes such as tactics used by a change leader.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN HSOs

In HSOs, seminal writing on organizational change began over 30 years ago (e.g., Resnick & Patti, 1980), and has been addressed sporadically in the human services literature. In a special issue of *Administration in Social Work*, Bargal and Schmid (1992) summarized other work in this area. In recent years, it has received increasing attention (e.g., Glisson, 2008; Packard, 2013; and Schmid, 2010).

Research focusing on the *content* of organizational change has been conducted in several practice settings. Change efforts in public child welfare have been described (e.g., Cohen, 1999; McBeath, Briggs, & Aisenberg, 2009). Regarding welfare reform, Austin (2004) and others described 21 cases in content areas including workforce participation, self-sufficiency programs, behavioral health, and community partnerships where organizational change occurred.

Implementing EBPs can be seen as an example of organizational change. A special issue of the *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work (JEBSW: Austin, 2008)* was devoted to EBP implementation. In a recent case study, Bledsoe-Mansori and colleagues (2013) described the implementation of a training program on EBP in three agencies, noting the challenges in implementing and sustaining EBPs. Another special issue of *JEBSW (Building Knowledge-Sharing Systems to Support Evidence-Informed Practice: Austin, 2012)* can be seen as an aspect of this small but growing literature. Finally, the field of implementation science (e.g., Proctor et al., 2009) is another example of organizational change in HSOs.

The Austin (2004) volume focused mainly on change content, but also included chapters on some change *processes*. For example, Carnochan and Austin (2004) gathered data from 10 county social service directors in California and reported that the directors identified five primary challenges in implementing organizational change in response to welfare reform legislation. Another chapter (DuBrow, Woher, & Austin, 2004) described the use of organization development in a county agency.

Organization development, perhaps the most common organizational change method, has also been used in HSOs, as described by Latting and Blanchard (1997), Norman and Keys (1992), and Packard (1992). One recent case study of organizational change included the use of an organization development consultant supported by a visionary agency director to build a learning culture in a county human service agency (Lindberg & Meredith, 2012). The authors noted three “essential ingredients” for success—a sense of urgency, guiding principles and vision, and data to assess progress—which are consistent with change tactics identified in the literature assessed in the study reported here.

There have been some attempts to develop comprehensive models of organizational change in the human services. Glisson (2008) has provided evidence of the usefulness of the ARC (availability, responsiveness, and continuity) organizational intervention model, which involves the use of trained change agents to help change culture, climate, and performance in human service programs. Models for HSOs from Lewis, Packard, and Lewis (2012) and Proehl (2001) suggest steps to be taken in the change process, while acknowledging that tactics and principles are applied at different points based on the uniquenesses of a situation.

In summary, the literature on organizational change in HSOs often has some of the same limitations noted above regarding the organizational change literature in general: limited consideration of conceptual frameworks and theories, studies of only selected variables in the change process, and studies which generally do not build upon or connect with relevant earlier research or models. Glisson (2008) has eloquently summarized the limitations in this literature, from poor specification of intervention strategies to inadequate outcome measures. With exceptions including the research on ARC by Glisson and colleagues (2010), implementation science research (e.g., Proctor et al., 2009), and the summary of cases regarding welfare reform by Austin and colleagues (Prince & Austin, 2004), much published research involves case studies from which it is difficult to derive generic practice principles.

The study presented here is intended to offer a structured analysis of this literature and the related literature of generic organizational change to assess the current state of evidence in this field. This should provide a foundation and research agenda for more evidence-based research on organizational change in HSOs.

METHODS

There are several methods for conducting systematic reviews of data from multiple sources, including the use of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005). These authors also noted that systematic reviews tend to use only

quantitative data (including the so-called gold standard of randomized control trials), and they encouraged the use of other methods as well, including content analysis, which was used in the study reported here. Some of the limitations of the meta-analysis method were noted by Rozas and Klein (2010) in a discussion of qualitative literature reviews. Regarding traditional narrative reviews, they added that these “became more systematic by incorporating *vote counting reviews* (Davies, 2000) or *box counting* in order to introduce an increased level of objectivity . . . they afforded a more disciplined evaluation of existing research studies than had previously existed” (p. 389; italics in original). This type of counting was used in the research reported here. Also regarding narrative reviews, Proctor and colleagues (2011) noted that they are “appropriate for summarizing different primary studies and drawing conclusions and interpretation about ‘what we know,’ informed by reviewers’ experiences and existing theories” (p. 67).

The variety of research methods and presentation formats in the literature assessed in this study (many case studies, occasional use of quantitative methods; books, and journal articles) precluded the use of meta-analysis methods. This study quantifies data from a content analysis, and stands between the traditional narrative literature review and a meta-analysis (Rozas & Klein, 2010).

In this study the authors included a content analysis of two related streams of literature on organizational change, with quantification of several aspects of both research methods used in these studies and the research findings. The first stream of research was derived from a thorough and eloquent narrative review by Fernandez and Rainey (2006) in *Public Administration Review*, which had a particular focus on the public sector, a common arena for HSOs. Fernandez and Rainey conducted a review and content analysis, “providing an overview of the vast literature on organizational change that demonstrates its complexity but that also helps to bring some order to the literature” (p. 2).

They summarized their findings as factors contributing to successful organizational change with a list of 8 propositions and 22 sub-propositions, which identified “points of consensus in the literature on successful implementation of such changes. These points serve as testable propositions for researchers to examine in future research, and as major considerations for leaders of change initiatives in public organizations” (p. 2). They discussed the use of these propositions with a primary focus on public sector organizations. They concluded that:

a number of empirical studies have supported many of the propositions from these models and frameworks. This suggests a pattern of consensus about what accounts for successful implementation of planned change. We examined streams of research relating to organizational change, including work on public sector reform and innovation and policy implementation, to distill a set of factors that contribute to successful implementation of organizational change in the public sector. (p. 6)

They added that:

We are not suggesting, therefore, that each of these eight factors needs to be present for organizational change to succeed. Rather, we are arguing that each of them has a positive additive effect on the outcome of change. That is, each of these factors contributes to the successful implementation of change, or makes implementation smoother, adding to the effects of the other factors. (p. 8)

From this set of propositions and sub-propositions, the authors created a list of 22 change tactics. This list formed the structure for categorizing tactics mentioned in the references selected and described below.

For the first analysis, references in the Fernandez and Rainey article which appeared, based on the context in which they were described in the article, to address organizational change tactics were reviewed, using the methods described below.

A second content analysis, focusing specifically on the recent literature in HSOs, was also conducted. This second analysis used data retrieved from Social Services Abstracts and Google

Scholar from 2005 to 2011 using the keyword “organizational change.” This time frame was chosen to follow the period used by Fernandez and Rainey and to provide the most up-to-date assessment of the literature in the human services on organizational change. This first search resulted in 2,729 references. Many were in the fields of education (K–12, higher education), international NGOs, criminal justice, public administration, or nursing; and because the focus here was on HSOs, these were eliminated. The search was then narrowed to include only those articles available online. Titles were assessed, and those references that apparently had nothing substantive to do with organizational change were eliminated. Then, abstracts were reviewed, noting those which, in fact, mentioned organizational change. Many of these abstracts only mentioned organizational change in passing, often noting that there were “implications for organizational change” or simply mentioned the benefits and risks of organizational change without discussing any specific tactics. Those which seemed that they may address organizational change were reviewed. After that review, those that did not actually discuss organizational change tactics at all (even though it appeared that they might, based on the abstract), were eliminated. Generous assumptions were made when assessing an item for inclusion as a change tactic. Many of these items were not specifically stated as tactics, but were pulled if they seemed to be related to any of the 22 tactics derived from Fernandez and Rainey.

Data gathered on these cases (articles or books cited) in both reviews constituted the empirical basis of this research. Each article or book was reviewed by at least one researcher, who notated in a structured data base two sets of data: characteristics of the item (type of publication, sector studied, the empirical basis of the research, and the type of data presented) and whether or not each of the 22 tactics was mentioned.

To assess interrater reliability, a random sample of 41 of the 124 cases (33%) was read and rated by both researchers. With a total of 1,148 pieces of data (28 variables on each of 41 cases), there were 117 disagreements on ratings of individual variables, for a disagreement rate of 15%. There was no clear pattern in the disagreements in terms of tactics with large numbers of disagreements or one researcher tending to under or over-identify tactics. In a similar content analysis which was part of Fernandez and Rainey’s sample (Borins, 2000), an interrater reliability of 80% was seen as “respectable” (p. 500) for such work. In a systematic literature review in the human services by Tucker and Potocky-Tripodi (2006), 6 of 17 cases were reviewed by two raters, resulting in a reliability of 83.3%. Given the methods and content of the research being described here, this agreement rate of 85% seems to suggest an adequate degree of consistency between the raters, offering some confidence in assessment of the ratings made; but this will be noted below as a possible limitation in this study.

FINDINGS

In the first study, using the Fernandez and Rainey article, the researchers identified 85 references which actually mentioned change tactics. Of the 85 references, 42 each were journal articles and books, and one was a monograph. In the study of human services references, 38 were from journals and 1 was a monograph. The contrast between the two sources could be expected, with the former explicitly using any source (e.g., book or journal), while the automated search used of the HSO literature was much more likely to identify articles rather than books. In fact, while there have been hundreds of books published on organizational change in general, primarily in the business and government sectors, there have been very few such books (e.g., Bloom & Farragher, 2013) published in the human services during the period studied (2005–2011).

Both sets of data were assessed to identify the sector that was studied in each reference. As shown in Table 1, most Fernandez and Rainey references were in the government/public sector,

TABLE 1
Sector Studied

	<i>F&R</i>	<i>HSO</i>
Business/for profit	13	1
Government/public	51	10
Not-for-profit	3	9
All or some of the above	16	13
Unknown	2	6
TOTAL	85	39

F&R = Fernandez & Rainey; HSO = human service organization.

while the human services references were nearly equally divided among government/public, not-for-profit, and a combination of sectors.

As shown in Table 2, for both the Fernandez and Rainey and HSO references, the most common evidence base was literature reviews (29% for Fernandez & Rainey; 28% for HSOs), Multiple case studies also represented 28% of HSO references; and this method was found in 26% of Fernandez and Rainey references. Single case studies (24%), the author's authority as a consultant (14%), and the author's authority as a researcher or teacher (13%) were the next most common sources in Fernandez and Rainey. Of these, only the single case study (21%) was found in the human services references, probably reflecting a stronger evidence base in refereed journal articles showing up in an automated search, compared to the Fernandez and Rainey data, which included many books. In some references, more than one evidence source was apparent. For example, a book might have used as the evidence base both the author's experiences and a survey of the literature. In those cases, more than one evidence base was recorded.

Qualitative methods were used in 76% of Fernandez and Rainey references, and 58% of HSO references. As shown in Table 3, studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods were the next most common, followed by studies using strictly quantitative methods.

Thirty two percent of the Fernandez and Rainey references mentioned a specific theory or model, while 21% of the HSO references did so. Only 8% of the references from Fernandez and Rainey articles reported statistically significant findings, while in the human services literature,

TABLE 2
Empirical Basis (% mentioning)

	<i>F&R</i>	<i>HSO</i>
Literature review	29	28
Multiple case studies	26	28
Single case study	24	21
Author's authority as consultant	14	0
Author's authority as researcher or teacher	13	0
Survey of multiple organizations	7	10
Survey of people across organizations	6	3
Meta-analysis	2	0
Other	2	0
Survey in one organization	1	10

F&R = Fernandez & Rainey; HSO = human service organization.

TABLE 3
Types of Data (N and %)

	<i>F&R</i>	<i>HSO</i>
Qualitative	62 76%	18 58%
Quantitative	9 11%	5 16%
Both	11 13%	8 26%

F&R = Fernandez & Rainey; HSO = human service organization.

10% reported statistically significant findings. The key section of this research is the assessment of the extent to which the references mentioned any of the 22 change tactics which were based on Fernandez and Rainey’s article.

As shown in Table 4, the most frequently mentioned tactics were support and commitment from top management (mentioned by 66% of Fernandez & Rainey references and 59% of HSO

TABLE 4
Change Tactics: Number and Percentage of Times Each Tactic Was Mentioned

	<i>F&R</i>	<i>HSO</i>
1. The need and desirability for the change were clearly and persuasively communicated by leaders	36 42%	9 23%
2. The urgency for the change was clearly and persuasively stated by leaders	11 13%	2 5%
3. Top management showed support and commitment, including a skilled senior individual or group to champion the cause for change	56 66%	23 59%
4. A cross section of employees was selected for a team to guide the change effort	36 42%	14 36%
5. The change team was seen as legitimate by most members of the organization	17 20%	4 10%
6. Key individuals and groups affected by the change were involved and solicited for their support	46 54%	14 36%
7. There was widespread participation of staff in the change process	42 49%	16 40%
8. The vision and outcomes for the change were clearly communicated	50 59%	7 18%
9. The change was supported by political overseers (e.g., Board) and external stakeholders	37 44%	4 10%
10. Progress on the change process was clearly communicated throughout the organization	29 34%	7 18%
11. Criticism, threats, or coercion to reduce resistance to the change were avoided	15 18%	1 3%
12. The organization provided sufficient resources (staff time, necessary funding) for the change effort	52 61%	18 46%
13. Change agents gathered information to document the change problem to be addressed and shared with staff	35 41%	11 30%
14. There was a clear and specific plan for how the change initiative would be implemented	50 59%	15 38%
15. The change strategy was based on a sound causal theory for how the results would be achieved	26 31%	4 10%
16. Potential sources of resistance were identified, and strategies for addressing resistance were developed	43 51%	4 10%
17. Monitoring tools were used to track progress	39 46%	12 30%
18. Project activities were revised as appropriate based on new information or changing conditions	42 49%	7 20%
19. The change was comprehensive and integrated, so that relevant subsystems (e.g., HR, finance, programs) were compatible or congruent with the overall change	39 46%	5 13%
20. The results of the change initiative were institutionalized	47 55%	13 30%
21. The results of the change effort were evaluated using data (e.g., pre–post data)	36 42%	6 15%
22. Staff were made aware of the results of the initiative	38 45%	4 10%

F&R = Fernandez & Rainey; HSO = human service organization.

references). The organization providing sufficient resources for the change initiative was the second most commonly mentioned tactic (in 61% and 46% of references respectively). Two tactics were the third most often mentioned in Fernandez and Rainey: clearly communicating the vision and desired outcomes for the change, and having a clear and specific plan for how the change initiative would be implemented (59%). In HSOs, the third most common tactic was widespread participation of staff in the change process (40%).

Other tactics mentioned in over 50% of the Fernandez and Rainey references were institutionalizing results of the change in the organization's systems, involving and soliciting the support of key individuals and groups affected by the change, and identifying and addressing resistance. Nine more tactics were mentioned in at least 40% of the Fernandez and Rainey references, including widespread participation of staff in the change process and revising change activities as needed (both found in 49% of references), using monitoring tools to track progress of the initiative and ensuring that the change was comprehensive (each mentioned in 46% of references), and making staff aware of results of the change process (45%).

Tactics were found less frequently in the HSO references. In addition to the top three, the most common in the HSO references were a clear implementation plan (38%), selecting a cross section of employees for a team to guide the change initiative, and involving and soliciting key individuals for their support (both mentioned in 36% of references). Three other tactics were mentioned in at least 30% of references: change agents gathering information to document the change problem, using monitoring tools to track progress, and institutionalizing results of the change initiative.

The Fernandez and Rainey references mentioned an average of 6.64 tactics each, and the HSO references mentioned an average of 5.13 tactics each. There were two Fernandez and Rainey references which mentioned 18 tactics, and two mentioned 17 tactics. The HSO reference with the most tactics mentioned 16, with the next highest mentioning 12 tactics. In several references in each group, no change tactics could be found.

Several factors beyond the 22 being studied were occasionally mentioned. Factors mentioned more than once included management being trusted, rewards for staff, a change-oriented culture, and getting support from outside and internal stakeholders.

LIMITATIONS

Before discussing the findings and their implications, several limitations must be noted. The fact that the two data sets in this study used different time periods and inclusion guidelines limits a strict comparison of the two. It seems likely that a traditional search of the public administration and general organizational literatures, particularly with the later time frame of 2005–2011, using methods of the second study here, would have had different results. On the other hand, for purposes of advancing such research in the human services, the earlier review was valuable in showing the state of the field from a public administration perspective, which was available to researchers in the human services as of about 2005; and the later review may shed some light on the extent to which HSO researchers might have built upon earlier work.

As noted above, some subjectivity was involved in assessing articles for inclusion from the Fernandez and Rainey article and from the HSO literature search. The same limitation applies to the searching for and identifying tactics in selected references. For example, sources often used wording different from the exact wording of change tactics being studied, and reviewers had to make a judgment as to whether or not a particular practice principle identified did, in fact, correspond to one of the 22 tactics being considered. Liberal judgment was used by researchers regarding identification of tactics, which increased the prospect that any of the 22 tactics would have been counted; but this may have over-represented the number of tactics identified. As noted

above, a random selection of 1/3 of the readings by 2 researchers showed a disagreement rate of 15%—within the standards of two other studies using similar methods. Resources available (i.e., researcher time) prohibited the reading of each reference by 2 or more researchers and meetings to resolve discrepancies as is sometimes done.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Regardless of the limitations, this study represents the first known attempt to codify and systematically analyze the literature on organizational change tactics from a HSO perspective, and provides a useful but necessarily preliminary overview of the extent to which tactics are mentioned in the literature, and the evidence supporting them. As may be expected, tactics were more commonly mentioned in the Fernandez and Rainey references, which were the basis of the list of change tactics. In the Fernandez and Rainey references, 7 of the 22 tactics were mentioned in over 50% of the references, and an additional 10 were mentioned in 40%–49%. In the human services literature, only one tactic was mentioned by over 50% of the references, and two tactics were mentioned in between 40%–49% of the references. Both sets of references had most frequent mentions of the same top two tactics.

Because there is no standard for what could be expected here, it can't be said that the fact that a tactic was mentioned by a particular percentage of writers validates theory or is necessarily essential or important in organizational change. Further research, using more systematic methods, will be needed to learn what tactics, and in what combinations, really are associated with successful organizational change.

Overall, many of the articles and books contained tactics that were not well-supported by higher levels of evidence in the EBP hierarchy, perhaps due to the difficulty in carrying out such research, and the lack of well-developed research designs when the works were written.

Literature reviews, case studies, and authority-based assertions were the most common sources of evidence, suggesting that a greater use of quantitative methods such as surveys of all employees in an organization experiencing formal organizational change could augment rich and detailed case studies to develop new knowledge which can better guide researchers and practitioners as they work to improve organizational effectiveness.

This assessment of the literature on organizational change can be viewed from several perspectives. First, a study of organizational change could be assessed from a hierarchy of evidence perspective. One recent model (Johnson & Austin, 2008) listed the following levels:

- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses
- Randomized control trials
- Cohort studies
- Case-control studies
- Cross-sectional surveys
- Case reports

Of course, randomized control trials are not possible when studying organizational change; and meta-analyses are not currently possible due to the limited number of studies using similar methods. However, case-control studies (matching and studying cases, such as, regarding organizational change, comparing successful and unsuccessful organizational change interventions) could be adapted to research on organizational change. Cross-sectional surveys and case reports are frequently used to study organizational change; and if enough such cases are studied using similar methods, systematic reviews may be possible.

Another perspective, according to Johnson and Austin, is to consider “the multiple sources of knowledge that are available to practitioners who seek to engage in evidence-based practice” (2008, p. 244). From this perspective, the occasional systematic review, existing case reports, authority-based books by consultants, quantitative studies, and other sources could be assessed as a group to identify the best available evidence to guide an organizational change intervention. The value of using multiple sources was also noted above (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005; Rozas & Klein, 2010).

The literature can also be assessed in terms of the variables being studied. In the current study, the small number of references which explicitly mentioned theory suggests that future work in this area could be strengthened by using a theory or model (Burke, 2011, for example, offered several), and ideally by using common models across studies. Comprehensive models of change include more variables than a typical researcher studying HSOs could easily manage logistically, ranging from environmental forces and structure to dynamics of leadership and organizational culture and climate, organizational processes such as reward systems, and service delivery technologies. Some research on organizational dynamics in HSOs has looked at a wider range of variables (e.g., Glisson, 2007; Jaskyte, 2011; Yoo, Brooks, & Patti, 2007), but research on organizational change has not typically reached this level of comprehensiveness.

Comprehensively studying organizational change could include a number of organizational variables, including those listed above and also staff and organizational readiness (Holt et al., 2007) and capacity for change (Judge & Douglas, 2009). The latter two have been extensively studied in the organizational change literature but have not often been studied in relation to organizational change tactics and outcomes of an organizational change initiative. All of these areas represent rich opportunities for further study, ideally by examining relationships among different combinations of important variables. Possible research questions include:

- What preconditions (e.g., readiness, capacity, climate) affect the successful use of particular change tactics?
- Do certain styles of leadership interact with particular tactics to enhance prospects for success?
- What specific change tactics, and in what combinations, are most likely to contribute to successful change?
- What change methods are successful, and under what conditions?
- How is success impacted by contextual factors such as type of program, agency size or structure, environmental context, staff, or clients?
- What direct connections can be made among preconditions, change activities, and organizational outcomes?

The literature reviewed here was based almost entirely on allegedly successful cases of organizational change, often using data provided by the author as a consultant or in case studies where the data may come only from selected administrators, who were often the change leaders, and therefore represent a limited and perhaps one-sided perspective on what actually occurred. Future research should go beyond gathering data from only a few managers or allegedly successful cases. Contrasting equivalent successful and unsuccessful organizational change initiatives could greatly strengthen the evidence base in this area.

Finally, the review and analysis here suggests that mixed methods studies, using both qualitative methods such as observation and interviewing and quantitative methods such as surveys of participants and organizational outcomes data should strengthen the evidence base, providing practitioners such as agency administrators acting as change agents with stronger and more useful evidence to guide them as they work to improve the effectiveness of their organizations.

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