Organizational Change: Effect of Motivational Interviewing on Readiness to Change

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Abstract
Failure accompanies most organizational change efforts. A change agent’s use of motivational interviewing (MI) to help employees resolve ambivalent attitudes may improve the success rate of organizational change initiatives. This experimental research evaluated MI effectiveness to increase readiness to change. The theoretical framework was the transtheoretical model of change and the theory of planned behavior. Through random assignment, 56 employees of a company undergoing change populated the experimental and control groups. Members of the experimental group participated in 3 MI sessions over a 30-day period. Participants indicated their readiness by completing the Job Change Ladder. Within and between group differences from a mixed ANOVA revealed that MI significantly increased readiness to change. The findings suggest that leaders of organizational and societal change initiatives could incorporate MI to prepare individuals and groups to embrace the change process, thereby improving the chances that the change initiative will be successful.

Key words: organizational change, reactions to change, readiness to change, resistance to change, ambivalent attitudes, theory of planned behavior, transtheoretical model of change, stages of change, motivational interviewing

Organizations are in a continuous need to change as they confront new challenges and adapt to the turbulence of their operating environments (Oreg&Berson, 2011). However, a general implementation failure rate of approximately 70% (Burnes, 2014), in some cases reaching as high as 93% (Decker et al., 2012), brings caution to the undertaking of organizational change-related efforts as these efforts could represent a costly organizational endeavor (Ijaz&Vitalis, 2011). Organizational changes inherently require employees to change their behaviors (Burke, 2011) and in pursuit of the desired end state, managers adopt the role of change agents needing to influence their followers (Choi &Ruona, 2011).

Change recipient’s reactions play a significant role in determining the magnitude of the organizational change (Oreg, Vakola, &Armenakis, 2011). Results from a survey of over 115,000 employees impacted by organizational change identified the quality of change management as a key driver of change (Parry, Kirsch, Carey, & Shaw, 2013). Other researchers linked leaders’ behaviors with employees’ attitudes towards change (Oreg&Berson, 2011). As such, change leaders can benefit from the adoption of a person-centered approach (Lawrence, 2015) when interacting with other organizational members.

In the change management literature, employees’ reactions to organizational change include constructs such as resistance to change (Smollan, 2011), cynicism about change (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005), readiness for change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993), openness to change (Wanberg & Bannas, 2000), commitment to organizational change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002), and coping with change (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). As attitudinal responses (Choi, 2011) connected to evaluations of proposed organizational changes (Bohner & Dickel, 2011), employees’ reactions became categorized as positive or negative attitudes encompassing feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Bouckenooghe, 2010). In this polarized view, employees expressed either support or dissent towards change (Giangreco & Pececi, 2005) based on an idiosyncratic evaluation that assigned a favorable or unfavorable valence to the organizational change (Lines, 2005). However, individuals can simultaneously experience positive and negative attitudes towards change as they hold ambivalent attitudes within and between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Piderit, 2000).
The complexities and contradictions of ambivalent reactions to organizational change have been under-researched (Peachey & Bruening, 2012), with over 90% of studies adopting the attitudinal dichotomy of resistance and readiness to change (Bouckenooghe, 2010). The notion of ambivalent attitudes as response to proposed organizational change (Bouckenooghe, 2010; Piderit, 2000) encapsulated in the stages of change (Nigg et al., 2011) and being indicative of readiness, intentions, and motivation (McEvoy & Nathan, 2007) provide the theoretical nexus of the study. Movements along the stages of change model reflect variations on the person’s change-related intentions underlying readiness to change (Nigg et al., 2011).

**Ambivalent Attitudes to Change**

Ambivalence is a salient response to organizational change indicating that employees simultaneously hold positive views and concerns about the consequences of change (Burke, 2011). Ambivalent attitudes are manifestations of a person’s intra-personal, inter-personal, and experiential factors (Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Piderit, 2000) associated with an internal conflict related to the cognitive and emotional assessment of the organizational change (DeMarree, Wheeler, Briñol, & Petty, 2014; Tomprou, Nikolau, & Vakola, 2012).

According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), employees engage in cognitive evaluative processes as antecedents to intentions to engage in a particular behavior (Ajzen, 2011; Jimmieson, White, & Zajdlewicz, 2009). An individual’s intention captures what the person is planning or intending to do and it becomes the most immediate determinant of his/her behavior (Ajzen, 2011). In the organizational change context, intentions to enact change-related behavior derive from the formation of attitudes towards the behavior, perceived social pressure, and self-evaluation of personal abilities (Ajzen, 2011; Jimmieson et al., 2009). The decision-making dynamics include emotional responses and the likely processing of incomplete, inaccurate, and unrealistic information (Ajzen, 2011). Emerging perceptions contribute to the assignation of valence to the proposed organizational change (Jimmieson et al., 2009) that underlies the formation of positive, negative, or ambivalent attitudes (Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007; Piderit, 2000).

Ambivalent attitudes have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral implications (Van Harreveld, Nohlen, & Schneider, 2015) and act as moderators of the relationships among variables in TPB (Sparks, Conner, James, Shepherd, & Povey, 2001). The strength of the attitude-behavior and the perceived behavioral control-behavior relationships is weaker for high ambivalence individuals as compared with those with low ambivalence (Conner, Povey, Sparks, James, & Shepherd, 2003). Individuals with low ambivalence also display stronger cognition-intention and cognition-behavior than individuals high in ambivalence (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004).

In the transtheoretical model of change (TTM), the decisional balance captures the ambivalence that individuals experience towards the enactment of new behaviors while the stages of change construct provides a temporal backdrop to a person’s cyclical process of behavioral change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). Based on Jannis and Mann (1977) description of the decision-making process, the decisional balance involves a cognitive assessment of pros (i.e., positive aspects) and cons (i.e. negative aspects) of the behavior. As the benefits of a decision outweigh its costs, individuals progress through stages of change and move closer to engaging in the new behaviors (Nigg et al., 2011). The five stages of change (i.e., pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance) integrate tenants and processes of change from different theories of psychotherapy and capture when and how people change (Norcross, Krebbs, & Prochaska, 2011). Within the stages of change continuum, individuals present different levels of ambivalence (Di Noia & Prochaska, 2010) and confidence (i.e. self-efficacy) in
their abilities to change (Nigg et al., 2011) indicative of their readiness (McConnaughy, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Velicer, 1989) and motivation (DiClemente, Nidecker, & Bellack, 2008) to change.

The linear relationship between intentions to perform a behavior and the stages of change support the practical integration of TTM and TPB (Armitage, 2009) suggesting that interventions targeting intentions can promote behavioral change (Armitage, 2006). Intentions to enact change-related behaviors signal a person’s motivation (McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011), readiness (Ajzen, 2011), and likelihood to engage in change supportive behaviors (Kim, Hornung, & Rousseau, 2011). A person’s attitudes influence his/her intentions and predict progressions and regressions throughout the stages (Courneya, Plotnikoff, Hotz, & Birkett, 2001). The decisional balance within TTM captures the attitudinal responses to changes (Armitage, Sheeran, Conner, & Arden, 2004) and expose ambivalence as an underlying dynamic within the stages of change (Nigg et al., 2011). In this context, each stage provides a comprehensive conceptualization of readiness suitable for stage-matched interventions (Clark, 2013) targeting an individual’s ambivalent attitudes towards enacting organizational change supportive behavior (Steele-Johnson, Narayan, Delgado, & Cole, 2010).

Ambivalent attitudes are unpleasant for individuals as they become aware of their simultaneous holding of conflicting thoughts and feelings about an object (Song & Ewoldsen, 2014) in the context of his or her unique experience of cognitive dissonance (Burnes, 2014), need for consistency (Nordgren, Van Harreveld, & Van der Pligt, 2006), and uncertainties about the consequences of a given decision (Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014). As an aversive attitude, ambivalence produces a level of discomfort that compels people to reduce it (Van Harreveld et al., 2015) and seek information about the perceived source (DeMarree et al., 2014). Employees may attempt to resolve their ambivalence and investigate particular organizational change because of their cognitive dissonance, conflict with changemanagement processes (Burnes, 2014), and the need to decide whether to engage in change-related behavioral support or rejection (Van Harreveld et al., 2015). In this respect, ambivalence can be a strong motivator for change as individuals engage in processing their ambivalent attitudes (Van Harreveld et al., 2015) and responding to the change leader’s approach (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011).

Motivational Interviewing to Help Resolve Ambivalent Attitudes

There is an inverse relationship between ambivalence and readiness to change, indicating that individuals progress through the stages of change as they experience a declining level of ambivalence towards the enactment of the new behavior. An individual exhibits more ambivalence in the precontemplation stage than in the preparation stage of change (Nigg et al., 2011). Individuals could resolve their ambivalence in such a manner that their positive cognitions associated with the benefits of change could outweigh their negative cognitions or costs of change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Motivational interviewing (MI) is a dialogic approach that a change agent can use to help participants resolve their ambivalence and increase their readiness to change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Applications of the MI approach fall within the context of the TTM in which change represents a dynamic process (Macdonald, Hibbs, Corfield, & Treasure, 2012) and a person’s level of readiness or motivation to change is concomitant to his/her stage of change (McEvoy & Nathan, 2007). According to MI and TTM, an individual’s readiness to change is fluctuating and influenced by the relationship between the change agent and the change recipient (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Prochaska & Norcross, 2010).

Capturing the resolution of ambivalence, Mlasan approach to change proved successful in an array of behavioral changes and showed potential applicability to the field of organizational development and change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). There is ample evidence of the effectiveness of the use of MI to help change individuals’ behaviors in the areas of health (Hettema & Hendricks, 2010; Rubak, Sandbaek,
Lauritzen, & Christensen, 2005), substance abuse (Lundahl, Kunz, Brownell, Tollefson, & Burke, 2010), education (Goggin et al., 2010), and the criminal justice system (McMurran & Ward, 2010). In the organizational context, MI had positive effects on changing employees’ specific health-related behaviors (Linden, Butterworth, & Prochaska, 2010). Passmore (2011) proposed the use of MI in executive coaching; while Miller and Rollnick (2013) noted similarities with the widely accepted large group organizational intervention known as appreciative inquiry. However, I found no evidence of research into the application of MI to organizational change. The purpose of this research was to assess the effectiveness of MI as measured by differences in readiness to change between participants randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group. I posited that the use of MI by change leaders might influence readiness to change as indicated by change recipients’ progression through the stages of change in TTM. The null hypothesis to test was MI absence of an effect on readiness to change. An ANOVA statistical analysis was performed to determine differences between pre and posttest results, and between the control and the treatment groups.

The research contributes to knowledge in the under-researched area of ambivalence during organizational change by including individuals who simultaneously resisted and supported change (i.e., ambivalent attitude; Peachey & Bruening, 2012). The study advanced the applicability of TTM and TPB to the practice of organizational change. This conceptual background encapsulated ambivalent attitudes and intentions that change recipients experienced when required to engage in new work-related behaviors. I used the stages of change construct in TTM to capture each employee’s unique response to organizational change. In contrast to the change agent perspective that is pervasive in the practice of organizational change, the emphasis of the study was on a change recipient’s perspective to organizational change. Consistent with previous studies on responses to organizational change, research participants were actively engaged in the analysis of the implications of the proposed organizational changes (Oreg & Sverdlick, 2011).

Method

Participants

Participants were employees of an organization with a workforce of close to 100 people that worked first shift. The company was to begin implementing planned organizational change at the time of the study. Employees volunteering to participate were over the age of 18 years old and nine out of 10 of them were over 25 years old. More than half of the sample population (55.4%) held college degrees and almost all participants (98.3%) had been working less than 10 years with the company.

Sampling procedures

The sample unit selection followed a purposive sampling approach that enlisted members of a privately owned logistics organization located in the Midwest region of the United States. The selected organization met the representativeness criteria of being in the early stages of implementing a planned change that exhibited ramifications throughout the entire system and affected all employees. This planned change encompassed a strategic shift requiring restructuring of the systems and processes of the entire organization. At the time of research, there were organizational members absent due to vacations, traveling, or illness. Initially, 69 of 70 the eligible organizational members volunteered to participate. The person declining to participate simply returned the blank forms. Due to attrition, fifty-six individuals (approximately 56% response rate) completed the research requirements. Participants were from all departments in the organization (i.e., accounting, human resources, information technology, inventory
operations, sales, solutions and services, and warehouse). Due to the reallocation of roles in alignment with the organization’s strategic plan, participants needed to alter the way they conducted their work. Details of the strategic plan linked each employee’s new roles to specific organizational objectives.

The research took place within a couple of weeks that employees received detailed communication of the changes. Participants’ inclusion in either the experimental group (i.e., motivational interviewing) or the control group (i.e., non-motivational interviewing) adhered to a random assignment process. Participants received assurances that all information was confidential and anonymous. Their participation was voluntary and there was no payment or gift in exchange for their participation. There is no evidence of harmful or adverse effects related to the utilization of MI.

Studies on the effectiveness of MI showed a preponderance of moderate and large effects across a wide range of behaviors (Lundahl et al., 2013; Rubak et al., 2005). Output from the statistical software G*Power indicated total sample sizes of 54 individuals for ANOVA calculations based on effect size of $d = 0.5$ at a 0.05 alpha level for the two groups design. In this respect, the 56 participating individuals exceeded by two the minimum amount of participants statistically necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of MI.

**Measures**
Informed by the stages of change construct, I measured differences in readiness to change between the group exposed to MI and the control group. The effect of MI was measured by the dependent variable readiness to change job-related tasks linked to the planned organizational change. Researchers established the validity and reliability of the stages of change (Norcross et al., 2011) in which movements along the stages of change reflected variations on the person’s intentions underlying readiness to change (Nigg et al., 2011). I assessed participants before and after the MI sessions by asking them where on a ten-step decision/contemplation ladder labeled Job Change Ladder (JCL) they would place themselves.

Biener and Abrams (1991) developed the Contemplation Ladder as a continuous measure of readiness to change. Ladders are single choice, single-item measures with rungs numbered from 0 to 10 following a vertical graphical display where the higher rungs represent greater readiness to change. Researchers provided evidence for the convergent, concurrent, and predictive validity of contemplation ladders with established measures of stages of change (Amodei & Lamb, 2004; Hogue, Dauber, & Morgenstern, 2010). The contemplation ladder has strong construct, predictive, and concurrent validity with behavioral indicators of intentions and reliability for measurements of stages of change (Biener & Abrams, 1991; Hogue et al., 2010). The ladder also exhibited predictive validity in relation to readiness to change and movements along the stages of change (Herzog, Abrams, Emmons, & Linnan, 2000).

Modified versions of the contemplation ladder had been validated for a variety of target behaviors (Caviness et al., 2013; Coolidge et al., 2011; Hogue et al., 2010; Magill et al., 2010) and used in randomized trials to assess the effectiveness of MI in maintaining behavioral changes as well as enhancing readiness to change behaviors (Carey, Henson, Carey, & Maisto, 2010; Hettema & Hendricks, 2010; Magill et al., 2010). Clair et al. (2011) found significant pre and posttest correlation that demonstrated the reliability of a modified version of the contemplation ladder. LaBrie, Quinlan, Schiffman, and Earleywine (2005) found that a modified ladder outperformed longer questionnaires in predicting behavioral intentions.
Because of its brevity, criterion and construct validity, strong psychometrics, as well as its ability to measure readiness to change as a continuum, I used a modified version of the contemplation ladder to evaluate the effect of MI in relation to an individual’s readiness in the context of organizational change. The structure of the verbal anchors provides a concrete measurement that facilitates the use of the modified ladder by individuals having difficulties with abstract thought. Verbal anchors in the contemplation ladder assisted participants to self-report their intentions to change, and to assess their level of readiness to change (LaBrie et al., 2005). Using the statements as a guide, I asked subjects to select which rung (number) best represented their thinking, action, or both, about the potential behavior change at the moment of completing the scale (Amodei & Lamb, 2004).

As a continuous measure of readiness to change, the rungs in the change ladder depicted numerical values that measured the precontemplation, contemplation, and preparation stages. Participants selecting responses in the contemplation ladder ranging from 8 to 10 were identified as being in the preparation stage. Those selecting between 3 and 7 were considered contemplators while those selecting the lower rungs of the ladder with scores of 1 and 2 were classified as precontemplators (Herzog et al., 2000; Herzog & Komarla, 2011). Higher posttest scores on the ladder depict progression towards the enactment of the change-related behavior and reflect improvement in a person’s readiness to change. Similarly, lower posttest scores denote a declined in readiness to change. I administered the tests to members of the experimental and control groups before and after I conducted the three MI sessions.

Research design
The research design of choice was a quantitative pre-post-control mixed factorial design, which featured random assignment of individuals through a lottery procedure to an experimental and a control group. The design is a combination of the between-subjects design and the within-subjects design consisting of readiness to change as the within subject variable with pre and post levels, and MI as the between subject variable with two levels (i.e., exposed to motivational and not exposed to motivational interviewing). A mixed ANOVA was the statistical method used to analyze within and between group differences.

Experimental manipulations or interventions
As a trained facilitator, I conducted MI sessions as collaborative relationships built on the principles of expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, developing discrepancy, and supporting self-efficacy (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). I engaged in active and reflective listening in a non-confrontational style that was not to raise defensiveness, denial, or resistance on the part of change recipients. In the context of MI, resistance or denial is an interpersonal variable signaling the change agent the need to change motivational strategies (Rubak et al., 2005).

I set the meeting agenda by asking participants about the types of jobs they performed and the description of new task requirements associated with the organizational change. Applying the principles of MI, I directed the conversation so that this information became the topic of conversation for asking open-ended questions and reflecting back on their answers. Following the guidelines of the decisional balance, I elicited from employees the sources of ambivalence that provided the focus of the conversations about the employees’ personal views of organizational change. Previous research on individuals’ reactions to organizational change had revealed the preponderance of ambivalence and its overt and covert manifestations (Peachey & Bruning, 2012; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Restubog, 2013) associated with the stages of change (Nigg et al., 2011).
My communication style was geared at evoking their own reasons for supporting change that could lead to the development of positive attitudes and intentions. The emphasis was on self-determination as opposed to compliance. I sought to elicit a person’s intrinsic motivation through persuasion and support, rather than coercion and argumentation. The conversations were not about imposing perspectives on individuals; rather, the purpose was to increase the importance of change in a manner that was consistent with the person’s values and beliefs.

I also focused on developing discrepancy and supporting self-efficacy to instill and help resolve ambivalence towards the target behaviors (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Miller and Rollnick (2013) suggested instilling ambivalence when individuals seemed emphatic about not wanting to engage in change talk as in the case of precontemplators. As I dialogued with employees, I remained attentive to conversational cues indicative of likely stage of change progression (e.g. change talk) and partnered with interviewees to actively engage in the dialogical exploration of their ambivalent attitudes. Change talk are verbal expressions signaling that a change recipient recognizes the need for change, expresses concerns for his or her current situation, reveals an intention to change or believes on the possibility of change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). I sought to elicit change talk as the person explored pros and cons of his or her situation. The interactions were non-confrontational in nature during which I collaborated with the organizational member to help him or her become ready to change.

Data collection took place during a 30-day period at the organization’s location. I conducted three sessions of MI with each one of the individuals randomly selected to be a part of the experimental group once a week for three consecutive weeks. These one-on-one meetings lasted approximately 25 minutes and took place in a private room specifically designated for this research to provide confidentiality. Rubak’s et al. (2005) meta-analytic review of MI revealed that a statistically significant size effect could result with less than five brief meetings lasting 15 minutes each. The number and length of sessions were in line with the literature. There were no incentives of any kind offered to participants.

Results

After random assignment of participants, groups were equivalent based on employees’ roles as managers or workers. Analysis of the frequency distribution of pre-test ladder scores revealed that two thirds of participants (66.1%) were in the contemplation stage of change, while the remaining one third were in the preparation stage. The pre-post-control mixed factorial design of the research justified the use of the mixed ANOVA statistical technique to analyze decision ladder results obtained from the experimental and control groups.

According to the results of the analysis, there was a statistically significant interaction between MI and time on readiness to change, $F(1,54) = 39.850, p < .0005$, partial $\eta^2 = .425$. Discriminatory analysis for simple main effect for group showed that there was a statistically significant difference in readiness to change between the experimental and the control groups at time 2, $F(1, 54) = 4.161, p = .046$, partial $\eta^2 = .072$. Testing for the simple main effects for group meant testing for differences in readiness to change between the experimental and control group at each level of the within-subjects factor, time (see Table 1). Results for simple main effect for time concluded that there was a statistically significant effect of time on readiness to change for the group exposed to MI, $F(1, 28) = 95.159, p < .0005$, partial $\eta^2 = .773$. Testing for the simple main effects for time meant testing for differences in readiness to change between time points for each level of the between-subjects factor, group. Further examination via pairwise comparisons indicated that for the experimental group, readiness to change was statistically significantly increased at post-MI compared to pre-MI ($M = 2.0, SE = 0.20, p < .0005$).
Discussion

MI was effective at increasing readiness to change and reducing ambivalence. There was a statistically significant difference in readiness to change between the group exposed to MI and the control group. Applying Cohen’s $f$ (1988) conceptualization of effect size, the analysis showed a large strength of effect of the interaction and a large size effect on the group differences between time points as expressed by the partial eta squared indexes ($\text{partial } \eta^2 = .425$; $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .773$).

Participants’ scores in the decisional ladder reflected their level of ambivalence, intentions, motivation, as well as readiness to change. In the pre and posttest variability of scores on the decisional ladder (see Table 2), participants exposed to MI affirmed the notion that increased readiness to change signified transitions through personal stages of change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). The use of MI assisted in these transitions from a low to a high rung in the ladder by capturing the resolution of ambivalence, evoking a person’s own reasons for supporting change, and helping individuals develop positive attitudes towards change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

Employees exposed to MI were more motivated to change than employees in the control group. As evidenced by the positive movement along the decisional ladder by participants in the MI group, I found that (a) intentions to change were mainly self-initiated and (b) individuals’ determination to engage in change supporting activities increased as they resolved their ambivalence. The dialogical encounters about change pertained to the specific circumstances of each interviewee and resonated with the idiosyncratic, as well as pervasive characteristics of ambivalent responses (Plambeck & Weber, 2010; Smollan, 2011). Results of the study confirmed Peachey and Bruening’s (2012) assertions that (a) ambivalence is a prevalent response from individuals facing organizational change, (b) ambivalence is dynamic, and (c) ambivalence evolves along a continuum.

Research results aligned with Piderit’s (2000) multidimensional perspective on responses to change and the theoretical postulates of TPB (Ajzen, 2011) and TTM (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). According to TPB, a person’s intentions are indicative of attitudinal disposition (Ajzen, 2011) and the intentional path to the enactment of change-related behaviors is moderated by ambivalence (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004). According to TTM this process of behavioral change encapsulates progressions through stages of change epitomized by decreasing levels of ambivalence (Nigg et al., 2011).

Similarly to other studies, by combining the application of decisional balance and decisional ladder during the MI sessions, I uncovered a person’s readiness to change as it related to their unique ambivalent attitudes and stage of change (Di Noia & Prochaska, 2010; Heather & McCambridge, 2013; Norcross et al., 2011). Within the context of the stages of change, resistance and readiness to change relates to the individual’s relative weighing of pros and cons representing two ends of a dynamic spectrum characterized by ambivalence (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). In line with TTM, as participants in the MI sessions talked about and elaborated on issues elicited by the decisional ladder they were assessing the pros and cons of enacting change-related behaviors (Di Noia & Prochaska, 2010).

Pretest scores in the decision ladder provided evidence of participants’ stage distribution and revealed the presence of ambivalence as a ubiquitous attitudinal response. Stage distribution concentrated in the contemplation and preparation stages of change. These results somewhat differed from other researchers’ estimates of population stage distribution of 40 % in precontemplation, another 40 % in contemplation, and 20% in preparation (Prochaska & Norcross, 2010). It is plausible to attribute discrepancy with the literature to organizational members’ prolonged involvement in the development
of change plans (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). In terms of this evaluation, however, the process of randomization counteracted this and other extrinsic factors that could lead to erroneous interpretations of causality through the formation of equivalent groups. The use of a nonprobability sampling strategy such as purposive sampling is a limitation to this research as it raises issues of external validity and the generalizability of the results of the evaluation of MI. Conducting the research in one organization within a specific industry presented risks to external validity originated from sample representativeness. There is also a potential threat to reliability because of the first time use of the Job Change Ladder to measure readiness to change in an organizational context. Further studies could address this issue.

Conclusion

According to the results of this study, the use of MI has positive implications for the effective practice of change management as it highlights the inter-relational nature of implementing change at the individual level and the importance of the change agent’s role. During most organizational change efforts, the responsibilities for the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of change plans reside on the skills and abilities of middle and lower level organizational leadership. Extrapolating from the results of the evaluation, managers and supervisors can benefit from pro-actively learning the principles of MI to enhance their change management skill sets.

MI constitutes a viable alternative to change leaders’ interactions demanding compliance with organizational directives. The interpersonal nature of MI together with its directive characteristics constitute the type of goal-oriented skill set suitable to change leaders in the workplace environment. Leaders could encourage each organizational member to explore their uncertainties and to evoke change-related behaviors.

The principles of MI also relate to the macro level of change management. In system-wide organizational change, the process of diagnosis, planning, developing readiness, and adoption of change require that organizational members exert considerable dedication of organizational time, efforts, and other resources towards these activities. Based on the notion of having the whole system in the room, large group methods rapidly gather information from different sectors of the organization while fomenting collaboration among participants. Similarly to MI, change agents applying whole system approaches to change emphasize collaboration and seek to evoke strengths and possibilities. Such conceptual commonalities facilitate organizational members’ transition to the adoption and institutionalization of change. Extrapolating from this research, change facilitators could apply MI during the implementation phase that follows the diagnosis and action planning phases of the change effort. Organizational change practitioners, informal leaders, managers, and supervisors could apply the principles of MI and facilitate the adoption of organizational change and the realization of organizational objectives. The incorporation of MI to the practice of change management could help produce a point of inflection in the high rate of failure of organizational change by increasing employees’ level of readiness to change.
References


