Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wpic20

Testing a Measure of Organizational Learning Capacity and Readiness for Transformational Change in Human Services

Kimberly D. Bess [a], Douglas D. Perkins [a] & Diana L. McCown [a]

[a] Center for Community Studies, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Available online: 25 Jan 2011

To cite this article: Kimberly D. Bess, Douglas D. Perkins & Diana L. McCown (2010): Testing a Measure of Organizational Learning Capacity and Readiness for Transformational Change in Human Services, Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 39:1, 35-49

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2011.530164

Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 39:35–49, 2011

ISSN: 1085-2352 print/1540-7330 online
DOI: 10.1080/10852352.2011.530164

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Testing a Measure of Organizational Learning Capacity and Readiness for Transformational Change in Human Services

KIMBERLY D. BESS, DOUGLAS D. PERKINS, and DIANA L. MCCOWN

Center for Community Studies, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Transformative organizational change requires organizational learning capacity, which we define in terms of (1) internal and (2) external organizational systems alignment, and promoting a culture of learning, including (3) an emphasis on exploration and information, (4) open communication, (5) staff empowerment, and (6) support for professional development. We shortened and adapted Watkins and Marsick's Dimensions of Learning Organizations Questionnaire into a new 16-item Organizational Learning Capacity Scale (OLCS) geared more toward nonprofit organizations. The OLCS and its subscales measuring each of the above 6 dimensions are unusually reliable for their brevity. ANOVAs for the OLCS and subscales clearly and consistently confirmed extensive participant observations and other qualitative data from four nonprofit human service organizations and one local human service funding organization.

KEYWORDS DLOQ, empowerment, learning organizations, nonprofits, organizational culture, planned transformational change, second-order change

We thank Isaac Prilleltensky, Scot Evans, the other members of the NewSPECs research team, and especially our organizational partners and respondents for their participation in this project.

Address correspondence to Kimberly D. Bess, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Peabody #90, 230 Appleton Place, Nashville, TN 37203, USA. E-mail: Kimberly.d.bess@vanderbilt.edu

Community-based nonprofits are often called on to engage in adaptive organizational change in response to changes in community circumstances, funding opportunities, and the regulatory environment. Less often are they involved in transformational change processes that challenge their fundamental beliefs and values about practice and their approach to community change work (Evans, Hanlin, & Prilleltensky, 2007; Perkins, Bess, Cooper, Jones, Armstead, & Speer, 2007). In this article we argue that transformational organizational change processes in this context require initial organizational readiness in the form of *organizational learning capacity* (OLC). *Organizational learning capacity* can be understood as the level of investment an organization makes in (1) aligning its vision and values with its structural systems and practices, both internal and external to the organization; and (2) promoting a culture of staff learning and development that includes (a) open communication systems and practices, (b) exploration, information-seeking, and learning, (c) staff empowerment, (d) support for professional development throughout the organization. Together these become resources or *organizational learning capacity* that can be drawn on to potentiate transformational change processes. We further argue that the absence of OLC during the initial stages of such a process signals low readiness for change.

In this article, we present a measure of *organizational learning capacity* and compare results from five nonprofit organizations that volunteered to be part of an action research project designed to engage each in a process of transformational change. Specifically the project challenged each to examine their implicit theories of community change based on ameliorative practices and consider adopting a *systems change* approach by introducing principles of prevention, strengths-based practice, empowerment, and community condition change. This process both challenged core organizational beliefs about practice and engaged members the initial stages of a transformative organizational change process.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

The construct of OLC is grounded in principles of organizational learning as they relate to second-order organizational change. Here we distinguish between change processes involving first-order, adaptive, incremental, or continuous change and those that focus on second-order, transformational, radical, or discontinuous change. We define second-order organizational change as involving a qualitative change in the structural or cultural systems of an organization that requires the development of new cognitive schemas among members for understanding the organizational setting or context in relationship to its purpose or mission. Two classes of change process theories, teleological and dialectical, focus on second-order change processes and their underlying mechanisms (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Teleological theories

understand the change process as a goal driven "cycle of goal formation, implementation, evaluation, and modification . . . " that occurs when "actors perceive that their current actions are not enabling them to attain their goals" (Austin & Bartunek, 2003, p. 312). Dialectical theories view the underlying mechanism of change as grounded in the conflict between new ideas and values and the status quo. Both teleological and dialectical theories describe change as a socially constructed process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) thereby implicating reframing or breaking with past assumptions through the process of co-constructing new meanings. In contrast to first-order change processes that have micro-level and individual implications, enacting systems level changes requires organizations to create a context for engaging members collectively at the organizational level.

Organizational change theorists have begun to make explicit connections between organizational learning and change (Henderson, 2002; Hendrey, 1996; Rampersad, 2004). A growing number argue that learning—individual and/or organizational—is an essential ingredient in the implementation of planned organizational change and an important dynamic in linking individual and organizational change (Huy, 1999). The natural marriage of these two perspectives is hardly surprising given the emphasis on cognitive framing in second-order change processes. Similar to second-order organizational change theory, transformative individual and organizational learning is understood as an emergent, generative process. At the individual level, transformative learning theory seeks to understand how cognitive reframing occurs (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Brookfield, 1987; Freire, 1993; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Similarly, theorists attending to organizational learning address the question of how organizations embed learning in organizational processes, structures, culture, and identity.

Argyris and Schon (1978) are among the few who explicitly link organizational learning and change in their model (Henderson, 2002). They see organizational learning as originating when a member of the organization acts to resolve a problematic situation. In this process, the person experiences a discrepancy between the actual result of their actions and what he or she thought would happen. This event then triggers a cycle of reflection and action that ultimately leads to a revision of his or her perception of the organization and a change in activities in order to resolve the discrepancy between expected and real outcomes of action. They theorize that what impedes learning and change is the discrepancy between *espoused theories* and *theories-in-use* (those theories that guide action). Without the capacity to engage in double-loop learning in which assumptions of one's theories-in-use are examined and questioned, individuals and organizations are unable to resolve organizational dilemmas. Thus, for many theorists who follow this tradition, second-order learning, which includes double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978) or subjective reframing (Mezirow & Associates, 2000), is foundational to second-order organizational change (Henderson, 2002; Newman

2000). Argyris and Schon (1978) further articulate the process of translating individual learning to the organizational level: "in order to become organizational, the learning that results from organizational inquiry must become embedded in the images of organization held in its members' minds and/or in the epistemological artifacts of (maps, memories, and programs) embedded in the organizational environment" (p. 16, cited in Friedman, 2001, p. 399). Again linking this back to organizational change, organizational learning is what facilitates second-order change because it makes public in the organization what otherwise may be held privately.

The all-too-common failure of organizational change efforts has been linked a paradigm of organizational change focused too heavily on action (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001). This is consistent with our own research in human service organizations in which *action or doing* was often valued over *reflection or learning* (Bess, Prilleltensky, Perkins, & Collins, 2009). Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) address this challenge in their transtheoretical model of change. They propose a progress change model with five stages, three of which—precontemplation, contemplation, planning—focus on the adequate preparation of members during the "pre-action" phase. They suggest in the precontemplation stage that organizations engage members in three critical activities—*consciousness raising, dramatic relief, and environmental reevaluation*—in order to lay the groundwork for eventual action. These activities are designed to mitigate negative responses and provide members with an opportunity to make meaning of the proposed change through a shared reflective process. Consciousness raising makes explicit the conflict between current cognitive frameworks expressed through values, beliefs, and practices and new schemas and provides the opportunity for members to examine their shared assumptions. Dramatic relief provides the opportunity to surface emotions related to the potential change both in relation to positive and negative impacts. This often under-attended aspect of change provides the source of energy for change and resistance to it (Huy, 1999; Piderit, 2000). Environmental re-evaluation engages members in a process that allows them to assess the benefits that change will afford to the work environment. The activities described by Prochaska and colleagues in the precontemplation stage support double-loop learning processes and align with teleological and dialectical change process goals of cognitive reframing and the development of new shared organizational schemas.

MEASURE OF OLC

Our measure of OLC is based on items adapted from Marsick and Watkins's (2003) Dimensions of Learning Organizations Questionnaire (DLOQ). This measure has been mainly used in for-profit contexts (see McHargue, 2003 for exception) and linked to financial performance of firms (e.g., Ellinger,

Ellinger, Yang, & Howton, 2003; McHargue, 2003). It is consistent with an understanding of OL as embedded in organizational processes, practices, and structures that support collective inquiry into values and beliefs about practice. The 55 item questionnaire has eight sub-scales, each with an alpha >0.70. The scales represent seven cultural dimensions of organizations (i.e., create continuous learning opportunities; promote inquiry and dialogue; encourage collaboration and team learning; create systems to capture and share learning; empower people toward a collective vision; connect the organization to its environment; and provide strategic leadership for learning) and one dimension of financial performance (Marsick & Watkins, 2003).

The measure we propose focuses on aspects of OL that can be understood as preconditions for learning or capacities that are salient to community-based nonprofits. OLC is made up of two main components. The first, *organizational systems alignment*, refers to ongoing practices within the organization that allow members to respond effectively to challenges and opportunities in the organization's internal and external environments. This perspective of OLC as related to the capacity for ongoing systems alignment is consistent with Pawlowsky (2001), description of organizational learning as a "modification of the organizational knowledge system that enables organizations to improve their understanding and evaluation of the internal and external environments" (p. 70). Organizational leaders are central in building this component in two ways: (1) by managing through a systems lens and (2) by communicating a systems orientation to members (Gephart, Marsick, Van Buren, & Spiro, 1996; Marsick & Watkins 2003). The second component, *culture of learning and development* refers to practices grounded in the values of open communication, learning, staff empowerment, and staff development. The cultural perspective highlights the importance of developing a climate in which inquiry, learning, participation, and openness is valued and that these values are expressed in organizational rituals, symbols, and practices. Underlying this component is the recognition that individual members at all levels of the organization play a change agent role and the values underlying a culture of learning and development become critical resources for them under conditions of ambiguity, uncertainty, or change. We argue that OLC is the result of ongoing organizational investment in the two components outlined earlier and that it becomes a critical resource particularly during the initial stages of an organizational change process and for processes that focus on transforming beliefs and values related to practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study uses a new, six-dimension Organizational Learning Capacity Scale, a shortened adapted version of the Dimensions of Learning

Organizations Questionnaire, to compare the organizational learning capacity in four private, nonprofit human service organizations and one local human service funding organization. The questions we focus on here include: What are the dimensions of organizational learning capacity? How are they inter-related? Are there differences among the five organizations in organizational learning capacity or its dimensions? How do any differences relate to our participant observations in working with each organization?

METHOD

Setting

The present study was part of "New SPECs," an action research project in a mid-sized Southern U.S. city to help five nonprofit organizations shift from an operating paradigm of amelioration toward a transformative one focusing more on individual and community strengths (as opposed to deficits or problems), primary prevention (as opposed to treatment), empowerment, and changing community conditions. Participatory case studies were conducted with five nonprofit organizations: Nazareth Center and MLK Center[1] provide services from day care and youth outreach programs to workforce-development and senior hot lunch programs in separate low-income, minority inner-city neighborhoods. Healthy City runs eight health clinics in local underserved communities. Island Center focuses on youth services, including crisis and shelter services, counseling, and youth leadership programs. John Snow Foundation raises funds to distribute to local nonprofit human services. It funded the New SPECs project.

Procedures

Organizations were invited to voluntarily join the project by the John Snow Foundation. The present data are from the first year of the project so as to reflect the pre-existing individual and organizational learning capacity and readiness for change and limit the influence of the action phase of the project. Staff participation in all data collection was voluntary. Surveys were distributed at staff meetings and self-administered. Time during the meeting was allotted for survey completion but respondents were also allowed to take the survey with them to complete privately later in the day. In addition to the present quantitative survey data, organizational assessments are based on extensive qualitative data collected through open-ended survey questions, focus groups, staff and leader interviews, organizational records, meeting notes, and participant-observation field notes.

The Sample

Across the five organizations, 271 survey forms were distributed and 135 surveys (50%) were returned, with 125 complete enough for analysis. Overall 79% of respondents were female; the sample ranged in age from 22 to 64 years with an average of 41. Respondents were employed by their organizations for an average of five years and ranged from 0.25 to 20 years of employment. Organizational samples were roughly proportionate to total staff size of each organization and are distributed as follows; 26% from John Snow Foundation,

TABLE 1 16 Items and 6 Dimensions of the Organizational Learning Capacity Scale (OLCS; $\alpha = .939$)

Organizational System Alignment
Practices to promote external alignment ($\alpha = .775$)
My organization encourages people to think from a community perspective (*adapted from DLOQ 33: "global perspective"*).
My organization works together with the outside community to meet mutual needs [*DLOQ 36*].
In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with its values [*DLOQ 43*].
Practices to promote internal alignment ($\alpha = .792$)
My organization builds alignment of visions across different levels and work groups [*DLOQ 31*].
My organization considers the impact of decisions on employee morale [*DLOQ 35*].
My organization encourages people to get answers from across the organization when solving problems [*DLOQ 37*].
Culture of Learning and Development
Open communication practices ($\alpha = .802$)
In my organization, people openly discuss mistakes in order to learn from them [*DLOQ 1*].
In my organization, people give open and honest feedback to each other [*DLOQ 8*].
Learning practices ($\alpha = .798$)
In my organization, people view problems in their work as an opportunity to learn [*DLOQ 6*].
In my organization, people are rewarded for exploring new ways of working (*adapted from DLOQ 7: "for learning"*).
My organization enables people to get needed information at any time quickly and easily [*DLOQ 21*].
Practices of staff empowerment ($\alpha = .742$)
My organization recognizes people for taking initiative [*DLOQ 26*].
My organization gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work [*DLOQ 29*].
Practice of supporting staff development ($\alpha = .844$)
In my organization, leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training [*DLOQ 38*].
In my organization, investment in workers' skills and professional development is greater than last year [*new*].
In my organization, the number of individuals learning new skills is greater than last year [*DLOQ 55*].

TABLE 2 Intercorrelations Among Organizational Learning Capacity Dimensions*

	1. PPEA	2. PPIA	3. OCP	4. LP	5. PSE
1. Practices to promote external alignment					
2. Practices to promote internal alignment	0.817				
3. Open communication practices	0.578	0.637			
4. Learning practices	0.68	0.793	0.747		
5. Practices of staff empowerment	0.657	0.741	0.524	0.674	
6. Practice of supporting staff development	0.592	0.646	0.419	0.619	0.585

*$n = 119$; all correlations are significant at the 2-tailed level of $p < .001$.

22% from MLK Center, 16% from Nazareth Center, 20% from Healthy City, and 20% from Island Center.

Measures

The organizational staff survey included 36 Likert-scaled (−3 to +3) items taken or adapted from the Dimensions of Learning Organizations Questionnaire.[2] The 36 questions were factor-analyzed using principal components analysis with varimax rotation, resulting in eight initial factors. Six of those factors were selected on the basis of coherent content validity and items with marginal loadings and redundant meanings were dropped. The result is the 16-item Organizational Learning Capacity Scale (OLCS) with six dimensions or subscales, including Internal and External Organizational System Alignment and four dimensions of learning and development culture: Open Communication Practices, Learning Practices, Staff Empowerment, and Support for Staff Development (see Table 1). The total scale ($\alpha = .939$) and all subscales have strong internal consistency, particularly for two- and three-item scales, with alpha reliability coefficients of between .74 and .84. The six dimensions of Organizational Learning Capacity are all discrete but highly inter-related ($r = .42$ to .82: see Table 2).

RESULTS

Organizational means were above the 0 midpoint in total OLCS (mean = 0.581 on the −3 to +3 scale), suggesting at least moderate organizational learning capacity for each organization in the sample (see Table 3). There was some variation both among organizations and across OLCS dimensions, however. The total means for each subscale were also positive, but were highest for Internal and External Alignment (1.162) and lowest for Open Communication (0.195) and Learning Practices (0.342). Levels of Staff Empowerment (0.697) and Support for Staff Development (0.576) were moderately positive across the five organizations.

TABLE 3 ANOVA: Organizational Mean Differences in Learning Capacity and Its Dimensions

Organization	*n*	Org. learning capacity (Total) *M**	*SD*	Subscales:	Internal alignment *M*	*SD*	External alignment *M*	*SD*
John Snow Foundation	30	0.685	0.994		0.556	1.305	1.567	0.889
MLK Center	27	0.887	1.201		0.914	1.329	1.296	1.285
Nazareth Center	18	0.066	1.5 65		–.056	1.848	0.407	1.706
Healthy City	24	0.153	1.190		–.076	1.112	0.972	1.112
Island Center	20	0.969	0.591		0.883	0.919	1.283	0.711
Total	119	0.581	1.171		1.162	1.417	1.162	1.201
ANOVA		$F(4,113) = 2.884$ $p < .05$			$F(4,114) = 2.785$ $p < .05$		$F(4,114) = 3.123$ $p < .05$	

Organization	Staff empowerment *M*	*SD*	Open communication *M*	*SD*	Learning practices *M*	*SD*	Support for staff development *M*	*SD*
John Snow Foundation	0.567	1.244	0.133	1.497	0.456	1.136	0.611	1.195
MLK Center	1.148	1.292	0.648	1.622	0.679	1.373	0.642	1.330
Nazareth Center	0.194	1.477	–0.382	1.799	–0.241	1.660	0.278	1.801
Healthy City	0.354	1.529	–0.104	1.628	–0.167	1.570	0.299	1.862
Island Center	1.150	1.027	0.525	1.070	0.850	0.888	1.033	0.878
Total	0.697	1.355	0.195	1.557	0.342	1.384	0.576	1.440
ANOVA	$F(4,114) = 2.501$ $p < .05$		$F(4,113) = 1.651$, ns		$F(4,114) = 2.912$ $p < .05$		$F(4,114) = .936$, ns	

*Response options ranged from −3 to +3 on each item, scale, and subscale.

Analysis of variance was used to compare means of the five organizations on the overall OLCS and on each of its six dimensions. Significant differences were found on the total OLCS and in learning practices, staff empowerment, and both internal and external organizational alignment. Although open communication and support for staff development were nonsignificant due to the small sample and large variances within organizations, mean differences were sizable and in the expected direction. Island Center had the highest mean overall and on three of the six subscales: learning practices, staff empowerment, and support for staff development, although the latter ANOVA was nonsignificant. MLK Center had the highest level of internal alignment and open communication (ns), in both cases just ahead of Island Center. John Snow Foundation was highest in external organizational alignment. Nazareth Center had the lowest mean on every dimension of organizational learning capacity except internal organizational alignment. On that dimension, Healthy City was slightly lower and it had the second lowest mean on every other dimension.

Thus, overall, Island Center had the most organizational learning capacity, followed closely by MLK Center. John Snow Foundation was in the middle on all dimensions other than external alignment. Nazareth Center and Healthy City scored lowest on all six dimensions. All of the organizational mean comparisons are consistent with qualitative participant observations from the action research project and the OLCS did a much better job of predicting those observations than any of the other dozens of measures obtained but not reported here.

Although these comparisons are based on data from the first year of the action/consultation study, it must be noted that Island Center leading the way on organizational learning capacity may be due, at least in part, to their having worked on a transformative paradigm shift, both internally and externally, for a year or more prior to data collection and were largely responsible for convincing the John Snow Foundation to fund and help organize the organizational intervention project. MLK Center's position near the top of the OLC dimensions reflects their CEO and staff efforts for years, both prior to and during the project, to be a local leader in nonprofit human service innovation despite funding and other limitations generally recommending a safer, more traditional path. In contrast, although Nazareth Center and Healthy Cities are both very successful organizations in terms of surviving and even expanding despite fiscal challenges and dramatically changing client bases, they are archetypally traditional, individual client–based, direct-service organizations with little apparent capacity, or desire on the part of their leadership, to truly engage in organizational learning or internal or external transformation.

Finally, we must acknowledge that the variance in perceived OLC within organizations, particularly Nazareth and Healthy Cities, is substantial. While many of their staff reported low OLC, quite a few reported it as fairly strong.

Variances were greatest for the communication and support for staff development subscales, which helps explain the nonsignificant ANOVAs. The variances for internal alignment, learning practices, and staff empowerment were almost as large, but the between-organization differences on those subscales were even larger.

DISCUSSION

The 16-item Organizational Learning Capacity Scale demonstrated strong reliability overall and for each subscale and predicted qualitative findings from an action research project with five nonprofit organizations. Clear and fairly consistent differences were found among organizations in the degree to which they engage in staff empowerment, have consistent internal and external alignment with organizational goals (focused on the community), and have instituted organizational learning practices (Table 3). Although nonsignificant, differences in internal organizational communication and support for staff development were also in the expected direction.

Within-organization variances were substantial, particularly in the lower-OLC organizations, which may indicate that OLC dimensions, or at least their perception, are linked to staff role, department, and position within the organization. It may also suggest that shared perceptions and experiences, or their lack, are based on staff development opportunities and communication. Particularly in interviews and focus groups with Nazareth Center and Healthy Cities staff, perceptions of organizational practices were widely contested. Despite the non-significant findings in support for staff development, the strong correlations among OLCS subscales suggest that internal and external alignment, organizational learning practices, empowerment, and open communication are important to organizational support for staff development.

The overall pattern of results were strongly consistent with extensive participant observations of each organization, lending validity to the ability of the OLCS to accurately measure complex differences in organizational learning and change capacity. In contrast, other face-valid survey measures of systems change were very misleading. For example, on some, Nazareth Center scored higher than Island Center meaning that Nazareth staff reported that their practices empowered staff and community members, built on members' assets or strengths, and focused on prevention and systems change. This suggests that many Nazareth staff who had only recently been introduced to these concepts within the context of the organization's work may have been persuaded by their leader's positive rhetoric. Island staff, by contrast, had engaged in a reflective learning process long enough to expose discrepancies between their beliefs about the efficacy of their approach to human service practice and the outcomes they experienced. They had a more realistic appraisal of what systemic community change would entail, how difficult it is to achieve,

and how long it takes. We are therefore particularly impressed by the ability of the OLCS to cut through the rhetoric and a lack of deep understanding of change, and accurately measure organizations' learning (and alignment, empowerment, communication, and supportive) capacity at varying levels.

In an increasingly complex world in which community-based nonprofits are expected to have the capacity to adapt and transform themselves in the face of new demands and shifting environmental conditions, developing and maintaining the capacity to learn is a key organizational asset (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Organizations with low OLC face two challenges in relation to change. First, the lack of systems alignment suggests that within these organizations structures are not in place to create opportunities for staff to engage in collective problem solving, learning, and cognitive reframing, which is at the heart of double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Friedman, 2001). Without bridging structures to integrate subunits within the organization or to maintain linkages to the community, organizations experience the "silo" effect in which subunits pursue unit-level goals without consideration of the larger organizational mission. This limits not only members' learning but ultimately the organization's effectiveness (Henderson, 2002). A second related challenge concerns the absence of a culture of learning and development. Specifically, we observed that those organizations that did not have in place ongoing practices of inquiry and reflection also lacked a cohesive organizational identity in which values and commitment were shared. These practices serve as the foundation upon which new conversations about organizational values and beliefs are built and sustained (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Particularly for second-order change processes (e.g., dialectical and teleological), it is essential that members be supported in engaging the inevitable "conflict" between new ideas and values around practice and the status quo (Austin & Bartunek, 2003). Together then these two components of OLC—systems alignment and culture of learning and development—indicate organizational readiness for change (Prochaska et al., 2001).

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

The OLCS can be used as a diagnostic tool to evaluate organizational learning readiness for engaging in transformative organizational change processes. While the larger participatory action study attempted to engage the five organizations in such second-order change, the relatively low scores of Nazareth Center and Healthy Cities on the OLCS were consistent with data from focus groups and participant observations from staff and team meetings, which indicated that these two organizations were internally fragile and struggled to engage effectively in even incremental, or first-order, change processes. Thus, from a learning and change perspective, what these organizations needed most was a process of organizational development or adaptive capacity building that would allow them to be more effective in their

community change efforts without necessarily engaging in a process of inquiry or learning that challenged their undying assumptions about practice. Working with these organizations to build learning practices and processes to support their work within their existing operating paradigm was perhaps a more appropriate goal.

Further research is needed to document organizational change in human service organizations over a longer period of time. To truly work from this paradigm the organization must not only transform the way they practice, they must also transform their organizational culture. Much like the *knowing doing gap* as discussed by Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), an organization cannot just agree to a new paradigm on the surface and expect it to be implemented without having the organizational learning capacity in place to support such a change process.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample, both of organizations and participating staff, limited the power of the statistical analyses. The fact that five of the seven ANOVAs were significant is thus a strong statement. The differences among organizations' OLCS scores may be attributed at least in part to history effects, however. Island Center had begun working on shifting its internal and external operating paradigms prior to our survey. Their new programmatic second-order change processes involved new participatory structures and they may have led to new organizational learning practices and greater support for staff empowerment and development. In fact, given their head start in the change process, they might have been expected to have even higher OLCS scores. It suggests that even in this very transformationally focused organization, systems alignment, staff empowerment, open communication, new learning practices, and opportunities for meaningful staff development are difficult to achieve.

CONCLUSIONS

As we experienced in the action research part of our project, shifting organizational paradigms, either internally or externally, let alone both simultaneously, is not an easy endeavor. It takes time, a willingness to critically evaluate current organizational practices, and above all, a capacity for organizational learning. The *Organizational Learning Capacity Scale* is a promising tool that may assist both researchers and practitioners in gauging an organization's readiness for such an endeavor. Despite the challenges we believe any organization is capable of transformative change if it is *first* given the opportunity to increase its capacity to learn.

NOTES

1. We use pseudonyms for each organization throughout this article.
2. http://www.partnersforlearning.com/instructions.html.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Austin, J. R., & Bartunek, J. M. (2003). Theories and practices of organizational development. In D. R. Ilgen & W. C. Borman (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Industrial and organizational psychology* (Vol. 12, pp. 309–332). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Bess, K. D., Prilleltensky, I., Perkins, D. D., & Collins, L. V. (2009). Participatory organizational change in community-based health and human services: From tokenism to political engagement. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *43*, 134–148.

Brookfield, S. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ellinger, A. D., Ellinger, A. E., Yang, B., & Howton, S. W. (2003). The relationship between the learning organization concept and firms' financial performance: An empirical assessment. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *13*(1), 5–21.

Evans, S. D., Hanlin, C. E., & Prilleltensky, I. (2007). Blending ameliorative and transformative approaches in human service organizations: A case study. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *35*(3), 329–346.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Continuum International.

Friedman, V. J. (2001). The individual as agent of organizational learning. In M. Dierkes, A. B. Antal, J. Child, & I. Nonaka (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational learning and knowledge*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Gephart, M. A., Marsick, V. J., Van Buren, M. E., & Spiro, M. S. (1996). Learning organizations come alive. *Training and Development*, *50*(12), 34–36.

Henderson, G. M. (2002). Transformative learning as a condition for transformational change in organizations. *Human Resource Development Review*, *1*(2), 186–214.

Hendrey, C. (1996). Understanding and creating whole organizational change through learning theory. *Human Relations*, *49*(5), 621–641.

Huy, Q. N. (1999). Emotional capability, emotional intelligence, and radical change. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*(2), 325–345.

Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (2003). Demonstrating the value of an organization's learning culture: The dimensions of the learning organization questionnaire. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *5*(2), 132–151.

McHargue, S. (2003). Learning for performance in non-profit organizations. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *5*(2), 196–204.

Mezirow, J., & Associates. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspective on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Newman, K. L. (2000). Organizational transformation during institutional upheaval. *The Academy of Management Review*, *25*(3), 602–619.

Pawlowsky, P. (2001). The treatment of organizational learning in management science. In M. Dierkes, A. B. Antal, J. Child, & I. Nonaka (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational learning and knowledge* (pp. 61–88). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Perkins, D. D., Bess, K., Cooper, D. G., Jones, D. L., Armstead, T., & Speer, P. W. (2007). Community organizational learning: Case studies illustrating a three-dimensional model of levels and orders of change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *35*(3), 303–328.

Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. (2000). *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Piderit, S. K. (2000). Rethinking resistance and recognizing ambivalence: A multidimensional view of attitudes toward an organizational change. *The Academy of Management Review*, *25*(4), 783–794.

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1992). The transtheoretical approach. In M. R. Goldfried & J. C. Norcross (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy integration* (pp. 300–334). New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.

Prochaska, J. M., Prochaska, J. O., & Levesque, D. A. (2001). A transtheoretical approach to changing organizations. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, *28*(4), 247–261.

Rampersad, H. K. (2004). Learning and unlearning in accordance with organizational change. *Organization Development Journal*, *22*(4), 43–60.

Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. (1995). Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 510–541.