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## The Role of Reflection in Planned Organizational Change

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# The Role of Reflection in Planned Organizational Change

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*Abstract: This article identified the role that structured personal reflection plays in enabling and supporting planned organizational change, thereby enhancing change outcomes in a sector facing substantial change in the face of economic threats and challenges. Reflection, in a myriad of formats, supports the management of positive change outcomes by focusing simultaneously at the organization-wide and personal levels. A longitudinal single case study in a nonprofit hospital implementing an electronic patient management system was the research site. Methodologically, data from fifty-six semi-structured interviews involving clinical, administrative, and managerial staff, as well as those tasked with designing and implementing the system, was analysed based on the theoretical sampling strategy of grounded theory. This wide source of interviews ensured that data was obtained from an array of those who were impacted by the changes, directly and indirectly. One of the key findings of the study was the positive role that reflection played in a nonprofit organization, as a direct result of management prescribing formal time-availability for reflection, for both the internal change agent, as well as the change recipients. In this manner, the study identified an integrated reflection framework that may aid organizational and individual attributes in the support for change. Other findings from related research identified a range of characteristics that require a more substantial focus in planned change models when applied to nonprofits. These involved issues of trust and confidence in the organization, change actor experiences, and change activity sequencing.*

*Keywords: Reflection, Personal Reflection, Planned Organizational Change, Qualitative Research, Grounded Theory, Nonprofit Sector*

## Introduction

This article focuses research attention on the role of personal or self-reflection in organizational change processes. In doing so it provides possible guidelines for the inclusion of personal reflection options at every phase of a planned change program. This includes both the change agent as well as change recipients in the nonprofit sector. It further emphasizes the positioning of the role of reflection in management applications as a specific application in the process (Kayes 2002; Dehler, Welsh, and Lewis 2001; Reynolds and Vince 2004). This is distinctive from its origins in the field of broader social learning applications (Boonstra 2004; Taylor 1981).

This article emphasizes the importance of personal reflection, as supported by a range of formal and informal reflective practices. It also argues that group reflection in the context of planned organizational change provides opportunities for participants in such programs to understand and evaluate their experiences. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of individual reflection for change recipients as well as the change agent. It further provides the physical and emotional space to consider events in the context of a range of personal factors. These include personal experiences, personal expectations, self-awareness, and emotional well-being. In this context it considers the responses to the change process itself.

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In this manner, personal reflection follows numerous interrelated pathways, including:

- that of experience (which includes personal behaviour, feelings, and ideas);
- that of the reflective processes (which includes returning to the experience, attending to the feelings first identified, and re-evaluating the experience in that context), and
- that of consideration of outcomes which will incorporate reactions and responses moving forward (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985a).

The article further suggests that reflection, in order to be effective in planned organization change, should be an ongoing process throughout the change, including the lead-up to the change, during the change, and for a period after the change. This approach supports wide-ranging earlier research identified as:

- the role and relevance of individual responsiveness to organizational change (Lewis 2011);
- the relationship to people's willingness to change (Miller, Johnson, and Grau 1994);
- the characteristics of individual coping mechanisms together with their general well-being (Noblet, Rodwell, and McWilliams 2006; Rafferty and Griffin 2006; Robinson and Griffiths 2005), and
- the extent to which change is individually well supported (Lewis and Seibold 1996).

## Theoretical Framework

Reflection can best be understood as a process of thinking and conceiving about future alternative actions based on the analysis of past actions and reactions to these. This approach to considering what defines reflection has been identified in the literature as a personal internal mapping exercise which supports the linking of uncertainty to learning (Bolton 2010). In this manner, it is a process that drives individuals and/or groups of individuals towards a process of critical evaluation on how best to respond and move forward within a context of interpreting past activities and past reactions, including lessons learned. At this level of description, there are many elements that define reflection across a dynamic range. These include:

- personal, group and organizational learning and application;
- formal, informal, structured and unstructured reflection, as well as
- social and psychological impacts of reflection, all of which underpin a broader understanding of its applicability to change management outcomes.

Researchers in this field have conceptualized widely on defining and categorizing the reflection activity. These have included:

- as a human evaluative focus (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985a);
- as a stage in the learning process that is not time delineated (Taylor 1981);
- as a dialogue process (Bredensjö and Huzzard 2005) or a dialectical process (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985a);
- as a discursive activity that limits premature reactions (Cameron and Green 2009);
- as a method of separating thought from action (Malinen 2000);
- as an assessment process that links perception and reactions in the act of problem-solving (Mezirow 1990);
- as a method of critical thinking that can provide clarity (Moon 1999), and
- as a process that links directly with an experiential learning activity (Kolb 1984).

A key aspect of reflection has seen a shift from personal or individual reflection, sometimes referred to as self-reflection, to that of group or collective reflection. This has been identified by many researchers applying a wide array of interpretations and applications including:

- as an emphasis on workplace discourse (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985a);
- as a shift in the focus from individual to organizational learning and its integration as a workplace learning activity to strengthen its effectiveness (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985b);
- through identifying the social context of reflection which underpins it as a collective activity (Hoyrup and Elkjær 2006);
- through developing its role in collaborations of people sharing common situations (Cressey, Boud, and Docherty 2005);
- by promoting a combination of collective and individual reflection (Moon 1999);
- by identifying various organizational attributes that are beneficial to successful reflection outcomes (Reynolds and Vince 2004);
- as the basis of inquiry into social power relations within organizations (Vince 2002), and
- as a key component in the organizational political framework linking to learning and change (Kemmis 1985).

Such a focus on the collective, as originally characterized in the learning organization descriptor (Senge 1990) steers a slightly different path from other researchers who have primarily focused on individual reflection (Antonacopoulou 1999; Dewey 1997; Schuttloffel 2013; Senge et al. 1999).

As discussed in this article, primary focus has been given to how the individual may positively impact organizational change outcomes through a process of utilizing personal reflection processes that involve the change agent as well as change recipients. In this manner, organizational initiatives are designed and developed as part of the planned change program. Such design considerations are aimed at providing support mechanisms and opportunities for these players to maximize the use of, and application of, reflective practices that can improve change outcomes.

The context of this research is how organisations can drive successful change and the role that reflection may play in this overall pursuit. Considerations of organisational agility are also at the heart of this challenge, where the need to be adaptable may be a precondition of success (Haneberg 2011). Such adaptability may result in changes to leadership, systems, and culture (Nold and Michel 2016). Elements of the “Performance Triangle” as a model to promote corporate agility (Nold and Michel 2016) may provide further scope regarding the connection between reflection and change management outcomes, where success, culture, leadership, systems, and people coupled with collaboration, purpose, and relationships form the underpinning of the Triangle. The focus afforded to collective thoughts, behaviours, alignment, and coordination may all be improved through considered reflective practice.

## Methodology

This longitudinal research study sought to understand the components of successful change management in the nonprofit sector. It did so by interpreting relevant processes in the context of everyday activities of those who experienced it, whilst focusing on their daily routines and work programs (Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017). Accordingly, genuine grounded theory was identified as the appropriate method for pursuing these aims. An overview of the grounded theory methodology appears in Figure 1. This highlights the importance of the design considerations at the commencement of the research. This set the process for data collection and

analysis, through to informing the grounded theory of change management in the nonprofit sector (Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017)

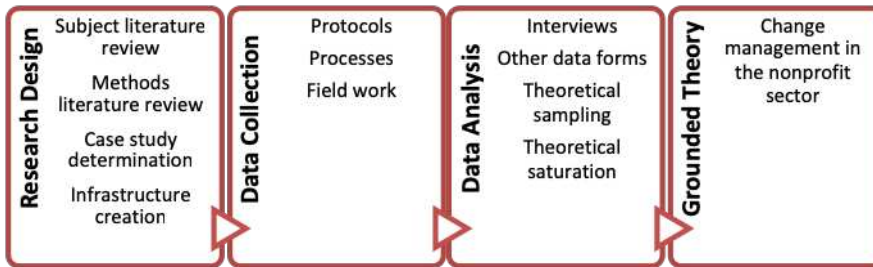


Figure 1: Overview of the Grounded Theory Methodology  
Source: Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017

The grounded theory methodology enhanced the resulting qualitative framework. It provided a focus on visibility, comprehensibility, and replicability (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Its approach to theoretical sampling focused on the development of concepts, properties, and dimensions that originated directly from the data and underpinned the interplay between induction and deduction (Aminian, Kirkham, and Fenn 2013).

The longitudinal research was focused on seeking input from, and the views of, staff from across the organization. This provided a rich picture of the lived change experiences (Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017), consistent with accepted research approaches (Burgess 2003; Dawson 1994, 1997).

Interviews were conducted at three stages of the change process, namely before the change, during the change, as well as after the change. In this manner, the emotional responses of those experiencing the entire process were able to be captured and interwoven in the iterative analysis. This maintained the theoretical sampling methodology and captured both the positive and negative emotions of those experiencing the change.

As highlighted by Rosenbaum, More, and Steane (2017, 78–9), data collection was undertaken over a three-year period, with fifty-six interviews conducted during this time. "These included twelve before-the-change (BC), nineteen during-the-change (DC), eighteen after-the-change (AC), and seven member-checking interviews (MC). The latter were used for validity purposes. Staff movements in and out of the hospital during this period resulted in varying combinations of interviews being undertaken. Of the total number of interviews, eleven staff members involved themselves in only one change phase each. A further nine staff members were involved in two change phases each, and eight staff members were each involved in all three phases of the change." During the research period at the hospital there was an ongoing analysis of the interview data that supported the identification of common interpretative themes. Such data was augmented by numerous group meetings that were attended by the principle researcher acting as a non-participant observer. Evaluation of a broad range of hospital-based documentation enabled effective triangulation which underpinned conclusions drawn from the data (Eisenhardt 1989).

All interviews were audio recorded from which detailed transcripts were developed. Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. In this manner, participants' behaviours, experiences, as well as actions, motives, beliefs, values, and attitudes, formed the basis for a thick rich description that supported the development of the grounded theory (Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017).

This study was undertaken at the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital (SAH), a Sydney-based nonprofit organization that has been in existence since 1903. At the date of this research, SAH employed in excess of 2,200 staff in varying capacities, accounted for 700 accredited medical specialists, catered to an average of 50,000 in-patients and 160,000 out-patients per annum, and 20,000 Emergency Care admissions.

## Findings

The findings of the research identified the impact of four key characteristics that required a more substantial focus in planned organizational change when applied to nonprofits (Rosenbaum, More, and Steane 2017). These findings included:

- an equal focus on formal reflection for the change agent and change recipients;
- the development of trust and confidence in the organization prior to the actual change;
- focusing on the individual as distinct to largely on the organization; and
- identifying the appropriate sequencing of events from a planning perspective.

In the context of formal reflection, the inclusion of the change agent, as well as change recipients, recognized the broad role that reflection plays. Its application throughout the change process also recognized the importance of maintaining reflection as an assimilated component of planned organizational change.

Evidence from the research identified a number of attributes of reflection that lead to outcomes associated with the change process. This has resulted in the development of an integrated reflection framework. Such a framework highlights the relationship between the sources of reflection and reflective practices, organizational and individual attributes that result from these in the support of change, and the individual reflection mechanisms that can be applied in the process. These are presented in Figure 2.

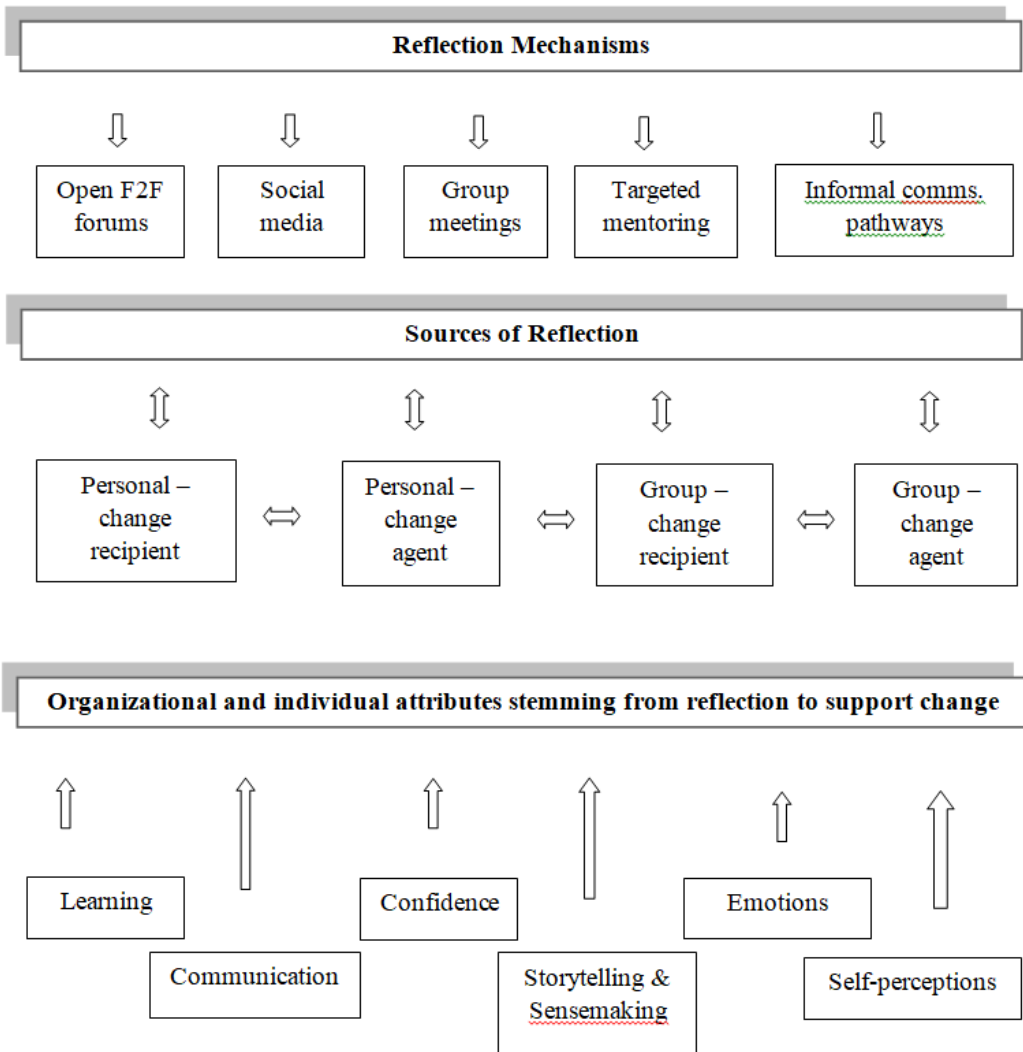


Figure 2: Integrated Reflection Framework  
 Source: Rosenbaum, Taksa, and More 2019

The planning and execution of change was impacted by the reflective practices undertaken. This was evident in the process of integrating learning experiences of change recipients as supported through the individual reflective practices. The structure, content, and frequency of communication, before, during, and after the change supported this process. This was evident in such comments as:

Each time you rollout you’ve learned things from it...sometimes you assume people think how you think or know you think or know what you know, and I think I’ve learned to make sure that I communicate more clearly.” ([Interview 1 with Interviewee #13])



It's been slowly introduced, and enough information given at the time to just get your head around and then give you the next bit...(Interview 1 with Interviewee #14 when commenting on the impact of a reflection process)

She did it from her home environment [training]...she was not under pressure to look after patients, she was actually giving me more positive thoughts to think to say maybe after a little while when she's used to it she'll be knowing what to do so she'll be okay with it. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #4)

I know some staff have gone back in and they've gone over the training modules again. Some of them did it at work but the majority of people did it at home. They actually reflected [on their experiences] that it was better to do it at home because they're not interrupted and stuff. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #4)

Formal and informal communication, some of which evolved following the ongoing reflection processes amongst the change agent group, identified a range of initiatives that supported the change processes. These included policy developments that enabled nursing staff to actively reflect on the clinical repercussions of the changes. It also identified the informal communication that was undertaken between nursing staff across wards to encourage supportive reflection before the change in pre-implementation wards. The feedback stemming from nurses' experiences in post-implementation wards, for those nurses who worked across multiple wards, reinforced this informal communication process. This was evident in the following comments:

We've tried to initiate certain things to help with it, so we change a lot of policy and procedure...evidence based. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #1 when commenting on the application of an evidence-based approach which underpinned policy changes)

So they're already able to go back to their areas and say "Okay I've used the new system, so when we get it I'll already know it." (Interview 3 with Interviewee #5 when commenting on the movement of nurses between wards that have experienced the change and those that are yet to experience it and reflect on their experiences in those affected wards)

They heard a lot from downstairs [previous wards that have transitioned to the new system] and this was informal communication processes around the hospital which proved very effective. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #12)

The reflection process supported an ongoing improvement in levels of confidence amongst those experiencing the changes. This strengthened the likelihood and sustainability of successful change. This was evident in such comments as:

They appreciate it because they can now go home and they've got a little bit more idea on the computer, what they're doing and how to get there. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #7)

I think I'm open to it. I think it's given me some confidence and I think it is beneficial. I've learnt that it's been helpful for my practice in that I can access information easier. It's been helpful for me in terms of developing new skills. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #11 when discussing the impact of reflection on their ability to interpret the changes on their own nursing practice)

I think some of the benefits that we accrued at that time—because we all then went back to our roles at the end of the project—so we took with us I guess quite a lot of skills in doing those sorts of things that we were able to implement in our day-to-day roles. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #1)

“Hang on, I’m empowered here” and I think it’s really beneficial because I think it’s helping to build people’s skills and what I feared about it was we’re going to be like a rudderless ship. It’s not actually true at all; people have risen to that occasion. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #1)

Storytelling and its impact were also identified as a valuable process in supporting the change. This grew out of personal reflections stemming directly from an individual assessment of how best to “sell” the transition to certain parts of the organization. This was highlighted in the following comments:

I find storytelling very powerful and so I try- and you always get the people who are like – but you see the other people who go ‘Oh yeah’ who can really relate to it. Well I think storytelling generally is very important and I’m not too sure if enough organizations are able to effectively tell the story. Sometimes fact and figures on their own don’t compute. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #1)

The nurses wanted to own the change I think. They wanted to just get in there and do it ...We had girls in blue shirts everywhere [these were part of the change agent task-force], we called them super loses as opposed to super users, which is kind of funny. And everyone just embraced [this visualization]...it was a good thing. So it worked. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #22)

There were three staff members that have been working down there [a ward that had already experienced the change]. So, when they came back [and relayed their experiences] they said they’ve already worked with it and it’s not too bad. So that’s okay. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #14)

The emotional impact of planned organizational change was also affected by the degree of reflection that was both a formal and informal part of the process. Assisting the change recipients and the change agent in this process involved recognising barriers and enablers of change and supporting these with articulated responses to support the process. This was evident in such comments as:

You have to make the head change and then find ways to implement the change at a clinical level. I am forcing myself to not be a mature person, woman, who can’t adopt to change. So that is my challenge and so when changes come I personally...reflect...on how I can deal with it the best possible way. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #6)

I rang the other girls in the support, which I think if you’re going to do any kind of change within you’ve got to be supportive together, and I said ‘I need time out’. So they came up and we swapped over. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #12)

[as I reflected] I think I learned a really valuable lesson there to actually look when people are oppositional to change, try and look at that hidden, underlying thing, because if you can actually get to that you can then work with the person to try and I guess, reassure them...It was that point when I recognized that I hadn’t understood what her issue was, but once I understood it I was able to shore that up for her. (Interview 2 with

Interviewee #1 when considering how the process of reflection had been undertaken and the impact that personal reflection had on the overall change process)

Analysis of the interview and related data suggested a nexus between self-perception amongst those experiencing change and change outcomes. Such personal reflection enabled change participants to actively make personal behavioural adjustments. These led to better levels of “buy-in” to the change, resulting in outcomes that were consistent with expectations set by both the hospital executive and the internal change agent. This was evident in comments such as:

Well you’ve got to work out what’s going to suit you the best to be able to do it in your allocated time. (Interview 3 with Interviewee #5)

She did it in her own environment, she was at home and she was not under pressure...she was actually giving me more positive thoughts to think maybe after a little while...she’ll be okay with it. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #9)

I think these sentinel events or issues that pop up from time-to-time in the process of transition...are important for us to dwell on and try and really understand them ... reflecting on difficult, critical situations. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #20)

Personal reflection may provide the underpinnings for a number of resulting activities that support the management of planned organizational change. A number of these have been identified in this case study. This pointed to a range of reflection-related activities including:

- the impact on self-perception;
- the process of applied learning;
- an understanding of the roles of both formal and informal communication;
- an overall improvement in confidence levels;
- storytelling as a mechanism, and
- the possible mitigation of emotional responses to change.

These are identified further in the discussion of these results that follows.

The opportunities for reflective practice that supported the change program were introduced through a number of different mechanisms. These recognised that, as with communication, change recipients, as well as the change agent, may engage to differing levels within each. Limiting such reflective opportunities may reduce the desired impact on the change process and thereby the change outcomes. Approaches that were adopted in the case study are further discussed below.

The introduction of open-invite face-to-face discussion forums held throughout the hospital at all stages of the change supported the change processes and outcomes. These were initiated by the internal change agent and advised in advance of the event and normally coincided with a completed ward implementation. These provided an opportunity for formal group reflection and informal personal reflection following these forums, as was evidenced by comments such as:

They just went okay, there has not been a lot of barriers and I think any insecurity or whatever was quashed. (Interview 3 with Interviewee #1),

Sort of walk with them a bit on the road to give them confidence to get to the point of believing. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #6)

Additionally, recognition of the importance of these forums was evidenced by such comments as:

People all need to be on the same page and I think sometimes people are not on the same page because they are too busy and have not gone to these sessions that have promoted the change and sort of missed out. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #13)

Since there was no organization-wide technology-based discussion platform in use at the time of the change, individual change recipients utilised their personal social media platforms to comment on the developments within the organization with regards the changes. This provided opportunities for interactive discourse, which developed into a wide platform for airing views following ongoing ward implementations. It soon became apparent, following comments such as the one below, that bespoke structured technology-based platforms can be introduced to support change management programs in a manner that encourages open discourse as an outcome of personal reflection.

That's a real test, it's in the social environment and people are going 'It's fantastic'... Afterwards there was just oodles and oodles of comments of her friends. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #4)

Individual ward-based meetings were conducted throughout all stages of the change program, before/during/and after, and were ancillary to the regular hand-over meetings. These were driven by the Nursing Unit Manager rather than being an integral component of the organizational change strategy and accordingly were not a common activity across all wards. In those wards where this was applied, it acted as a means of support and encouraged an open dialogue opportunity enabling participating nurses to reflect on their experiences with the new technology and the related operational changes that ensued. This represented an opportunity for both group and personal reflection which resulted in a wide range of issues being canvassed by participants during this activity. This was evidenced by the following questions being asked during one such session:

Is it a big change? How are you coping? Is it going to make more work? (Interview 3 with Interviewee #5)

Following one such session in a different ward, a participant commented about her experiences in the meeting and how she reflected on the outcome:

I don't know, I think everyone up here just has a positive attitude towards it, and if it doesn't work, whatever the change might be, the management and everyone else, educator, all them, are quite happy to sit down and discuss different ways to approach it, if it isn't working, whatever it may be. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #24)

The aim of focusing reflection on experiences with the change was reinforced by one Unit Nursing Manager when she indicated from a process perspective, following the formalities of the shift handover:

Okay, now we've finished that, let's go around the room and you can tell me all about the changes and how you feel about it. (Interview 2 with Interviewee #21)

Targeted mentoring was applied to those change recipients that were identified as being in need of the process. Anticipated and actual benefits were identified through lower resistance levels and better change outcomes. Through mentoring, the focus on the individual and the personal gains from learning through formal reflection were highlighted. These were combined with the coaching focus on performance and task which accelerated the degree of change acceptance for those that were less inclined to grasp the change from a cultural perspective. They were also less confident in applying the new technology and hence preferring to shy away from

its adoption. Immediately following one such mentoring session, one interviewee discussed the advantages she found in having time to reflect outside the ward and within the parameters of one-on-one coaching and commented that:

So it's been an ongoing learning process for me and a frustrating one, but I can see the benefits of it. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #11)

Sort of walk with them a bit on the road to give them more confidence to get to the point of believing. (Interview 2 with interviewee #6)

The informal communication pathways were actively encouraged. To some extent these were relied on by the internal change agent as a means of verbalizing personal reflection amongst those nurses who traversed wards in the normal course of their fortnightly shifts. In essence the process relied upon utilising those nurses who had experienced the implementation in one ward, taking their feedback on their experiences to another, yet to be implemented, ward, and absorb their messaging into the casual discussions amongst the nurses in that second ward. These discussions evoked reflection amongst the nursing staff that challenged them to critically evaluate their concerns regarding the implementation, which tended to directly impact their levels of resistance. This strategy became overt during the ongoing changes throughout the hospital in those wards where the opportunity for such "cross-fertilization" presented itself. This strategy, and its impact, was highlighted in the following comments:

Yes, the grapevine is alive and well, but you can use it to your advantage and I think the particular implementers of our system...used that to her advantage...she actually now takes clinical champions from one ward and works them on the next ward as supporters because they are people who will speak positively about the whole program. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #1)

It does influence a lot of people. People saying, oh it's really hard, or it's not working well, or something. But I did one shift, upstairs on level, I think it was 11, and they were already live, and I got a quick crash course in it. It was quite good, so I'm looking forward to it. (Interview 1 with Interviewee #24)

## Discussion

### *Self-perception and Reflection*

Evidence from this research suggests that individual reflection for both change recipients as well as the change agent further embedded a range of self-perception attributes that supported the change processes and outcomes. Individual perceptions of change can be readily influenced by the processes that are implemented and the sequencing of the events that follow (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999). The focus on individual dimensions as distinct from purely organizational dimensions (Bamford and Forrester 2003; Oreg, Michel, and By 2013) has laid the research foundations for better understanding the individual in addressing planned organizational change, linking directly with their perceptions, interpretations, and responses (Brewer 1995).

Such perception of change can be strongly influenced by personal experiential involvement associated with earlier change (Isett et al. 2013) to the extent of such experiences cementing attitudes toward change, both positive and negative (Kelman 2005). This has been further exemplified by linking such experiences with change recipients maintaining ongoing monitoring of the organizational environment. This is often a precursor to forming opinions about the extent of trust in the management of the organization (Lines et al. 2005). Perceptions of those

experiencing change, together with the reality of the change, are equal protagonists in successful change outcomes (Swanson and Creed 2014).

### ***Applied Learning and Reflection***

Much has been researched and written with regard to learning organizations. This is in direct response to growing organizational challenges linked to varied internal and external change factors (Altman and Iles 1998; Antheil 2011; Ford and Ford 1994; Senge 1990). These have also included the focus on applied learning in executing successful change, which requires further consideration. In focusing on applied learning, the emphasis becomes one of drawing insights from experience and applying these to the organizational challenges at hand. This is often based on integrating formal reflection into the process. The iterative nature of the interactions between the internal change agent and the change recipients, which was integrated into the formal reflection processes of the change agent and her staff, reinforced learnings of the change.

The linkages between learning and its application as an ongoing social process (Armitage, Marschke, and Plummer 2008) were considered in the context of three learning theories, firstly as an experiential process (Keen and Mahanty 2006), secondly as a transformative process (Mezirow 1996), and finally as an iterative social activity heavily reliant on reflective processes (Keen, Brown, and Dyball 2005). The processes of acting, reflecting, interpreting, and sensemaking have also been identified when considering learning in the context of change in routines (Boonstra 2004). Such an emphasis on reflection has a long history in extant literature. The role of reflective activities and the learning experiences combine to enhance overall learning. This is especially so where allocation for reflection time is provided through such formal activities as debriefing sessions and time availability for maintaining a reflective diary (Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985b).

As reflection has been closely linked with effective learning, learning has been closely aligned to effective change. A range of researchers have discussed the positive linkage between effective change and organizational and personal learning (Fiol and Lyles 1985; Huber 1991; Argyris 1992; Srivastva et al. 1995). Such an approach works on the premise that the outcome of learning is new knowledge that can be applied to dealing with the organizational and personal challenges that change brings (Beckhard and Pritchard 1992). A number of researchers have also historically spoken of an inseparable linkage between learning and change, suggesting that the concepts are, to some extent, synonymous (Beckhard and Pritchard 1992; Handy 1995; Friedlander 1983).

The application of this learning into the ongoing change program supported process and application refinements that reinforced numerous aspects of the change execution within the change recipients. In this manner, learning was identified and further developed as ongoing refinements which supported both learning and change (Mets 1997; Tam 1999). Personal reflection on the part of the internal change agent, supported by group reflection by the change agent team, enabled learning to be applied in a manner that supported the individual requirements of targeted change recipients. This approach improved the integration between learning and change.

### *Communication and Reflection*

The issue of communication is one that has been raised frequently with regard to the management of change. This has been presented in many forms, namely:

- in terms of its consistency (Armenakis and Harris 2002);
- as a foundational element in organizational change readiness (Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder 1993);
- as a process in supporting the rationale for change and to articulate a vision (Baker 2007; Freeze 2013; Lewis 2011);
- in terms of the appropriateness and clarity of language types and style (Barrett 2002; Bommer, Rich, and Rubin 2005);
- as an aid in reducing change recipient uncertainty (Bordia et al. 2004);
- as a necessary core organizational capability (Hughes 2010);
- as both positive and negative feedback mechanisms within organizations (Kelman 2005), and
- as both a fundamental element in successful change as well as a primary reason for change failure (McClellan 2011).

The nature of communication in a change management context focuses understandably on communication at three levels. These include between the organization and the change agent, the organization and the change recipients, and between the change agent and the change recipients. These should be on a two-way basis. Once we consider the interaction of reflection, both formal and informal, communication must also be a pivotal issue within the change agent group as well as within the change recipient group. Such inward communication provides opportunities, as depicted in the case study, for levels of interaction on both an inter-group and intra-group level. Such interactions identified in the case study and supported by management in the organization, resulted in higher levels of identified inclusion amongst change recipients. It further pointed to higher levels of satisfaction amongst members of the change agent support team.

### *Storytelling, Sensemaking, and Reflection*

The importance of storytelling as an organizational process aiding the management of change has been widely discussed in recent literature (Dailey and Browning 2013; Brown, Humphreys, and Gurney 2005; Brown, Gabriel, and Gherardi 2009). These have focused attention on the advantages associated with narrative repetition and the effectiveness of the speed with which the circulation of stories through the organization impacts its social fabric and hence its culture. As stories are spread through the organization and referenced and reinforced through formal reflection processes, levels of cognitive dissonance amongst change recipients potentially decrease (Bartunek, Balogun, and Do 2011). This provides the opportunity for change leaders to effect a positive sensegiving framework regarding the change. This has enabled change recipients to absorb a positive sensemaking framework within which change is generally better supported (Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince 2012).

A substantial body of knowledge has evolved that focuses on the role of storytelling to support organizational change. Recognising varying storytelling techniques and utilising them under different circumstances has been recognized as a positive leadership trait in communicating and implementing successful change (Kouzes and Posner 2006). Applying unique approaches of storytelling through creative and visual means, and in so doing considering the approach of collective voicing as a reflective practice, has also been the subject of research in the public health system (Pässilä, Oikarinen, and Harmaakorpi 2015). It has also been suggested that stories of change may provide the creative base for employee empowerment, which links the

organization with work and self, hence supporting the change process (Driver 2009). This has been further extended to the view that organizational change produces stories that in turn can either result in further change or, in some cases, hinder change through a sensemaking lense. This defines what change means to individual change recipients (Brown, Gabriel, and Gherardi 2009). Such sensemaking processes have also been linked to member perceptions of identity and image under a range of change conditions in academia (Gioia and Thomas 1996). This has also been extended beyond management levels to frontline employees, given that the responsibility for change implementation often makes its way to this level in the majority of organizations (Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010). At the conceptual level, storytelling integrates with the two key questions that sensemaking processes sequences, namely what is the current story and what are we now going to do with that story? (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005). Reflection enables these questions to be discerned by those involved in this process.

A key attribute of storytelling in the context of change management is the nature and extent of reactions to them and how such reactions potentially embed themselves in the minds of those who interact through the activity (Beech, MacPhail, and Coupland 2009). These interactions, as identified in the case study, involved both formal and informal elements. Both of these were, to a great extent, facilitated through a reflection process that was supported and encouraged through all levels of the organization. Linkages between such discursive approaches and innovative organizational outcomes related to change have been previously identified (Peirano-Vejo and Stablein 2009) and well placed within the spectrum of sensemaking possibilities (Brown, Gabriel, and Gherardi 2009).

### ***Confidence Levels and Reflection***

The role that confidence levels of change recipients play in the overall change management process has also been described in extant research. Evidence of the roles of individuals in change programs has been evident in the literature (Becker 2007). There has also been identification of the linkages between personal ownership and change outcomes (Hambrick, Nadler, and Tushman 1998). This suggests that such ownership can only take place as a direct result of rising confidence levels within the change recipient group. Such confidence is also assumed as an ingredient in the behaviour adjustments that are required in this group, in order to effect change at the organizational level (Hesselbein and Johnston 2002). Ensuring change recipients have the full range of resources leading into a change program, in order to underpin successful change (Shin, Taylor, and Seo 2012), may also be extended beyond the physical resources. It may also include a range of cognitive resources and capabilities gained through wide-ranging personal confidence levels in both themselves and in the change program itself.

The interrelationship and interdependencies between change recipient confidence levels and change outcomes at the organizational level are perhaps supported by levels and types of formal and informal reflection processes. These have been created and offered by the organization throughout the change process. Evidence from the case study suggested that reflection enabled mature-age change recipients to better come to grips with the “destruction” of well-versed processes (Biggart 1977) and accepting and working with wide-ranging uncertainties and anxieties (Bolton 2010). Reflection and reflective practices as utilised in the case study supported notions of change recipients’ ability to consider how best to address issues of personal ignorance regarding the changes (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel 2001). This responds to the challenges of potentially addressing this not only amongst their own peer group members, but also with the internal change agent and related staff members.

### ***Emotions and Reflection***

A wide array of emotional responses to those experiencing change, be they as change recipients or the change agent, has been addressed to varying degrees in recent research, with an increasing



emphasis applied since the early 1990s (Bartunek, Balogun, and Do 2011). This, however, has focused most attention at the organizational level. There has been less emphasis on the individual, appreciating that individual reactions to change vary (Becker 2007; Cook, Macaulay, and Coldicott 2004) and emotional and spiritual buy-in must be recognized (Dunphy, Griffiths, and Benn 2007). More recent recognition has been afforded to the linkage between individual staff perceptions of the change and organizational supports (Baker 2007). This also identifies the limited research with regards the evolving nature of emotions during the change process (Klarner, By, and Diefenbach 2011; Liu and Perrewe 2005). It has been extended to an evolving understanding of the intense feelings that individuals may experience as they are exposed to change, in line with the earlier studies in grieving (Kübler-Ross 1969). Linked to this are the interactions between change recipient and the change agent, where developing and accepting the change becomes a mutually focused activity (Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols 2011).

These emotional reactions and processes are integrated into the way change recipients feel about proposed changes and the ability of the change agent to tap into these feelings ahead of the change, as well as during and even after the change, providing opportunities for deep and meaningful engagement between these individuals. Feelings of change appropriateness, real and sensitive interaction with management, ownership and inclusion, and personal connection with change outcomes enable valuable interactions between change recipients and the change agent. This underpins levels of responsiveness to change at relevant points throughout the process. The case study identified the mind shifts that were necessary in this change program in order to deliver success. This success was supported by a reflective practice regime that recognized the importance of integrating it into the mainstream day-to-day activities of the change recipients as well as the change agent (Bolton 2010). It further considered the systemic inclusion in the workplace (Dixon, Lee, and Ghaye 2016).

## Research Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Given this research has been undertaken as a single exploratory case study in the nonprofit sector, a number of limitations have been identified that could be addressed in future research. One such limitation relates to the possibility of unique characteristics relevant to the industry within which this research has been conducted, namely the nonprofit hospital sector. Consideration should be taken on the impact that this sector-specific approach may have had on the findings. To respond to this limitation, further research should be undertaken, either as a single case study or multiple case studies, in other organizational settings.

A further limitation relates to the lack of comparison between the inclusion and non-inclusion of reflection and reflective practices on organizational change management outcomes. To respond to this limitation, further research within a single case study or multiple case studies in similar organizations to this research, would strengthen current findings.

## Conclusions

This article presents findings from recent single case study research into change management that identified the role that reflection, in various forms and across various actors in a change scenario, played in delivering a successful change outcome in an Australian nonprofit organization. An integrated reflection framework presented in the earlier Figure 1 highlighted a range of group and personal reflection sources that fed directly into a number of varying reflection mechanisms. These in turn resulted in a range of organizational attributes that were able to support organizational and personal change.

As a longitudinal qualitative study, applying grounded theory as the methodology, the case study sought to understand what success factors played an integral role in achieving the outcomes sought by the organization. As a qualitative study, the focus was placed on interpreting

change from the perspective of both the change recipients and the change agent and relied on both interview data and observational analysis. The findings included:

- the development of trust and confidence in the organization prior to the actual change;
- focusing on the individual as distinct to largely on the organization; and
- identifying the appropriate sequencing of events from a planning perspective.

The role that reflection may play as a precondition to successful change was an additional key finding flowing from the research data. In this context, elements of formal and informal reflection as well as personal and group reflection were evident throughout all stages of the change program. Such reflection activities and practices resulted from a combination of structured and unstructured activities, fully supported by management as well as the change agent and her team.

Reflection can be described as “in-depth focused attention” and reflective practice as “the development of insight and practice through critical attention to practical values, theories, principles, assumptions, and the relationship between theory and practice which inform everyday actions” (Bolton 2010, xxiii). The activities in the case study were very much centered on individual change recipients and the change agent (and her team) focusing on a range of actions including:

- using reflection and reflective practice as a means of clarifying the change and clarifying the impact of the change;
- addressing the emotional challenges that some had with the change; and
- addressing errors within and around the change.

This process was strengthened by individual change recipients and the change agent focusing their own minds and efforts on the various tasks that were put before them. Furthering this understanding were the roles that they needed to play leading up to the change, during the change, and after the change.

The reflective practices undertaken derived from a number of different approaches, including:

- face-to-face discussion forums;
- technology assisted discussion platforms;
- in-ward meetings;
- targeted mentoring sessions; and
- informal intra- and inter-ward communications supported and encouraged by an active approach by the change agent.

These reflection opportunities and pathways were developed within the time parameters of the organization’s management, who viewed the change program as a continuum that required adequate time to unfold rather than be rushed. This assisted in minimizing any potential detrimental outcomes for the change recipients, the change agent, and the organization.

This process identified a range of activities that influenced the change in the case study and best supported the latest research findings in sporting associations applying positive psychology, where in those settings reflection was seen as central and supportive in achieving effective change management (Dixon, Lee, and Ghaye 2016). In the case study, numerous activities and approaches were applied to create and support reflective practice. A range of outcomes was identified as a direct result of the organization-wide focus on reflection. Self-perception as a necessary ingredient in individuals managing change was supported by the attention given through the reflection process.

Learning as an applied process embedded in the change program was a key ingredient, and the integration of reflection involving the change agent, her staff, and the change recipients reinforced this process. Communication as an intra-group exercise, amongst both the change agent and the change recipient groups, encouraged and supported through a range of reflective practices, heightened the sense of inclusion and further supported the successful outcome of change processes. Storytelling linked the change program to the culture and history of the organization as well as the experiences of different individuals through the changes. It was supported through the reflective practices and focused the attention of change recipients in a discursive process that enabled a positive sensegiving framework to be established. This increased levels of support for the change by recipients. Confidence of change recipients, a necessary ingredient in successful change, was reinforced by the individual and group reflection that enabled those potentially less able to cope with the change to, over time, address their concerns and involve themselves more proactively with the change. Finally, recognising the importance the role that emotions of change recipients' play through a process of mind shifting, reflective practices were integrated into normal organizational activities for all involved. This included change recipients as well as the change agent, evidenced in both formal project plan narrative, and change agent responses to iterative activities during change execution.

The findings of this case study may substantiate the need for organizational leaders and managers to consider the inclusion of individual and group reflection as a fundamental process element in the management of organizational change. A key element for consideration includes building formal reflective practices into the overall time-frame of the change. Formalising reflection for change recipients as well as the change agent as unique groups, and formalising reflection for change recipients and the change agent on an intra-group level, may also prove beneficial. Structuring reflective practices enable key underpinnings of successful change outcomes. This can be achieved through the possible inclusion of the following essential ingredients to support such an outcome:

- strengthening self-perception;
- increasing communication and confidence amongst change recipients;
- simultaneously developing reflective practices that support the emotional reactions to change;
- ensuring change recipients view change as destroying existing well-versed processes;
- maintaining a reflection regime throughout the change process, including before, during, and after the change, and
- introducing storytelling within a reflection framework to support the sensemaking possibilities associated with the change.

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