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Factors Affecting Acceptance of Organizational Change: A Qualitatitive Analysis in the Pharmaceutical Industry

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FACTORS AFFECTING ACCEPTANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

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This exploratory qualitative study examines the relationships between organizational change factors including the occurrence of change, personal and work related barriers, and employee buy-in. The sample consisted of 20 individuals from seven different departments of a pharmaceutical products manufacturing firm that had recently undergone a major organizational change that impacted the entire workforce. Research questions were formed to examine the acceptance of organizational change, the perceived occurrence of organizational change, as well as personal and work force barriers. Results from the interviews suggest that the occurrence of change as well as personal and workforce barriers contributed to the participants' acceptance levels towards change. These findings suggest that it is vital for organizations to understand factors that relate to employees' willingness to accept change.

Key Terms: Organizational Change, Pharmaceutical Manufacturing, Acceptance of Change

Change is perhaps the only constant in life and business. Organizations that support and implement continuous and transformational change remain competitive and this is vital for long-term success (Cohen, 1999). Organizations must be able to effectively implement the internal changes that expand their goals and improve the way they do business. However, a variety of research indicates that the actual failure rate of all organizational change initiatives is about 50-85% (Strebel, 1996; Reynolds, 1994). Change initiatives fail not for lack of need or technical excellence, but may fail for multiple reasons including underestimating the effect that a change has on people, and not realizing that people are the ones who exert the actual change and determine the final outcome. Organizational change is about making alterations to the organization's purpose, culture, structure, and processes in response to seen or anticipated changes in the environment. Strategic management of change is all about identifying and embedding in the organization those changes that will ensure the long-term survival of the organization. Change is pervasive in our society and a fact of life in organizations (Goodfellow, 1985). Change is about survival and is vital in today's competitive environment.

In a study that included 40 "major" change initiatives, the results indicated that 58% failed and 20% realized less than a third of their anticipated value (LaClair & Rao, 2002). Studies have shown successful implementation of change (Briody, Pester, & Trotter, 2012) while other studies of various change efforts have reported failure rates ranging from one-third to two-thirds (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Bibler, 1989) and have reached levels as high as 80-90 percent (Cope, 2003). According to Strebel (1996) "Change management isn't working as it should. In a telling statistic, leading practitioners report that success rates in *Fortune* 1,000 companies are well below 50%; some say they are as low as 20%" (p. 86). Although companies look for enthusiasm, acceptance, and commitment (Nafel, 2014) from their employees, they often receive much less. In actuality, their communication is staggered, implementation plans fall off schedule, and overall results fail. Strebel (1996) suggests "This happens often enough that we have to ask why, and how we can avoid these failures" (p. 86).

The overall purpose of this exploratory research was to examine the impact of personal and work force barriers on the acceptance of organizational change as well as the occurrence of organizational change. Additionally, this qualitative analysis investigates which factors, if any, affect the level of employee buy-in individuals put forth to the organizational change. Specifically, factors such as occurrence of change, personal and work barriers are investigated with respect to employee buy-in to organizational change. The rationale for conducting qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of the true relationship and impact of the participant's responses. Thus, qualitative interviews were used to probe a significant understanding of the interplay of these organizational change factors.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research regarding organizational change is abundant. Research exists relating to the importance of employee buy-in relative to the successful implementation of organizational change, how change impacts an employee's commitment to the organization, as well as how employees react to change. In addition, studies have been conducted to determine the most feasible approach to implementing change within various organizations. Previous literature encompasses the examination of an organization's strategic adaptation to environment changes (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994), and includes appropriate processes and procedures used for implementing change within an organization (Quirke, 1996; Schweigher & DeNisi, 1991; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994). Latuch and Young (2011) discuss perceptions toward change by young professionals. Paraschiv, Nemoianu, Langa, and Szabo (2012) studied organizational change and corporate sustainability. A study by Fuchs (2011) discusses the impact of management identification on perceived organizational justice and change-oriented behavior. In addition, one study has shown the success of organizational change is dependent on the attitudes and behaviors of the employees of the organization (Herold & Caldwell, 2002).

The majority of previous research follows an organizational (macro) perspective, rather than looking at it from an individual's point of view (Fedor & Herold, 2004). Although numerous studies are available within the topic they do not seem to address the issue from an individual's perspective. Why do employees react to change? What factors contribute or deter their acceptance of change? This area is still somewhat unknown, including how individuals perceive change, how their perceptions are affected due to the type of change being implemented, and how other factors including the external environment determine their ultimate responses to change (Fedor & Herold, 2004).

The information gathered from this study will help organizations understand how these factors contribute or deter participation in organizational change and will therefore assist them in understanding their employees, relating to them, and consequently implement more feasible courses of action that are complimentary to their staff. Resistance to change is natural. However, by understanding these components, an organization can work around them in order to focus on positive facets of the change, and rally everyone together to focus on the big picture – succeeding in the implementation of organizational change initiatives.

Managing Organizational Change

Change is a constant factor within today's organizations. Organizations are not usually faced with the option of whether or not to implement change. They are most likely subjected to external elements, such as competitive pressures, economic or financial issues, and government regulations that create a situation in which change is necessary for the survival of the overall organization. When this occurs, organizations need to be able to respond quickly, which means they need to have the most appropriate and feasible strategy necessary to ensure a successful implementation of such changes. Without such a plan, individuals can begin to feel powerless and cautious, which is transferred into their resistance to the change, and essentially resulting in chaos.

Whether change is from mergers, acquisitions, outsourcing, downsizing, or restructuring, an organization is not able to successfully implement the changes or meet their goals and objectives without support from their employees. A study by the Conference Board of Canada found that "66 percent of organizations that completed restructuring initiatives showed no immediate increase in productivity, more than 50 percent realized no short-term profit improvement, and only 30 percent actually lowered costs" (St. Amour, 2001, p. 22). Unfortunately these results may be typical among organizations who attempt to implement change by focusing on factors such as processes, financial perspectives, and structure. In order for organizations to effectively implement change they must determine the most appropriate strategy that embraces their employees and focus their efforts in valuing, respecting, and communicating with them (St. Amour, 2001).

Managing change is one of the most common issues organizations are being faced with. This is an ongoing problem which has yet to be resolved despite numerous attempts. Previous research has examined the fundamentals of change and attempted to explain why successful implementation of change is so difficult to achieve as well as providing numerous models and explanations have been developed to aid organizations along the process of change (Beer, 1980, Bibler, 1989, Gagnon, et al, 2008, Kotler & Schlesinger, 1979, Nord & Jermier, 1994). However, despite the variety of perspectives, theories, models, and multi-step approaches, successful change initiatives are rare. Leaders lack a clear understanding of change, the necessary components needed to manage change effectively, or the ability to successfully engage organizational members in change initiatives (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). They are unable to recognize or respond to individual needs during change, which contributes to the majority of failures (Shook, Priem, & McGee, 2003). A previous study revealed how individuals were managed was a significant motivating factor and ultimately molded their support towards management (Hebda, Vojak, Griffin, & Price, 2007).

In order for organizations to effectively compete, it is crucial that they be able to adjust to issues accordingly and make the necessary changes. Organizations must be able to evolve and change at a rapid pace. However, the level of resistance that employees put forth, or the level of participation/ buy-in they have, can be a determining factor of whether the change initiatives are actually successful. "Unless managers define new terms and persuade employees to accept them, it is unrealistic for managers to expect employees to fully buy into changes that alter the status quo" (Strebel, 1996, p. 87). For change initiatives to be effective, they must be collectively owned, engineered, and implemented by all within the organization. To achieve this, individuals that are facilitating the change must be motivated to do so. The key is to understand what actually motivates the people in the organization to adopt the necessary change.

Noble and Mokwa (1999) identified implementation success as a primary outcome of commitment to a strategy and defined it as "the extent to which an implementation effort is considered successful by the organization" (p. 60). Implementation can be effective only when employees are committed (Paton & McCalman, 2000). In fact, Conner and Patterson (1982) suggested the lack of employee commitment as the most prevalent factor contributing to failed change projects. The inability or resistance of individual employees to commit to a strategy and adopt the necessary behaviors for accomplishment of strategic objectives often result in the failure of change relating to new strategies and strategic innovation (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

Steps can be put in place to align the implementation efforts to coincide with the dynamics of the workplace. Organizations can utilize change management as a way to effectively deliver on these factors. Change management may be described as a set of processes, tools and practices used to manage the people side of change. Change management connects the implementation of a solution with the realization of the benefits associated with the change (Hiatt, 2006). In order for effective change management to occur in any organization, employee buy-in and understanding is critical. By building support and helping an organization's employees understand why the change is occurring, and what is to

be gained from it, management can be assured a much greater success rate. However, just because it has been determined that a process is needed, it does not necessarily indicate the best approach or strategic design the change management efforts should include.

Resistance to Organizational Change

Findings indicate that support is a crucial and determining factor that is directly responsible for the success of various facets of the business, including change initiatives (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997). Since employees very often resist change efforts (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Strebel, 1996), support should be addressed as an important underlying barrier to planned organizational change (Watt & <u>Piotrowski</u>, 2008). Researchers have begun to include other elements such as crisis, politics, and conflict in change models because resistance to change is so pervasive in planned change efforts (Reynolds, 1994; Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997; Simsek & Louis, 1994). One example that reflects these factors is Reynolds' (1994) model for change. This particular model includes four stages of change: denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment, and is pictured below in Figure 1.

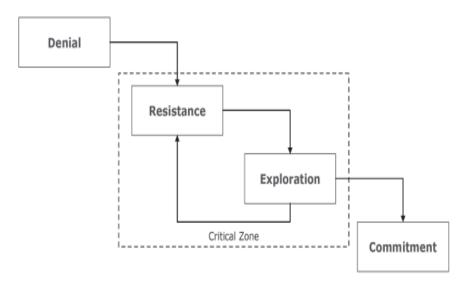


FIGURE 1: MODEL FOR CHANGE (REYNOLDS, 1994)

Reynolds (1994) suggests that during the first two stages, denial and resistance, employees typically have increased levels of tension and anger, translating into heightened levels of pandemonium in the workplace. Once employees transition to the third stage, exploration, Reynolds (1994) indicates that the movement towards change begins. At this point, organizations should focus on providing open communication, relaying the overall vision, and focusing on relationships of trust (Reynolds, 1994). "It appears that institutional readiness for change is inversely related to the resistance experienced during the transformation effort. Reynolds also points out that once individuals move beyond the denial and resistance phases, there is usually a great burst of energy and activity among institutional members" (Keup, Walker, Astin, & Lindholm, 2001, P 4).

Wanberg and Banas (2000) suggest that the enlistment of employee participation and input in the change process increases performance and commitment, and reduces resistance to change. The preceding supports the argument that employee participation is a central component in the buy-in process for a

change initiative. However, it does not determine "why" this is the case. Although the result of the study is interesting, it does not indicate whether the individual's personality was a contributory factor explaining why the employee preferred to participate in such initiatives. It is likely that the participants fell within certain personality characteristics, which could explain their need for involvement, which is correlated to a high level of employee buy-in and commitment to change.

Nord and Jermier (1994) argue that "resistance" is often used as part of an agenda that could overshadow employees' actual reason for objecting to change. Nord and Jermier (1994) suggest that management should not "resist resistance" and abandon the concept, but instead try to better address the employees' subjective experiences in order to obtain a more valid understanding of why the resistance has developed. Additional research regarding this topic suggests that resistance involves a collection of an employee's feelings, behaviors, and thoughts about the change. Here resistance is viewed as a multidimensional attitude towards change, comprising affective, cognitive, and behavioral components, to capture the true complexity of this phenomenon (Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2003).

Factors Affecting Employee Buy-In

All changing organizations struggle with issues related to their staff. The majority of attention in an organization is typically concerned with structure, processes, tools, measurements, policies and procedures. However, for transition to be successful, people need to "buy-in" and be committed throughout the implementation stages. Trader-Leigh (2002) argued that buy-in is comprised of several variables, some of the most prominent being beneficial, rewards, goal agreement, and capacity for additional work. Employees wanted to see at least some of their self interests being met by the change in order to buy-in to the change initiative. However, to know if these interests are being met, one must first identify what those interests are and how their employees perceive them in relation to other factors being present. A deeper understanding can be made to ensure that organizations highlight or structure their plans to align with factors their employees determine as the most valuable components to gain their full participation and buy-in.

An employee's relationship to the organization shapes his or her interpretation of its actions (Rousseau, 1995). During planned change, the quality of employment relationships plays an important role in promoting employee acceptance and involvement (Pfeffer, 1994). Organizations are beginning to understand the value of intra-organizational relationships (Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell, 1996). The quality of these complex relationships affects the overall health and well-being of the organization, but is also an underlying contributing factor to knowing the employees and understanding how they perceive the functionality of change. Managers should aim to create relationships with their managers typically feel more desire and duty to support an organizational change (Parish, Cadwallader, & Busch, 2008). Therefore, the means to success in implementing change initiatives include choosing the right strategies and effectively implementing those (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gwinner, 2005). A key to effective implementation appears to be in the understanding of an employee's internal desire (Parish et al, 2008).

By focusing on the suggests above, organizations can use this strategic knowledge to determine what is perceived as "most valuable" to their employees and structure their change strategies to encompass these desires. The strategic implementation process requires establishing a common body of strategic knowledge (Gagnon, Jansen & Michael, 2008). Strategic knowledge is a necessary precondition for effectively committing to the organization's strategic goals. Although not all knowledge gained will lead to commitment, organizations can view these circumstances about their strategic initiatives that result in a decrease of commitment and negative implications to redesign their efforts to ensure proper implementation. Gagnon, Jansen, and Judd (2008), suggest strategically committed individuals are

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predisposed to engage in strategic-supportive behavior, and development of individual commitment to strategic initiatives is likely to assist the enactment of strategic transformation.

Research Questions

This research study includes an analysis of various factors relating to personal, work barriers and the occurrence of change in order to determine if these factors have a direct correlation to an employee's acceptance of change. By understanding the underlying relationships, an organization can appropriately structure their strategies of change to better cater towards their employees in an effort to achieve successful implementation. The results will be beneficial in that the findings, regardless of the outcome, will help organizations in their implementation process for future change initiatives. A qualitative research approach is used to investigate factors affecting the acceptance of organizational change relative to the following two research questions:

Research Question 1: How does the occurrence of current changes within an individual's life describe the individual's willingness to accept organizational change?

Research Question 2: How do barriers relating to personal and work-life contribute to, or influence, the acceptance levels of an individual towards organizational change?

METHODS

Sample

The sample consisted of 20 employees at a pharmaceutical products manufacturer located within a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. The company had recently faced major organizational change throughout the entire workforce and all subsequent departments, and was therefore designated as an appropriate venue to gather participant information and responses. A probability sample selection, from selected departments, was used for selecting individuals to interviews so a wide variety of operational areas were included in the sample. The participants in the sample were selected randomly from representative departments after consultation with the office of human resources and used a probability sampling procedure within each selected representative department, thus the student used a sampling of the broader population within the organization that had experienced at least one important change within the organization. A total of 20 interviews were completed over a two month period which was appropriate given the limited resources of the interviewer/researcher. This sample size is appropriate given the exploratory nature of this research. The majority of the sample was female (55%). Level of responsibility consisted of 25% being classified as Upper Management (5 participants), 45% as Middle Management (9 participants), and 30% as Lower Management (6 participants). Age of the participants included 15% in their 20s (3 participants), 50% in their 30s (10 participants), 30% in their 40s (6 participants), and 5% in their 50s (1 participant). Participants represented a total of seven different departments, as depicted in Table 1 below.

Procedure

All interviews were conducted on the company campus of a health products manufacturer located in the Midwest that employed these participants. Each interview was held in the privacy of a reserved conference room to insure confidentiality of responses. The interview focused on collecting primary research through face-to-face, in-person interaction with the 20 consenting participants. The duration of each interview was 30-45 minutes and each interview session was tape recorded for additional analysis as needed. During the interview, the individuals were asked a standard set of questions to help gain a better understanding of their feelings towards the selected personal and work-related barriers, as well as their

rationale of why they do, or do not, accept change well, in both a work and personal setting. Interview protocol is shown in Appendix A.

TABLE 1: PROBABILITY SAMPLING – DEPARTMENTS AND NUMBER OF
PARTICIPANTS.

Departments in Sample	Participants
Generic Drug Subsidiary	3
Branded Drug Subsidiary	3
Sales Representatives	2
Finance	2
Customer Service	2
QA/QC	2
Manufacturing/Production	6
Total = 7 Departments	20 Individuals

RESULTS

Occurrence of Change

The occurrence of change can influence an individual's acceptance levels of future change. The results indicated that 100% of the participants believe that this factor in some manner plays a contributory role in how they perceive or respond to additional changes that occur (research question 1). All participants within this study had experienced at a minimum one high impact change relative to the organization, which was taken into consideration upon population and sampling selection. The more an individual experiences change, the more versatile they may be in relation to future changes. Forty percent of the participants felt that the more change an individual encounters results in a higher comfort level with managing additional change. However, an increased level of occurrences of change can also create a sense of "being overwhelmed" or cause "instability" which could lower acceptance levels of additional change, which 60% of the participants felt was most likely the case. Regardless if the results are positive or negative, the findings indicate that the occurrence of change does directly contribute to the levels of acceptance to some degree.

The participants indicated that the occurrence of changes, primarily those of high impact, heightened their awareness of other occurring changes that would not normally have played an substantial role in their lives. For example, one individual indicated that smaller occurrences of change, such as last minute scheduled activities or increased work load would not typically be stressful changes. However, given the recent activities of various changes, additional changes along with their impact level seemed to add additional unnecessary pressure. A quote from a participant illustrates this phenomenon:

"The occurrence of change does affect my acceptance level, but impact of those changes is what influences me the most. Either several medium to low impact occurrences or one high impact occurrence can play a tremendous part in how I react. I feel a combination of both occurrence and impact levels are therefore relevant."

Many of the participants had not only undergone the one high impact change that occurred companywide, but also experienced numerous other types of change and in a variety of impact levels within the last year. Details surrounding specifics to the changes were not disclosed, however, the number of occurrences of change they had undergone and the impact level associated with each change was tracked for analysis purposes. The findings from this indicate that the participant responses have a diversified experience not only in the amount of change they have encountered, but also the varying level of impact which is expected to aid in the understanding of such occurrences.

Personal and Work-Related Barriers

Barriers related to an individual's personal life, as well as barriers that are work-related, may have a significant influence on the individuals acceptance of change. Personal barriers, which included finances or relationship issues, were seen as being a substantial influence towards an individual's acceptance level regarding organizational change (research question 2). Following are several quotes from participants indicating their thoughts on these barriers:

"Personal barriers, such as financial issues or relationship issues, would influence how I accept change. The more stable my personal life, the more comfortable I would be in general which would relay to how I react to additional conflict or external situations."

"Barriers within my personal life often make dealing with change more difficult. Sometimes the simplest issues or situations can be magnified out of proportion when coupled with other emotional turbulences."

"Although I enjoy my work, my personal life takes precedence. When personal barriers are at a minimum I am able to be more open to change within the workplace. It is more likely that my personal life would affect my work than my work to affect my personal life."

"Personal barriers are more significant to me since I am more emotional involved – I have more at stake. For instance, regarding the recent downsizing, my reaction to the change was primarily led by my finances. I am fortunate to have an adequate savings which allowed me to not be as stressed over the situation compared to others that were vocal about being financially handicapped."

The participants' responses indicate that barriers pertaining to an individual's personal life has a greater impact on their level of acceptance regarding organizational change, more so than barriers related to the actual work-related change that is occurring within the workplace. Results show that the majority of the participants were influenced more by personal barriers than those that were work-related. Work-related barriers were classified into four pre-determined sections, including management, communication, involvement, and types of change. All have been discussed in previous literature and are shown to affect the implementation of successful organizational change. Of the participants used within this study, the majority viewed the type of change to be the contributing factor on how they accepted organizational change. Communication and management, which were both closely rated, seemed to be critical factors, but the style and importance of each were relative to the type of change that was being implemented.

DISCUSSION

In this study, relationships between associated factors and individual's acceptance of organizational change were analyzed. The research questions regarding the occurrence of change with personal and work-related barriers were analyzed. Bringselius (2014) suggested a framework for addressing management responses to organizational change. The findings within this qualitative analysis provide some understanding factors that may affect employee's acceptance of organizational change initiatives. There was evidence that occurrence of change impacted how participants responded to additional change.

In fact changes that occurred within the workplace, when respondents viewed their having minimal to no control, seemed to create an increase in anxiety and tension for the respondents. All respondents felt that the occurrence of change that they had recently undergone, which was defined as occurring within the last 12 months, directly affected their comfort level with change.

In addition to the occurrence of change, the participants all felt that the associated level of impact regarding these changes played a contributing factor to their acceptance of additional change. In fact, the level of impact seemed to have, in most cases, an increased concern among the participants regarding their emotional state and their level of acceptance towards change. Based on these findings, the impact level of the changes that occurred were found to be a critical factor on the individuals' comfort level regarding change, especially relating to organizational change in which they typically would have minimal control of the circumstances.

Barriers that existed within their personal lives and the workplace also created an environment that contributed to the participants' acceptance levels towards change. Overall, both personal and work-related barriers influence the levels of acceptance an individual had regarding organizational change. The findings concluded that although both were relevant, personal barriers were much more significant. Personal barriers varied amongst the participants, but were primarily related to finances and personal relationships.

Limitations

Despite the efforts put forth, there are certain limitations within the sampling process that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. The sample that was identified in this study was limited in size, referenced only one type of industry (pharmaceutical) and included participants from only one company. The population for this study was restricted to one pharmaceutical company located in a large metropolitan area that had recently undergone high impact levels of organizational change. Generalizing these exploratory results to other industries and/or companies may not necessarily be feasible. Another limitation was that the organization had undergone dramatic levels of organizational change in the form of significant downsizing within the previous year. The occurrence of this situation could lead to an overly sensitive outcome of responses and limit individuals from responding in a manner that is more reflective of their personality and feelings towards specific questions on the personality evaluation as well as during the interview. Additional studies would be beneficial to determine accuracy of their responses and to ensure consistency in analysis.

Future Research

Future studies could use these results along with additional quantitative and/or qualitative research to determine specific emotional and physical barriers that affect individuals and associate the appropriate level of impact those barriers have on the implementation of change. Additional research can also incorporate specific geographical areas or specific age categories to help determine if these factors also play a crucial role in an individual's acceptance level of change. The relationship between personal barriers and their influence on participant's acceptance of organizational change is a rich area for investigation of this topic in future studies. Results may also prove to be structured differently based on the type of organizations that the individual contributes to, such as for-profit organizations versus non-profit organizations.

Conclusion

For organizations to be successful on a long-term perspective, it is essential they determine the most effective means of implementing change amongst their employees. To combat resistance, organizations

must focus on the individualized perspective and design their change implementation efforts in a manner that is feasible. Focusing on factors relative to the occurrence and impact of change they have recently experienced, and various personal and work-related barriers, organizations can structure the framework of their change appropriately. Understanding the actual employees and implementing a strategy that fits within the organization's dynamics is necessary. By focusing on factors pertaining to the individual, an organization is more likely to increase the level of acceptance, regardless of the type of change that being implemented, and is able to effectively transition their organization for success.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How does the occurrence of current changes within an individual's life describe the individual's willingness to accept organizational change?

- How do you generally accept change in your life Personal Change and Work Change?
- Describe 1-2 changes you have experienced either within the last 12 months.
- Exploring those changes, how did you react to the change? (Interviewer to select 1-2 changes based on previous response.)
- How has that change influenced your openness of future change?
- When multiple changes are occurring in your life within a short period (3 months, 6 months, and 12 months) of time how does that affect your acceptance of additional change?

2. How do barriers relating to personal and work-life contribute to, or influence, the acceptance levels of an individual's towards organizational change?

- Do you feel that barriers within your personal life contribute to how you react to change? How has it impacted your reaction to "insert change"? (Change to be selected from previously discussed occurrence).
- Describe two personal barriers that exist within an individual's life that could their acceptance of organizational change? How do these influence their reaction to change?
- In exploring various work-related barriers regarding the implementation of organizational change, which of the following do you feel has the biggest influence towards acceptance levels? Why?
- Explain how you feel barriers influence an individual's reaction to change regarding low level changes and high level changes?
- Which do you feel plays a greater role in the acceptance of organizational change: an individual's personal barriers or work-related barriers? Why?