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READINESS FOR CHANGE: EVIDENCE FROM A STUDY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND
EDUCATION CENTERS



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Readiness for Change:
Evidence from a Study of Early Childhood Care and Education Centers*

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Abstract

This study examines factors that influence staff members' readiness for change in early childhood settings in Ireland. The introduction of a new national framework, designed to improve the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education Centers (ECCECs), has been piloted in several communities. This study measures support for this change in organizational practices using the *Organizational Change Recipients' Belief Scale* and uses correlation analysis to determine how readiness for change is linked to job satisfaction and the work environment. Results show that individual staff characteristics had little impact on support for the change, while factors related to group dynamics were significantly associated with readiness for change. Specifically, a positive work environment and greater job satisfaction were associated with a lower belief that there is a need for change, but a higher belief that the staff will be supported by management if the change is introduced.

Introduction

The role of early childhood care and education settings has recently been viewed with increasing importance. Increased urbanization has led to the separation of many parents from their extended families who were once the source of care for young children. The recognition that center-based childcare is associated with a host of positive developmental outcomes for children such as increased cognitive abilities, language development, and emotional and social development (Kagan & Neuman, 1997; NICHD, 2000; 2002; 2008; NICHD & Duncan, 2003), has led to the introduction of a new policy in Ireland which will provide every three year old child with access to a free preschool place for one year. However, in order to maximize the benefit of this provision, it is important to ensure that quality childcare services are provided. Many empirical studies have highlighted this issue. For example, Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001), find that high quality childcare has cognitive and social benefits for all children, with stronger positive effects identified for disadvantaged children. Similarly, Vandell, Henderson, and Wilson (1988) demonstrate that children who attend poorer quality childcare show more problematic development and that these problems persist into later childhood.

Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of this new preschool initiative, the participating Irish early childhood care and education centers (ECCECs) must engage in a program to improve childcare quality standards. This has led to the development of The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (NQF). This study examines the individual and organizational factors that influence staff readiness to implement the new national framework in the ECCECs located in the NQF pilot communities. It is one of the first empirical studies to use the Organizational Change and Recipients' Belief Scale (Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007) to measure staff readiness for change.

The article proceeds as follows. Details of the new national quality framework are first set out before discussing the organizational change literature. When the relevance of the theory has been established, the data used in this analysis is presented along with descriptions of the specific

instruments employed. The empirical results are then reported and the implications of these results are discussed. Finally, we provide recommendations as to how staff readiness for change can be improved. These recommendations are relevant not only to Irish ECCECs, but also to other organizations implementing major workplace changes.

The New National Quality Framework

The NQF details the first national set of best practice standards for early childhood care and education in Ireland. It aims to improve the quality of ECCECs, which work with children between the ages of 0 and 6 years. Starting in January, 2010, the framework will be rolled out across the country to coincide with the free preschool initiative. Prior to the introduction of this new initiative, the implementation of the NQF was piloted in several disadvantaged areas of Ireland. The sample examined in this study comprises employees of the ECCECs located in one such community.

There are three stages to the implementation of the NQF: (1) registration, (2) baseline assessment and evidence collection, and (3) validation. First, an ECCEC must register with the NQF coordinators. This involves expressing an interest in the framework and learning what the implementation process involves. The second step consists of a baseline assessment, action planning, and an evidence collection period. The self-assessment is carried out with the NQF coordinator. During this process, participants are asked to reflect on the practices of their center in relation to the 16 quality standards.ⁱ To facilitate the self assessment, these standards are broken down into open-ended questions to entice thoughtful discussion on the quality of individual and center work. Center staff reflect on each of the standards, as a group, and rate the level of quality practice in their center.

Upon completion of the baseline assessment, the center works with the NQF coordinator to produce an action plan. This involves gathering evidence in support of the self-assessment, identifying a timeline for meeting the NQF standards, and describing the work that will take place over a fixed period of time limited to a maximum of 18 months. Once the developmental work

has been carried out, ECCECs review the self-assessment tool and portfolio of evidence. At this stage, improvements relating to all 16 NQF standards should have been completed by the center.

The final stage of the NQF process is validation. During this phase, the baseline self-assessment tool and portfolio are submitted and a blind, external validator re-evaluates the quality level in the center. A decision is then made as to whether or not the center has achieved the desired level of quality outlined in the submitted portfolio. If the desired level of quality has been achieved, a quality rating, valid for a two-year period, is given to the center.

The implementation of this new framework could potentially lead to a significant change of practice for some or all of the participating centers. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, the implementation of this framework is analyzed in the context of an organizational change.

Relevance of Organizational Change Theory

Organizational change is a major source of workplace stress and can be associated with a wide range of negative behavioral, psychological, and physiological outcomes including job loss, reduced status, loss of identity, interpersonal conflict, threats to self esteem, reduced well being, anxiety, and uncertainty (Ashford, 1988; Kanter, 1983; Martin, Jones, & Callan, 2005; Schweiger & Ivancevich, 1985; Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996). Readiness for change can be viewed as the precursor for later support or resistance (Bouckenooghe & Devos, 2007). The significance of staff acceptance of organizational change is widely recognized (e.g., Gilmore & Barnett, 1992; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1994) as employee resistance can slow or prevent the success of a new program (Leiter & Harvie, 1998). Therefore, it is important understand the factors that influence staff readiness for change in the first instance.

The aim of this analysis is to capture the factors that may influence employee support for the transition to the national quality framework in the ECCECs and, hence, its subsequent success. Contextual factors that may influence employee acceptance of such transitions are discussed below.

Contextual Factors

In a study of childcare nurseries, Munton, Mooney, & Rowland (1997) suggest that organizational characteristics can influence a center's ability to change their practices. Evidence shows that factors such as participatory management styles, employee involvement in decision-making, and established procedures for self assessment (Jorde-Bloom, 1995; Stephens & Wilkinson, 1995) are often influential in the success of facilitating organizational changes. Munton & Mooney (1999) summarize the empirical evidence by stating that staff are least supportive of change when they perceive their workplace as one that avoids taking risks, has low management support, is predominantly authoritarian, discourages participation in management decisions, has low in integration, and is intolerant of conflict.

Many authors emphasize the importance of a perceived need for change among employees. This belief is unrelated to the specific solution proposed by management and, therefore, it can be viewed as the "burning platform" (Armenakis et al., 2007) or the antecedent of change (Taylor, Templeton, & Baker, 2009). As Kotter (1995) explains, establishing this sense of urgency is essential because without motivation, staff members are unlikely to support any proposed change. Thus, clear communication of the need for change is important. Kotter (1995) quotes one CEO describing management's role as convincing staff that "the status quo is more dangerous than launching into the unknown." However, the perceived need for change is not enough in itself; beliefs related to the implementation of the proposed program must be fostered for the organizational change to be fully supported (Armenakis et al., 2007).

Another key factor which can facilitate organizational change is effective supervision. Shipper (1991) shows that it is correlated with higher morale and productivity in staff undergoing an organizational change. Walinga (2008) highlights that encouraging staff of their capability to adapt would lead to a more efficient transition. The author identifies the notion of emotion-focused coping, which arises when an individual feels overwhelmed by a challenge and, as a consequence, directs all his or her attention to controlling stress-levels. On the other hand,

problem-focused coping occurs when an individual has strong self-efficacy beliefs and can direct all his or her abilities towards problem solving.

Effective communication is also important for staff morale and change acceptance. For example, a retrospective study of over 3,000 hospital staff, whose working environment underwent significant change and restructuring, found that supportive supervision, confidence in management, and effective communication were associated with a positive perception of change. Furthermore, confidence in management and effective communication were both directly linked to an acceptance of change (Leiter & Harvie, 1998).

Although supportive management plays an important role in securing employee support for a program of change, this does not imply that staff want a passive role in the organization. Sagie and Koslowsky (1994) show that greater staff involvement in tactical decision-making during planned organizational change is associated with an increased acceptance of change, work satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of the change. This importance of staff involvement is reinforced by Rodd (1994) who finds that change is less likely to be successful when staff feel that they have little ownership of ideas and that change is imposed from above. In other words, organizations need to examine their staff protocol from both the top-down and bottom-up in order to find the correct balance between effective supervision and employee autonomy.

Method

Procedure

Prior to the national roll-out, the NQF was piloted in several communities in Ireland. As part of the evaluation of the NQF implementation process in these communities, a study assessing readiness to implement the NQF among the centers was developed. Questionnaires assessing basic demographics, knowledge of the NQF, readiness for the organizational change, job satisfaction, and the work environment were administered to all staff working in ECCECs participating in the pilot NQF communities between February and June, 2009. This was after

each center had registered to adopt the new standards, but before the staff began to engage in the transition process.

Participants

In total, 120 staff, across 9 centers, completed a paper and pencil questionnaire, resulting in a high response rate.ⁱⁱ As this organizational change is related to early childhood carers, job descriptions that did not involve direct involvement with children on a regular basis ($n=16$; e.g., bus driver, kitchen staff, receptionist) were excluded from the analyses. Therefore, the results reported below are based on the responses of 104 respondents.

The survey contained several questions related to the basic demographics of respondents, their time spent working in the centre, and their professional role. Overall, 38% of respondents work more than 35 hours per week, 44% work between 20 to 35 hours per week, and 18% of respondents are employed part time, working between 10 and 19 hours per week. The average age of respondents was 37 ($SD = 10.55$) years, with a range of 20 years to 64 years of age. All respondents, bar one, were female. On average, respondents had been working in the field of early childhood care and education for 8 ($SD = 7.23$) years, had been in their current centre for 5 ($SD = 4.35$) years, and in their current role at the centre for 4 ($SD = 5.03$) years.

In terms of education, 45% of respondents had the equivalent of a junior high school education or lower (i.e., Junior Certificate or lower in Ireland). Additionally, 6% dropped out before completing high school, 10% had the equivalent of a high school education (i.e., Leaving Certificate in Ireland) and 26% had a non degree qualification, 10% had a primary degree, and 3% had a postgraduate qualification.

Knowledge of NQF and Perceptions of Success

Staff members were asked to assess their knowledge of the NQF on 5 point scale ranging from “I do not know anything” to knowing “a large amount of information.” Respondents also predicted how successful their center would be at implementing the change by answering “yes,”

“no,” or “don’t know” when asked “Do you think your center will be successful at reaching the NQF standards?”

Instruments

The study was developed and conducted under the theoretical framework of Readiness for Change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). Standardized measures were used to assess readiness for change and factors related to organizational change such as work environment and job satisfaction. The rationale underlying each of these instruments is described in detail below.

Readiness for Change.

Readiness for change was assessed using the *Organizational Change Recipients’ Belief Scale* (OCRBS; Armenakis et al., 2007). Respondents were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with each statement on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” This scale provides scores in five domains. *Discrepancy* (4 items; $\alpha=.87$) refers to employees’ beliefs on whether the need for change is present in the center, *appropriateness* (5 items; $\alpha=.87$) measures whether the proposed change addresses the needs of the center, *efficacy* (5 items; $\alpha=.83$) represents the capacity of the organization to implement the change, *principal support* (6 items, $\alpha=.80$) refers to the effectiveness of management in the center, and *valence* (4 items, $\alpha=.63$) is defined as the appeal of the perceived benefit of the change. The OCRBS also yields an *overall readiness for change* score (24 items, $\alpha=.91$) which represents the respondents overall readiness for the proposed change and is an average of all domains described above.

For accuracy, scores were only calculated for domains in which at least 50% of the items within that domain were completed. Scores for each domain range from 1 to 7 and represent the mean of responses for that category. Higher scores are indicative of a stronger belief that the center is ready for the transition.

Work Environment.

The work environment operating at the center was assessed using an adapted version of the *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* (Jorde-Bloom, 1996). This is a measure of childcare center employees' feelings about their work surroundings. Respondents were asked to select items that characterize their center. This instrument provides scores related to *collegiality*, *professional growth*, *supervisor support*, *clarity*, *decision making*, *goal consensus*, *task orientation*, *physical setting*, and *innovativeness* within the center. Scores are reported on a scale of 0 to 10 with higher scores representing a more positive organizational climate.

This instrument also assessed the amount of influence staff currently have in relation to various aspects of the center, compared with the level of influence that they desire in the domains of *ordering materials*, *interviewing*, *program objectives*, *training* and *planning*. The total score for these categories ranges from 0 to 10 with higher numbers representing a greater amount of influence.

In order to analyze the relationship between employee influence and readiness for change, the difference between the current influence rating and the desired influence rating was calculated for each of the categories. The average of these five measures was also generated to gauge the overall disparity for each participant.

Job Satisfaction.

Global job satisfaction of center staff was measured using the following question: "On the whole, how satisfied would you say you are with your current job?" Responses were provided on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from "Very Dissatisfied" to "Very Satisfied."

The *Job Satisfaction Scale* (Andrews & Withey, 1976) was used to assess employee satisfaction with several specific components of the job. The instrument consists of five items in which the respondent rates his or her happiness in relation to aspects of his or her job including the *job* itself, the *colleagues*, the *work* the respondent does on the job, the *employment setting*,

and *available resources*. Respondents rate these items on a scale ranging from “Terrible” to “Delighted.” All scores related to job satisfaction are presented on a scale of 1 to 7 with higher scores illustrating higher job satisfaction.

Resultsⁱⁱⁱ

Knowledge of the NQF and Perceptions of Success

On average, respondents felt that they know “a little bit” about the new quality framework as reflected in the mean score of 3 out of 5, as illustrated in Table 1. The majority (89%) of staff indicated that their center would be successful at meeting the new standards. This level of confidence is consistent with the strong sense of readiness for change that was determined using the OCRBS instrument.

Readiness for Change^{iv}

Table 1 reports the mean readiness for change scores in each of the OCBRS domains. Scores are high across all domains, indicating that employees in the ECCECs are ready for the introduction of the new framework. Efficacy received the highest rating suggesting that center staff feel most confident in their center’s ability to implement the change. The lowest score was in the valence domain such that the anticipated benefit of introducing the new standards was not as strongly felt as the other drivers of change. Overall readiness for change was rated 5.7 out of 7, suggesting that on the whole, staff feel they are ready for the transition.

Table 1
Key Instruments

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Knowledge of Change</i>					
NQF Knowledge	99	3.07	0.90	1.00	5.00
<i>OCRBS</i>					
Discrepancy	103	5.28	1.21	2.00	7.00
Appropriateness	103	5.99	0.82	2.25	7.00
Efficacy	103	6.18	0.62	4.00	7.00
Principal Support	103	5.86	0.83	2.67	7.00
Valence	103	4.93	0.89	1.50	7.00
Overall OCRBS	103	5.70	0.61	3.79	6.87
<i>Work Environment</i>					
Collegiality	104	7.51	2.29	0	10
Professional Growth	104	5.14	2.67	0	10
Supervisor Support	104	7.49	2.00	0	10
Clarity	104	5.94	2.59	0	10
Decision Making	104	6.52	2.19	0	10
Goal Consensus	104	7.24	2.31	2	10
Task Orientation	104	7.44	2.09	1	10
Physical Setting	104	6.79	2.44	1	10
Innovativeness	104	7.07	1.92	2	10
<i>Influence Disparity</i>					
Ordering Materials	98	2.55	4.20	-10	10
Interviewing	89	2.42	3.46	-10	10
Program Objectives	79	2.22	3.65	-10	10
Training	90	1.11	4.02	-10	10
Planning	99	0.40	2.83	-10	10
Overall Disparity	75	1.77	2.33	-4	8
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>					
Global Satisfaction	97	6.28	0.93	2	7
Job	103	6.18	1.02	4	7
Colleagues	103	6.28	0.93	3	7
Work	103	6.30	0.70	4	7
Employment Setting	102	5.90	1.01	2	7
Available Resources	102	5.77	1.23	1	7

Work Environment

Mean ratings for each of the nine work environment domains are presented in Table 1. Overall, staff of the ECCECs rate all categories positively, with mean scores ranging between 5.1 and 7.5 out of 10. Collegiality and supervisor support received the highest scores, while professional growth received the lowest.

Figure 1 below compares the respondents' current level of influence to their desired level of influence, with respect to workplace decisions. These values represent the averages for all respondents. As demonstrated, significance tests^v reveal that staff members wish to be more involved in ordering materials ($z = -5.49, p < .001$), interviewing potential staff members ($z = -5.76, p < .001$), determining program objectives ($t(78) = -5.40, p < .001$), and training opportunities ($z = -2.64, p < .01$). A difference between staff members' current and desired influence in the domain of planning was observed at the trend level ($z = -1.67, p < .10$). This suggests that there is less evidence that staff are dissatisfied with their level of involvement in this aspect of center management.

The mean values for the influence disparity measures, presented in Table 1, are consistent with these results. On average, the difference between current and desired influence was positive for all categories which, again, indicates that staff desire more influence than they currently have. The magnitude of the difference was highest for *ordering materials* (2.55) and lowest for *planning* (0.40).

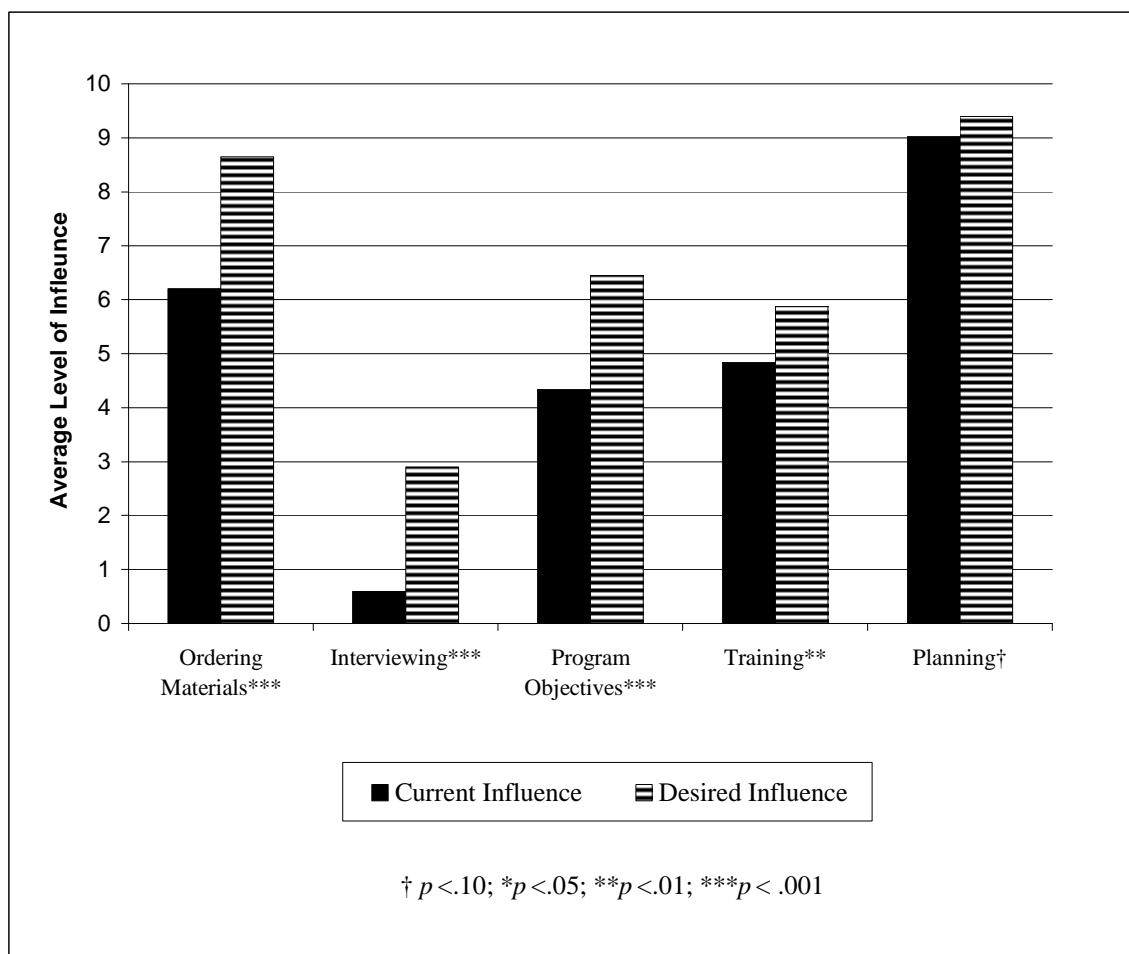


Figure 1. Current and Desired Influence in Decision Making
 This figure illustrates the difference between staff members’ current and desired influence in various aspects of the organization.

Job Satisfaction

Mean job satisfaction ratings are reported in Table 1. All scores ranged between 5.77 and 6.3, which is high given that the maximum rating is 7. Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that global job satisfaction, which measures how satisfied staff were with their jobs on the whole, received a mean score of 6.28 which lies between the “satisfied” and “very satisfied” response options.

In terms of more specific aspects of job satisfaction, respondents felt happiest with their work, their colleagues, and the job itself, with mean scores on these domains corresponding to

rating between the “pleased” and “delighted” response options. Although the employment setting and available resources were rated lowest, the mean scores were still high and indicative of a “mostly satisfied” response.

Relationship between OCRBS, Individual Characteristics, Work Environment, Job Satisfaction and Employee Influence

Organizational change theory suggests that readiness for change may be influenced by work environment and staff job satisfaction. Due to the small sample size of the data, linear multiple regression could not be used for statistical analysis. Therefore, Spearman Rho non-parametric correlation testing was applied to examine relationships between the OCBRS and individual characteristics, work environment, and job satisfaction. Correlation coefficients presented in Table 2 show that the majority of individual staff characteristics are not associated with perceived readiness for change. However, several significant associations emerged between the OCRBS domains and factors related to job satisfaction and the center itself. It is important to note, however, that although several significant relationships emerged, the magnitude of such correlation coefficients is small (between 0.16-0.45).

Table 2
Correlation coefficients between OCBRS scales and individual characteristics, work environment factors, and job satisfaction

	Discrepancy	Appropriateness	Efficacy	Principal Support	Valence	Overall
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>						
Age	-0.03	0.11	0.14	0.08	0.05	0.09
Education	0.00	-0.13	0.04	-0.16	-0.25*	-0.14
Yrs. in Early Childhood	0.09	-0.04	0.03	-0.16 [†]	-0.05	-0.03
Years in Center	0.07	0.02	0.11	-0.10	-0.07	0.02
Years in Current Role	0.04	0.04	0.13	-0.16	-0.06	-0.02
NQF Knowledge	0.14	0.19 [†]	0.24*	0.02	0.08	0.13
<i>Work Environment Factors</i>						
Collegiality	-0.36***	0.02	0.14	0.22*	-0.07	-0.02
Professional Growth	-0.10	0.20*	0.20*	0.40***	0.02	0.18 [†]
Supervisor Support	-0.25**	0.08	0.12	0.43***	0.13	0.12
Clarity	-0.16	0.13	0.22*	0.33***	0.17 [†]	0.14
Decision Making	-0.20*	0.08	0.18 [†]	0.40***	0.15	0.16
Goal Consensus	-0.32**	0.06	0.18 [†]	0.39***	0.02	0.08
Task Orientation	-0.44***	-0.03	-0.01	0.31**	-0.10	-0.06
Physical Setting	-0.38***	0.00	0.07	0.24*	0.02	-0.04
Innovativeness	-0.39***	0.03	0.16	0.27**	-0.21*	-0.04
<i>Desired - Current Influence</i>						
Overall Difference	0.32**	0.10	0.13	-0.25*	0.02	0.10
Ordering Materials	0.28**	0.00	-0.03	-0.32**	-0.05	-0.01
Interviewing	0.05	-0.05	0.08	-0.11	-0.03	-0.06
Program Objectives	0.42***	0.10	0.10	-0.14	0.02	0.18
Training	0.17	0.04	0.05	-0.10	-0.01	0.04
Planning	0.17 [†]	0.06	-0.01	-0.21*	0.07	0.00
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>						
Global Satisfaction	-0.24*	0.18 [†]	0.09	0.36***	0.07	0.14
Job	-0.04	0.29**	0.25*	0.34***	0.34***	0.33***
Colleagues	-0.10	0.12	0.20*	0.27**	0.07	0.17 [†]
Work	0.03	0.32**	0.36***	0.25*	0.22*	0.30**
Employment Setting	-0.17 [†]	0.19 [†]	0.15	0.45***	0.07	0.18 [†]
Available Resources	-0.18 [†]	0.15	0.15	0.43***	0.20*	0.20*

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

OCBRS: Discrepancy.

No significant relationships emerged between the discrepancy belief domain and individual characteristics of staff. However, there is a negative correlation between discrepancy and seven of the nine work environment categories. Specifically, there are negative relationships between discrepancy and collegiality ($r = -.36, p < .001$), supervisor support ($r = -.25, p < .01$),

decision making ($r = -.20, p < .05$), goal consensus ($r = -.32, p < .01$), task orientation ($r = -.44, p < .001$), physical setting ($r = -.38, p < .001$), and innovativeness ($r = -.39, p < .001$).

The discrepancy domain was positively related to variables measuring the disparity between current and desired influence. Results indicate that staff who desire more influence in the ordering materials ($r = .28, p < .01$), program objectives ($r = .42, p < .001$), and planning categories ($r = .17, p < .10$) have a stronger belief that a change is needed. Furthermore, the overall disparity average was positively and significantly correlated with the discrepancy belief ($r = .32, p < .01$).

Several relationships also emerged between the OCRBS discrepancy domain and various aspects of job satisfaction. The belief that a change is needed was negatively associated with global job satisfaction ($r = -.24, p < .05$), the employment setting ($r = -.17, p < .10$) and available resources ($r = -.18, p < .10$).

OCRBS: Appropriateness.

The perceived appropriateness of the NQF was not significantly associated with any of the individual characteristics. With respect to knowledge about the NQF, there is a trend suggesting that staff who felt well informed about what the transition involved believed that the NQF was appropriate for their center ($r = .19, p < .10$).

In terms of the work environment, one significant relationship emerged. Specifically, perceived appropriateness of the change was positively associated with professional growth ($r = .20, p < .05$). No significant associations with influence disparity measures were found.

Two categories related to job satisfaction were positively associated with appropriateness: the job itself ($r = .29, p < .01$) and the work one does on the job ($r = .32, p < .01$). Additionally, trends suggest positive relationships between the appropriateness belief and both global job satisfaction ($r = .18, p < .10$) and the employment setting ($r = .19, p < .10$).

OCRBS: Efficacy.

As in the previous OCRBS domains, the relationship between personal characteristics of early childcare staff and efficacy beliefs was not statistically significant. A positive relationship was identified between the respondents' level of knowledge about the NQF and their confidence that the change can be implemented successfully ($r = .24, p < .05$).

There also is evidence that self-rated efficacy is related to work-specific factors. Results show that those who are happy with their work environment anticipate that their center will undergo the transition successfully. Specifically, professional growth ($r = .20, p < .05$) and clarity ($r = .22, p < .05$) are significantly and related to the efficacy domain. Additionally, trends reveal positive relationships between the OCRBS domain of efficacy and both decision-making ($r = .18, p < .10$) and goal consensus ($r = .18, p < .10$).

With respect to employees' involvement in work place decisions, the disparity between current and desired level of influence was not significantly correlated with staff confidence in the center's ability to make a successful transition.

Job satisfaction is associated with higher perceptions of efficacy. The results indicate that those who are happier with their current job ($r = .25, p < .05$), their colleagues ($r = .20, p < .05$), and the work they do on their job ($r = .36, p < .001$) have a stronger belief that the organizational change can be successfully implemented in their center.

OCRBS: Principal Support.

Trends show a negative relationship between principal support and the number of years of experience in the early childhood setting ($r = -.16, p < .10$). All work environment factors were positively correlated with the principal support measure. Specifically the association was precisely determined for collegiality ($r = .22, p < .05$), professional growth ($r = .40, p < .001$), supervisor support ($r = .43, p < .001$), clarity ($r = .33, p < .001$), decision making ($r = .40, p <$

.001), goal consensus ($r = .39, p < .001$), task orientation ($r = .31, p < .01$), physical setting ($r = .24, p < .05$), and innovativeness ($r = .27, p < .01$).

Three of the influence disparity measures were negatively and significantly associated with principal support. Specifically, those who desire more influence than they currently have in the ordering of materials ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and planning aspect of the center ($r = -.21, p < .05$) have less confidence in management supportiveness. The overall disparity ($r = -.25, p < .05$) measure was also negatively correlated with the principal support belief domain.

All of the job satisfaction measures were positively correlated with the principal support measure. The more satisfied staff are with their job ($r = .34, p < .001$), their colleagues ($r = .27, p < 0.01$), the work they do on the job ($r = .25, p < .05$), the employment setting ($r = .45, p < .001$), and the available resources in the center ($r = .43, p < .001$), the higher they rate the support they receive from management in the ECCEC.

OCBRS: Valence.

The OCBRS valence domain was negatively correlated with the respondents' level of education ($r = -.25, p < .05$) suggesting that respondents with higher levels of education perceive the outcome associated with the new framework to be less attractive than those with lower levels of education.

In terms of the work environment factors, a negative relationship was present between innovativeness and valence ($r = -.21, p < .05$). Trends also suggest a positive relationship between clarity and valence ($r = .17, p < .10$), illustrating that respondents who feel that the center objectives are clearly laid out are more likely to anticipate a positive outcome from the implementation of the NQF. The valence domain was also positively related to respondents' satisfaction with the job itself ($r = .34, p < .001$), the work ($r = .22, p < .05$) and the available resources on the job ($r = .20, p < .05$).

OCRBS: Overall Readiness for Change.

The results from correlation analysis indicate that overall readiness for change is not associated with any of the staff demographic variables. Also, with respect to the work environment categories, professional growth was the only factor that was correlated with the overall measure ($r = .18, p < .10$) at a trend level. Although the relationship was positive, the magnitude of the correlation coefficient was not as precisely determined as some of the other measures. Similarly, no significant associations with the influence disparity measures emerged.

All of the job satisfaction scale categories were positively and significantly related to overall readiness for change as measured by the OCRBS. Specifically, the job itself ($r = .33, p < .001$), the work the respondent does on the job ($r = .30, p < .01$), the available resources in the workplace ($r = .20, p < .05$), the employment setting ($r = .18, p < .10$), and satisfaction with colleagues ($r = .17, p < .10$) were all correlated with overall readiness for change. Together, these findings suggest that the more satisfied employees are with all aspects of their job, the more supportive they are of the proposed program of change.

Discussion

Overall staff members in the ECCECs appear happy with their current careers and the proposed implementation of the NQF. They rated all aspects of their work environment highly and conveyed satisfaction with their roles in the center. Yet, there is room for improvement in relation to how well-informed staff members are about the NQF and the level of responsibility they are granted. Specifically, Table 1 shows that, on average, staff indicated that they knew only “a little bit” about the NQF while Figure 2 illustrates that staff would like to have more influence in decisions made within their center. Nevertheless, scores for the OCRBS measures indicate that staff are ready for the transition. As highlighted in Table 2, precisely determined relationships emerged between work conditions and readiness for change. Therefore, although the majority of

respondents rated themselves as ready for change to some extent, the *strength* of their belief is dependent on center-specific factors such as collegiality, innovativeness and job satisfaction.

Individual Characteristics

Previous reports assessing readiness for change in schools found that teachers felt that the change had to be embraced by the organization (Walsh & Gardner, 2006), which suggests that individual characteristics may be less important than group or center characteristics throughout the process of an organizational change. The findings from this study reinforce this theory. Overall, staff members' personal characteristics had little impact on readiness for organizational change. There were two exceptions. Firstly, the principal support domain and years of experience in an early childhood environment were inversely related. This, perhaps, points to a certain level of frustration with management that may develop over time. This relationship, however, was only determined at the 10% significance level.

There was also a negative and precisely determined correlation between the educational level of the respondent and the valence belief domain. One plausible explanation for this may be that items within this domain are particularly focused on the individual (i.e., "This change will benefit me," "I will earn higher pay from my job after this change"). The focus is on the benefit for the individual rather than the rewards for the center as a whole. Those with lower education may feel that the experience of working under a recognized national framework could be beneficial for their careers; while those who have well-established qualifications already have a means by which to signal their ability. Each of the other readiness for change domains, however, focus on the center rather than the individual, which might explain the lack of highly significant relationships between personal characteristics and the discrepancy, appropriateness, principal support, efficacy, and overall readiness for change domains.

Knowledge of the Program

It is important to note that the survey was administered after the ECCEC had indicated they wanted to participate in the NQF, but before the developmental work associated with the framework began. Therefore, due to the timing of the survey, it is not surprising that few respondents indicated that they knew a great deal about the framework.

Although respondents did not indicate a high level of knowledge about the NQF, the vast majority (89%) indicated that their center would be successful at making the transition. The correlation results echoed the finding that knowledge of the framework had no effect on overall readiness for change. However, the strength of belief in the appropriateness and efficacy domains was associated with greater awareness of the NQF. The appropriateness result is intuitive, as it is likely that the true relevance of the NQF only becomes apparent when the center starts implementing the change. The positive association between efficacy and knowledge may result as greater knowledge about the change may provide staff with the belief that they are capable of adapting to it. When staff members know little about what to expect in the transition process, the idea of “meeting new standards” may appear more daunting. Ensuring that staff are informed of the upcoming change and reasons for the change may prove beneficial for the uptake and implementation of the framework at a national level. Other research, in which focus group methods were used, revealed that although teachers may agree with a proposed change, they often feel they have minimal resources and not enough training to be fully ready for it (Walsh & Gardner, 2006). Therefore, it is important to inform staff of what the transition to the NQF will involve and bolster confidence that management will be supportive throughout the change.

Work Environment and Job Satisfaction

Several small to moderate significant correlations emerged between the readiness for change domains and work specific factors. Table 2 identified two definite patterns including a negative correlation between discrepancy and working conditions, and positive associations between the principal support and work-specific variables. Staff who rate their work environment positively and are satisfied in their jobs are less likely to believe that there is a need for the NQF in their center, however, they generally believe that they will be supported by the management in the introduction of the change.

It is important to view these correlations in conjunction with the OCRBS descriptive statistics presented in Table 1. The mean score across all OCRBS domains was high, indicating that there is belief among staff that the center is ready for change. However, the correlation coefficients presented in Table 2 show that the strength of such a belief is related to certain individual and center factors. For example, the Spearman Rho results imply that although there is a strong belief that a discrepancy, or need for the change, exists among staff members, this sense of urgency actually decreases with improved working conditions and job satisfaction. Conversely, it increases when staff desire more influence in the running of their center. A possible explanation for this is that negative sentiments could be attached to some of the discrepancy domain items, such as “we need to improve the way we operate in this organization.” Those that enjoy their work and are content with their positions are less likely to agree with such statements. Similarly, employees believe, on average, that management will be supportive during the transition process; however the strength of this belief was positively correlated with all work environment and job satisfaction measures. Also, it was found to decrease when there is a greater disparity between desired and current influence. This reinforces the evidence from other studies which show that successful transitions are more likely to occur in organizations that adopt bottom-up approaches which encourage staff participation (Rodd, 1994; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1994).

For the appropriateness, efficacy, and valence belief domains the significant relationships were more varied. All of the significant correlation coefficients in the work environment and job satisfaction categories were positive, with one exception which is discussed below. These positive correlations correspond to the existing theory that support for organizational change increases with management support and effective communication (Leiter & Harvie, 1998; Shipper, 1991; Walinga, 2008).

Therefore, although the need for change is more apparent in ECCECs where workers feel less satisfied, these results suggest that support for the change is associated with employees that are happy in their jobs. Perhaps the discrepancy belief is not the foundation necessary to motivate staff to support the transition, as Armenakis et al. (2007) suggest, but rather a complimentary idea. The results point towards the possibility that staff members who feel that organizational change is unnecessary in their center may, at the same time, be happy with the transition proposed and feel that they will have adequate support throughout the change process.

The exception mentioned above was found in the relationship between innovativeness and the valence domain of the Organizational Change Recipients' Belief Scale. This result suggests that staff who feel that they are encouraged to be creative in their work perceive a less appealing outcome will result from implementing the NQF. It is possible that staff are worried that a more rigid framework will stifle their freedom to develop ideas of their own.

Limitations

While several interesting findings related to perceptions and beliefs about the implementation of the NQF have emerged from this study, several limitations are present. First, the small nature of the sample has implications in regards the statistical analysis. Traditional statistical methods, such as linear regression, work under the assumption of large sample sizes and therefore the analyses in this study are limited to correlations. These correlations are indicative of underlying relationships that may exist between two factors. However, one must be cautious not to interpret this as causality. An additional constraint associated with small samples

is reduced variation in the responses recorded for each question. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to find definite trends in the data. Also, within-center analysis becomes difficult as separating the results for each ECCEC would make them potentially identifiable, thus breaching confidentiality. It is important to note, however, that the average scores across all readiness for change measures were similar for each center and therefore, it was deemed appropriate to run the analysis across the entire sample of ECCECs.

Conclusion

This study examined staff readiness for change in early childhood care and education centers (ECCECs) in Ireland. It is particularly relevant that the study was conducted in disadvantaged communities as research shows that high-quality childcare is most effective for children from low-income backgrounds with a high risk of family adversity (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Vandell et al., 1988). The implementation of this new quality framework program in the local early childhood settings may therefore have important long-term consequences if implemented with fidelity.

As the successful implementation of the framework is dependent on the readiness of the staff to engage and support the change, this study sought to identify the factors that may be correlated with readiness for change, such as individual staff characteristics, the work environment and the level of job satisfaction experienced by the staff working at ECCECs. By identifying factors that may facilitate the successful implementation of the NQF during this pilot phase, it is hoped that policy makers and management in the ECCECs will be aware of initiatives to ease the transition process in the future. Thus, insight into the policies that ensure the successful implementation of the NQF will result in higher quality preschool care and education centers in Ireland. The results may also hold relevance for other forms of organizations undergoing large workplace changes and contributes to the general literature on readiness for change.

First, the results highlight the importance of effective communication. Staff with a greater knowledge of the NQF had more positive beliefs that the center had the capacity to implement the change. A clear means to improve staff readiness for change is therefore to simply inform staff of what the change will involve. Launching into an unknown process is a much more daunting task and, hence, may cause more confusion and distraction (Walinga, 2008).

It is also important to communicate to staff that change will not have an adverse effect on their current working conditions. The results indicate that staff who are happy in their work environment are less likely to recognize a need for change. Perhaps this is due to what Cameron (2008) refers to as the paradox of positive change. He describes the paradox as thus: although humans are drawn to positive rather than negative situations, they react more strongly to negative stimuli. Therefore, if the managers and those implementing the NQFs highlight some of the faults in the current system, staff may be more inclined to support the transition.

Another key implication of the change is that it may have differing effects on staff depending on their level of education. The results indicate that less educated employees anticipate more potential benefits from adapting to the new framework. Therefore, prior to the national roll-out, it may be useful to focus on the higher educated workers and highlight, to them, the value of working under the NQF. One potential benefit is that the introduction of national standards will allow childcare workers to transfer more easily from center to center, and this in turn, makes ECCECs workers more employable.

Finally, it is important for centers to examine their organization style from both a top-down and bottom-up perspective. Clearly, employees desire strong management that will provide help and support during the adaptation phase. On the other hand, authoritarian styles are likely to have a diminishing effect on staff belief in the togetherness and efficacy of the center. The challenge for ECCECs will be in striking the correct balance between employee independence and guidance.

It is widely accepted that introducing change to an organization can cause disruption. Rather than focusing on the outcomes of change, the findings from this study give insight into the factors that influence initial support for a change of practice. Readiness for change has been shown to be the “cognitive precursor” to behaviors of resistance or support (Bouckenooghe & Devos, 2007). This study reports some of the first empirical results using the Organizational Change and Recipients’ Belief Scale (Armenakis et al., 2007) and, therefore, adds to the organizational change knowledge base. The parameters that are crucial for initial employee support have been described in detail and these are, consequently, the crucial building blocks in the foundation for successful organizational change.

NOTES

ⁱ The sixteen Síolta standards are: Rights of the Child, Environments, Parents and Families, Consultation, Interactions, Play, Curriculum, Planning and Evaluation, Health and Welfare, Organisation, Professional Practice, Communication, Transitions, Identity and Belonging, Legislation and Regulation, and Community Involvement.

ⁱⁱ The response rate for questionnaires completed by centre staff could not be calculated as the exact number of questionnaires distributed to each early childhood care and education centre is unknown. However, the response rate is likely to be quite high (>90%) based on the number of staff employed in the centres.

ⁱⁱⁱ The responses from staff in all centers were aggregated in the analyses to ensure confidentiality of the centers and to guarantee that the responses of employees at any one center could not be identified. Due to the varying number of staff working at each center, all analyses were conducted with and without using frequency weights. As there were no major differences across both sets of results, the unweighted analyses are presented here.

^{iv} The skewness and kurtosis test was applied to each measure to test for evidence of normality in all domains. Results indicate that all six domains are non-normal, therefore non-parametric analyses were used in all tests related to the OCBRS.

^v Wilcoxon rank-sum tests and t-tests were applied. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test was used for all domains with non-normal distributions (*ordering materials, interviewing, training, and planning*). The *program objectives* domain was normally distributed and therefore a t-test was used to identify any significant differences. For each variable, the skewness and kurtosis test was used to determine whether the normality hypothesis should be rejected.

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