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Employee Perceptions Regarding an Organizational Change Initiative in a State Wildlife Agency

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Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA; Department of Fisheries & Wildlife, Michigan State University East Lansing, Michigan, USA; Michigan Department of Natural Resources Lansing, Michigan, USA

ABSTRACT
Strategic planning is a common pathway used by state wildlife agencies to adapt to financial constraints and changing societal needs; both are accelerating developments. Yet evaluations of organizational change because of strategic planning, especially from perspectives of agency personnel, are not well reported in wildlife literature. We provide a template for capturing employee perceptions toward an organizational change initiative within one state wildlife agency. We used an organizational change framework to recognize outcomes and create a customized employee survey to evaluate attitudes toward changes as part of the long term strategic plan. Positive employee reactions to organizational changes were evident throughout the agency. Areas for organizational improvement identified included enhancing communications about change efforts and diffusing strategies working in collaboration with stakeholder groups. Employees identified more with their individual work groups than with the agency as a whole. Insights provide a basis on which to improve future change processes.

KEYWORDS
Adaptive management; organizational change; strategic planning

Introduction
State wildlife agencies (SWA) possess much of the legal responsibility to manage wildlife in the United States (Batcheller et al., 2010; Smith, 2011). A need for adjustment, if not transformation, in SWAs is emerging because of changes in the environmental and societal context in which wildlife conservation occurs (Decker et al., 2016; Jacobson & Decker, 2006). These changes include increased interest from nontraditional stakeholders (Teel & Manfredo, 2010), dwindling license revenue to support SWAs as numbers of licensed hunters and trappers decline (Jacobson, Decker, & Carpenter, 2007), and societal demands for expansion of services by wildlife agencies (Jacobson & Decker, 2006). Pathways for agency adaptation are not well researched or articulated in the wildlife literature (Jacobson, Organ, Decker, Batcheller, & Carpenter, 2010). Ease and efficiency of organizational change in SWAs could be enhanced through reporting of the development and evaluation of strategic change efforts.
The organizational development literature highlights the importance of data gathering as a key component in the evaluation of the success of any large-scale change effort (Waclawski & Church, 2002). The data gathered can lend insight into the organizational change process that can lead to continuous learning and improvement (Ford & Davis, 2002). An organizational-wide survey is one of the most prevalent and long-standing data driven methods for evaluating organizational change efforts (French, Bell, & Zawacki, 2005). Within organizational change efforts, the survey process must be model driven and focused on the key components that should change as a function of the strategic action implementation process (Falletta & Combs, 2002).

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ Wildlife Division (WLD) is one example of a SWA that has recently focused on organizational adaptation to the changes in their state. The WLD has deliberately taken steps to create a strategic plan that identifies the guiding principles of their agency and outlines strategies needed to reach key goals and objectives. As part of this process, the WLD recognized the need to collect high quality evaluation data to reveal employee perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategic plan and corresponding organizational changes undertaken to adapt to changing societal needs.

This article applied Kilmann’s (1985, 2001) organizational change framework to provide a structure for recognizing outcomes and evaluating effectiveness of WLD’s strategic planning and organizational change process. Development of a customized survey to gather employee perceptions of the change effort is described. Validation of the organizational survey instrument and results of the baseline perceptions are presented as initial metrics of the plan.

**Kilmann’s organizational change framework**

Although organizational change is an ongoing process, conceptually it can be divided into stages to help derive meaning of the key components that enhance the sustainability of a change effort (French & Bell, 1999). Kilmann (1985, 2001) provides a five-stage model of change that can be used as a template for understanding a change effort (Figure 1). The first two stages are “pre-change,” when the organization prepares for the change process.

![Figure 1. The five stages of planned change (Kilmann, 1985).](image)
The third and fourth stages relate to actions of change, whereas the final stage, which is the focus of this study, describes the need for metrics that track progress of the change effort so as to allow for continuous organizational learning and improvement.

The first stage of change is “initiating the problem.” During this stage, the organization and, specifically, top leadership acknowledges the need for change. It is in this stage that the senior leaders decide whether the agency is ready and able to commit to initiating and sustaining a change process. In the second stage of change, “diagnosing the problem,” data are collected and analyzed in order to identify the agency’s opportunities and threats given changing social needs. The data may come from focus groups, employee interviews, and surveys.

Stages three and four of the model refer to the implementation of a change initiative. The third stage of change is “scheduling the tracks.” “Tracks” refer to the target of the intervention. Kilmann describes five key tracks that should be addressed relevant to successful organizational change initiatives: culture, management skills, team-building, strategy-structure, and reward system. Each track acts as a leverage point for change to occur, and depending on the needs of the organization, the tracks can be moved through sequentially or prioritized individually. The selection of the track(s) primarily is determined by data collected in the prior stage. For example, an organization may choose to focus solely on the management skills track if their data suggest that there is a need for leadership development and their capacity only supports focusing on one track. The fourth stage is the “implementation of the tracks.” During this stage, interventions are designed and implemented based on the tracks selected. Types of interventions may include new training programs, problem-solving activities, and/or facilitated group work.

The final stage of the model is “evaluating the results.” This stage is one of the most critical as it is difficult to know whether change is successful without tracking its effects and outcomes. During this final stage, the organization evaluates what has happened; targeted metrics are developed to assess the various facets of the organizational change process. The organization can then continuously evaluate the results to determine whether the change efforts are effective or whether it is necessary to revisit the earlier stages (Kilmann, 1985).

**Development of strategic plan and stages of organizational change**

The WLD embarked on a strategic planning process in order to clearly define and communicate goals and objectives for the agency’s work, identify the strategies needed to reach those goals and objectives, and facilitate organizational change that better meet societal needs (Lederle & LeClaire-Mitchell, 2014). Underlying principles of the process include examination of all systems within the agency, engaging a large number of employees and stakeholders in the data collection, design, implementation, and evaluation process, and to learn and adapt both the strategic plan and the implementation strategies as the process emerged. Through these principles, the WLD aimed to create a strategic planning process that would be sustained over time (Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2010).

**Initiating the problem**

The WLD was aware of various new challenges in funding, shifting societal values, and environmental changes facing both their agency and SWAs more generally (Lederle &
LeClaire-Mitchell, 2014). Furthermore, their staffing levels had decreased by 30% over the 20-year period prior to initiation of the planning process. As a result, the WLD realized they were facing an unsustainable situation with increasing demands and workload, as well as some reductions in resources.

**Diagnosing the problem**

To identify program inefficiencies and to address more systemic, long-standing concerns, the WLD conducted three internal meetings in early 2009. During these meetings, employees were asked to share what they believed were the major issues facing the agency. The main themes that emerged from these meetings included concerns over priorities, supervision, strategies, and enhancing trust of stakeholder groups.

The WLD then created the design team, which included six employees and two outside organizational development consultants. The design team aimed to develop and finalize a strategic plan by mid-2010 and met weekly for 11 months to reach that goal. During the information gathering phase, the team determined that an effective strategic plan required input from a variety of internal and external stakeholder groups. Therefore, the design team conducted 41 focus groups over 3 months where over 260 internal and external stakeholders participated in the discussion of priorities. Furthermore, 64 personal interviews were conducted with state legislators, department directors, executive staff, heads of key stakeholder groups, and Natural Resources Commission members. The design team established an informational website and e-mail address where comments and questions could be submitted by stakeholders.

Based on feedback from all channels of communications, the overall vision for the change effort was identified as: (1) providing clear direction and setting agency priorities, (2) becoming more proactive and adaptive to contemporary and emerging wildlife issues, (3) increasing the efficiencies of the Division, and (4) engaging more effectively with partners, stakeholders, and the general public (Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2010).

**Scheduling the tracks**

The design team met to synthesize the data. Based on this analysis, the team described in depth 13 strategic issues consistent with the overall vision. Strategic issues included wildlife habitat management, access to lands for wildlife recreation, and wildlife population management. Additional teams of employees developed specific goals and objectives to address each of the 13 strategic issues, and to draft needed strategies to fulfill those goals and objectives. For example, one strategy for wildlife population management included monitoring and assessing game populations annually. To solicit additional input and comments, drafts of the goals, objectives, and strategies were presented to those who had participated in the focus groups or interviews, all WLD employees, and leadership of other department divisions.

Managers and supervisors of the WLD met with their staff to discuss how the revised goals, objectives, and strategies would apply to their day-to-day work. The purpose of these meetings was to identify the consequences of implementing draft strategies, as well as the consequences for not going forward with the recommendations. This enabled the design team to modify strategies based on staff input, and move on to the next step in finalizing the strategic plan. The draft strategic plan, called “Guiding Principles and...”
Strategies” (GPS) was then presented to the WLD top leadership and to the Natural Resources Commission, and posted on the department website to begin a public review period. The plan was approved by the director of the WLD in November 2010 (Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2010).

**Implementation of the tracks**

To put the strategic plan into effect and enact organization-wide change, the WLD created an implementation team, which included three members from the design team and four additional team members as well as continual help from the organizational development consultants. Best practices for implementation of organizational changes require effective communication, attention to structural barriers, and organizational buy-in (Ford & Foster-Fishman, 2012; French & Bell, 1999). Therefore, the new members included two employees from “the field,” one communication manager, and the Assistant Division Chief as a sponsor. The implementation team’s objectives were to (a) determine priorities across the Division consistent with the strategic plan, (b) develop a structured process for the collection and consideration of recommendations, concerns, and/or barriers from staff on implementation and operational details, and (c) develop a communication strategy to help drive the change effort.

An important step in the successful operationalizing of the strategic plan involved identifying the tasks that the various units of the Division would need to do to support the plan. Members of the implementation team conducted workshops with staff and supervisors to develop task lists, as well as to identify barriers and resources needed for implementation of the plan. Information from these tasking meetings and supervisor workshops were consolidated into a database and analyzed. For each barrier identified, the implementation team determined who (individuals or team) could and should remove the barrier, identified an owner of the solution for each hand-off to ensure accountability, developed a hand-off strategy with each barrier, and ensured that the owner of the barrier reported progress to the appropriate group.

In addition, a communication strategy was used throughout the implementation process to continue engaging with internal and external stakeholders. The implementation team viewed this process as an ongoing conversation, and believed that frequent communication would increase ownership of the implementation outcomes among stakeholders. Communication techniques such as personal interactions with managers, staff, and stakeholders were critical in building support for change. Establishing estimated timelines and showing progress towards objectives was also seen as critical for expectation management among staff members. Meetings were conducted throughout the state, and staff were invited to attend, encouraged to contribute to the meetings, and have specific questions answered. This allowed staff to voice their recommendations and concerns on implementation and operational details. In addition, this technique was used to maintain the engagement and ownership of the implementation outcomes.

**Evaluating the results**

A key factor in the success of any strategic planning and organizational change process is the ability to effectively track progress and accomplishments toward goals (Ford & Davis, 2002). This involves the need to establish ways to measure the success of the strategic plan in meeting fundamental objectives and goals.
To meet evaluation goals, the WLD formed a metrics team to rewrite objectives to be more measurable and identifying “dashboard” items that served as indicators of success for each objective. In addition, the need for an organizational-wide survey of employees was identified as a critical part of the evaluation process. Our research team was employed to create a measure to capture employee perceptions of the strategic plan and other key work factors that might be impacted by the organizational change initiatives relevant to the strategic plan.

The underlying model of change embedded into the process was that meeting the goals of the strategic plan would require employees to perceive that management and employees were committed to implementing the plan. A high level of commitment would then lead to changes in work behavior that would help drive a culture change in the WLD to one of more openness, engagement and employee development. Culture change would then impact two key outcomes for the division. First, meeting the aims of the strategic plan was seen as critical for enhancing the amount and quality of partnerships with external stakeholder groups. Second, changes related to the strategic plan and changes in culture were critical for affecting the degree to which employees identified with the WLD as a whole rather than their own specific jobs and locations.

The methods section of this article details the participative approach to the development of an employee survey focused on employee perceptions of the organizational change initiative. The results section provides an analysis of the quality of the survey responses and the initial findings of the employee survey.

**Methods**

**Survey development**

A key objective of the research was to create a survey, customized to fit the needs of the WLD. Two focus groups with WLD employees were used to gather input on what was of importance to WLD about the change process. Focus groups consisted of employees selected to ensure representation across levels, positions, and geographic regions in order to capture diverse perspectives. In each session, researchers asked the focus groups to discuss what they wanted to know about what had or what had not been changing within the WLD given the implementation of the strategic plan. Each group generated a list of dimensions (categories) of information that they considered valuable to know based on the goals of the strategic plan. The consultants identified themes across the dimensions created by each group to define and finalize each dimension. Sample dimensions included commitment to the strategic plan, impact of the strategic plan, ability to and frequency of forming partnerships, and communication within the WLD.

The next step in survey development was the creation of items that would effectively measure the target dimensions. First, we took the information from the meetings and wrote specific items for each of the aforementioned dimensions. Second, we met with a subset of the two focus groups, who reviewed the dimension labels and definitions, as well as the draft items. Employees offered critiques of the items, discussed if items fit the dimension they were placed under, and edited the wording of the items to the vernacular of the WLD.
The final instrument included 11 dimensions and 56 survey items (Table 1). The first four dimensions directly focused on perceptions of the strategic plan: personal commitment to the strategic plan, perceived management support for the strategic plan, changes arising from the strategic plan, and changes in roles and responsibilities due to the strategic plan. Personal commitment referred to employees’ commitment to the values expressed in the plan and the implementation strategies for achieving those values. Management support referred to employees’ perceptions that management supported and was committed to successfully implementing the strategies and objectives of the strategic plan. Changes arising from the strategic plan measured the degree to which employees perceived positive changes occurring within the WLD as a result of the strategic plan. Role responsibilities assessed the degree to which employees held each other responsible for fulfilling their job duties relevant to the goals/objectives of the strategic plan.

The next five dimensions on the survey focused on whether there were perceived changes in various aspects of the WLD culture, including openness, internal communication, challenging and varied work, training, and the use of multiple perspectives during decision-making. Openness to new ideas referred to the extent to which the WLD was open to the expression of new ideas, recommendations, and suggestions. Internal communication assessed how timely, clear, and adequate information was disseminated within the WLD. Challenging and varied work referred to the extent to which there were opportunities within the WLD to engage in different, challenging, and new tasks. The training dimension assessed whether there were opportunities and encouragement to engage in training programs, as well as the quality of programs offered. Finally, the use of multiple perspectives included the extent to which multiple views from outside the division were encouraged and incorporated into the decision-making process.

The last two dimensions focused on key outcomes identified by the WLD. The external outcome measured was perceptions of whether there were stronger and more extensive partnerships with stakeholder groups as a result of the organizational change. The quality and frequency that employees were forming partnerships with external stakeholders, as well as the adequacy of resources required to form and maintain partnerships, was measured. The internal WLD outcome focused on whether employees identified with the agency as a whole rather than individual jobs or local work groups. All items were scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree.”

Survey administration

The research team distributed the surveys in-person at regional employee meetings held by the WLD in June 2012 to achieve a high participation rate, fully explain issues of confidentiality, and answer questions. Employees who were unable to attend their regional meeting received a copy of the survey in the mail with instructions and a return envelope.

The final sample consisted of 148 employees. This represented over 95% of the total number of employees, so the goal of high level of participation was achieved. The majority of respondents (62%) were male. Just more than half (55%) of respondents reported
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>Sample item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Commitment to the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Employees' personal commitment to the values and the implementation of the strategies and objectives in the GPS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>&quot;I am personally committed to the vision and values that are stated in the GPS&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Support for the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Managerial support and commitment toward successfully implementing the strategies and objectives in the GPS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>&quot;The management team takes steps to remove barriers that prohibit implementing the GPS strategies&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes Arising from the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>The degree of positive changes that have arisen from the implementation of the GPS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>&quot;The GPS strategic plan is improving communication within the division&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLD Culture: Openness to Ideas</td>
<td>How open the division is to the expression of new ideas and opinions, and the attempt to try new things</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>&quot;New ideas are highly valued&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLD Culture: Challenging and Varied Work</td>
<td>Opportunities to engage in varied, challenging, and novel tasks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>&quot;Employees are provided with responsibilities and tasks that challenge them&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLD Culture: Clear and Timely Communication</td>
<td>How timely, clear and adequate information is disseminated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>&quot;Lessons learned from work assignments are made available to all employees&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLD Culture: Training Opportunities</td>
<td>Opportunities and encouragement to engage in training programs, as well as level of quality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>&quot;All employees have the opportunity to attend some type of training&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLD Culture: Incorporating External Stakeholders’ Views</td>
<td>Encouragement to incorporate various stakeholder views into the decision making process</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>&quot;Everyone is encouraged to bring the external stakeholders’ views into the decision making process&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Responsibilities</td>
<td>The degree to which employees hold each other responsible for fulfilling their job duties and the goals and objectives in the GPS, as well as the value placed on those duties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>&quot;Employees hold each other responsible for fulfilling their job duties&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>The quality and frequency that employees are forming partnerships with external stakeholders, and the adequacy of resources required to form and maintain partnerships</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>&quot;Employees view fostering high-quality interactions with stakeholder groups as a top priority&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with the Division</td>
<td>Level at which employees within the Division focus and identify with</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>&quot;Employees identify more with their work unit than the Division as a whole&quot; (reverse scored)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
having been in their specific position for less than five years. However, most participants held significant tenure with the WLD or state government: 70% had been working for the WLD more than five years and 79% had been working with Michigan state government for five or more years. Respondents varied across job classifications, including administrative support (7%), wildlife assistant (17%), wildlife biologist (23%), technician (21%), analyst (4%), supervisor (10%), and specialist (15%). Respondents also spanned across regions and units: planning and adaptation (7%), program support and public outreach (12%), research and management (17%), field resource management (7%), and regional field offices (54%).

Results

Factor analysis

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether the four dimensions related to perceptions of the strategic plan (e.g., personal commitment, perceived management support, positive changes arising, and role responsibilities) were empirically distinct. An analysis of the adequacy of the sample size for conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .85, which is greater than the recommended value of .60. Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (136) = 944.699, p < .01$), suggesting that the dimensions in the survey were correlated, and thus able to load onto factors. We used principle components analysis and found four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, confirming that the strategic plan-related items were four distinct dimensions.

Personal commitment to the strategic plan and perceived managerial support for the strategic plan all had primary factor loadings of .4 or greater for its corresponding items (Table 2). Some items for perception of positive changes as a result of the strategic plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Commitment 1</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Commitment 2</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Commitment 3</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Commitment 4</td>
<td>.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Support 1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Management Support 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Management Support 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Management Support 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 5</td>
<td>.612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Changes 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Responsibilities 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Responsibilities 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Role Responsibilities 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Total Variance</td>
<td>36.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Variance</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
and role responsibilities cross loaded across different dimensions. The overall findings are supportive of the construct validity of the items to dimensions.

In total, the four factors accounted for 61.1% of the total variance.

**Survey findings**

As seen in Table 3, employees responded favorably to most dimensions. With respect to the dimensions focused on the strategic plan, employees reported high personal commitment ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.62$) and moderately high perceptions of managerial commitment to the strategic plan ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.57$). Employees, however, reported more neutral responses regarding whether they had perceived positive changes in the WLD Division due to the implementation of the strategic plan ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.57$). Employees also reported neutral responses about whether employees held each other responsible for fulfilling the goals of the strategic plan ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.57$).

Employees also responded favorably to many of the culture dimensions. Employees reported relatively positive perceptions of the frequency and adequacy of training programs being offered ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.60$), challenging work assignments ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.56$), openness within the WLD ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.57$), and incorporating external stakeholders’ views in decision-making processes ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.52$). The area with the greatest room for improvement was providing timely and adequate internal communication ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.60$).

In terms of outcomes, employees had positive perceptions of the quality and frequency of partnerships formed with external stakeholders ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.50$). With respect to organizational identity, employees identified more with their individual work groups than with the WLD as a whole ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.65$).

Table 3 also provides correlations among the survey dimensions and various demographic information. Employee gender and tenure were not correlated to any of the strategic plan, cultural, or outcome dimensions. This finding supports the notion that

<table>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Personal Commitment</td>
<td>3.78(0.62)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Management Support</td>
<td>3.40(0.57)</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Positive Changes</td>
<td>3.12(0.57)</td>
<td>.69*</td>
<td>.67*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Culture: Openness</td>
<td>3.42(0.57)</td>
<td>.48*</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>.57*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Culture: Communication</td>
<td>3.07(0.60)</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Culture: Multiple Views</td>
<td>3.46(0.52)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Culture: Varied work</td>
<td>3.51(0.56)</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Culture: Training</td>
<td>3.86(0.60)</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>3.18(0.57)</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>3.44(0.50)</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td>.48*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>2.56(0.65)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.61(0.49)</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tenure in Division</td>
<td>12.06(9.54)</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*p < .05
the survey results represent the perceptions of the Division in general and is not related to particular subgroups within the WLD. Individuals who reported seeing more positive changes from the strategic plan were more personally committed it \((r = .69)\) and strongly perceived management support of the plan as well \((r = .67)\). The responses to the strategic plan dimensions were also strongly and positively related to the culture dimensions, specifically openness within the division, communication, challenging and varied work, and training opportunities. This finding suggests that individuals who viewed the strategic plan dimensions more favorably also viewed the WLD culture more positively. Perceptions of partnerships were moderately correlated with the perceptions of the strategic plan and of the Division culture, which suggests that employees who viewed partnerships favorably also tended to view the strategic plan and culture favorably. Organizational identification was moderately and positively correlated with several the strategic plan and culture variables, including clear and timely communication, perceived positive changes from the strategic plan, incorporating multiple viewpoints, and role responsibilities, suggesting that individuals who identified with the Division as a whole tended to respond more favorably to specific aspects of the strategic plan and culture.

**Discussion**

Given changing environmental and social environments with respect to wildlife conservation in the United States (Manfredo, Teel, & Henry, 2009), SWAs are adapting wildlife management strategies and practices. Nonetheless, pathways to adaptation and change for SWAs are not well reported (Decker et al., 2016; Jacobson et al., 2010). This article provides a template for a systematic way to evaluate an organizational change process from the employees’ perspective. We used a participatory approach to developing an organizational-wide survey for assessing perceptions of the change effort in one SWA and provide initial responses to establish baseline employee attitudes toward change.

Processes of organizational change can be understood as occurring across the stages described by Kilmann (1985, 2001). The WLD strategic planning and change process included a heavy involvement of internal and external stakeholder groups to provide valuable input into the planning process. Cross-functional teams were given the charge of collecting and analyzing such information in order to develop a plan with goals and objectives, and strategies to meet those goals. An implementation team was then created to work with stakeholders to develop, revise and implement strategies relevant to the strategic plan.

One indicator of initial success is the reaction of the employees within a SWA regarding the change initiative. Effort was expended on involving SWA administration in the development of the organizational-wide employee survey to capture the information they wanted through this assessment process. This led to the development of a measurement tool to provide a quantifiable sign regarding progress relevant to the change effort. High levels of participation were achieved by conducting surveys in person at staff gatherings; more than 95% of employees responded to the survey. Results indicated that most of the dimensions had high reliability and that confirmatory analyses provided evidence of construct validity.

As the action plans are enacted, some change efforts are likely to be more effective than others. The survey findings can be one piece of the puzzle to adjust action plans and refine
implementation efforts. In the case of the Michigan WLD, the findings from the survey point to positive signs for the efforts to ensure high levels of participation throughout the strategic planning and implementation processes. A majority of the employees agreed that fostering high-quality interactions with stakeholder groups (a key part of the strategic plan) was now a top priority. In addition, the ratings showed that employees had a strong personal commitment to the change effort. Research in other domains has suggested that personal commitment to a strategic plan is a critical component in the success of its implementation. For example, personal commitment by police officers to the strategy of community policing was related to the amount of officer behavior that was consistent with the strategy objectives. Personal commitment of officers also mediated the effects of perceived managerial support on officer community policing behaviors. Individuals who were initially involved in the planning of the organizational change effort were more likely to be committed to the new strategy and were more likely to try strategy-consistent behaviors on the job (Ford, Weissbein, & Plamondon, 2003).

Our survey also highlighted dimensions where employees reported more neutral responses. For example, employees responded neutrally toward whether they perceived positive changes occurring as a result of the strategic plan. This is likely due to timing of the survey relative to timing of change. Survey data were collected early on in the change process as a baseline, and it likely will take more time to see an impact of changes occurring due to the strategic plan on behavior. Although attitudes about the strategic plan (i.e., personal commitment) were positive, there is likely a lag between attitude change and behavioral change (Rokeach, 1966). Burke (2017) describes the results of employee surveys relevant to a large-scale study of a transformational change effort and found positive changes across the survey dimensions such as from the initial baseline measurement (time 1) and a later employee survey (time 2) in areas such as leadership, management practices, and workgroup culture. These changes were linked to employee motivation and satisfaction measures which in turn were predictive of changes in employee performance. Similarly, employees responded neutrally about whether they hold each other accountable for fulfilling the duties of the strategic plan. As indicted by the study by Burke (2017), it may take more time for higher levels of accountability to be fully engrained into the workplace culture.

The information from the organizational-wide survey also revealed areas for organizational improvement such as enhancing communications about the change effort, especially communication that raises awareness about strategies that are working (or not working) in partnering with stakeholder groups. In addition, the findings indicated that employees identified more strongly with their individual work units than the WLD as a whole. This is not unique to the WLD. Work groups typically have a greater influence on individuals than the organization at large because more time is spent with the team, thus making the team more familiar and a source of social support (Moreland, Levine, & McMinn, 2001). Team commitment tends to be stronger than organizational commitment (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Although it is common, having a strong local focus can derail a change effort when team norms, values, and goals are at odds with those of the organization (Gover & Duxbury, 2012). Stronger efforts by organizational administration to help employees recognize where their individual efforts fit into the organization’s strategy can be expected to increase the likelihood of aligning team and organizational goals and work efforts.
Survey feedback

An important step in this process was the initial evaluation through the organizational-wide survey and then the communication of the results of the survey to the leadership and WLD employees. This process, also called “survey feedback,” involves sharing the results across an organization and seeking input about the interpretation of the data (French & Bell, 1999). This communication process is important for a number of reasons. Prior research has found that it is effective for establishing and maintaining change (Bowers & Franklin, 2006). It also provides the opportunities for employee insights to occur and promotes organization-wide alignment. Individuals have opportunities to make sense of the data, voice their thoughts, and work together to determine next steps in planning and practice.

In our case, we presented the survey results to all employees at the annual WLD meeting. After the presentation, a specific session with interested supervisors and employees was facilitated to discuss the results, interpret key findings and identify barriers to successful implementation of the strategic plan. These discussions identified actions that could be pursued for continuous improvement of the change efforts, encouraged employees to consider the implications of the results, and helped plan appropriate follow-up actions to create a continuous learning and improvement orientation. The feedback from the session was then provided to the leadership team for their consideration in future planning and revision of the strategic plan.

Leadership challenges for sustainability

Kilmann’s (2001) model of change highlights the intensive, long-term approach that change leaders must take to move an agency from the initial pre-planning stages to build the readiness and capacity for planning and implementing a transformational change effort. The paradox of change is that sustaining the initial momentum requires significant effort after the initial planning process is completed. As one government agency leader of a change initiative noted, “it will be messy and it will be confusing, and we will get a lot of it wrong and we’ll have to start over. But that’s the creative process, that’s the evolutionary process” (Srinivasan, 2001, p. 6).

The failure rate of planned change efforts such as the one described here is typically high (Burke, 2017). Common reasons why organizational change efforts fail include a lack of clarity in the vision, lack of urgency for change, poor communication, failure to remove structural obstacles, and declaring success too soon (Kotter, 1995). In addition, neglect of addressing needed changes in the organization’s culture occurs frequently (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The failure to focus attention and energy on changing the culture can doom even otherwise well-planned organizational changes. For the WLD, a key issue from the organizational-wide survey is a focus on timely and accurate communications as well as efforts that unite employees relevant to the bigger picture issues facing the WLD.

The types of issues and long-standing problems facing SWAs in general require thoughtful strategic planning that lead to creative and innovative solutions with integrated, prioritized, and sustained actions. These notions of innovation, creativity, and sustained experimentation are often at odds with the typical organizational push in the
face of a strategic planning effort for continued standardization, conformity, and moving quickly from one crisis to another (Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Ford, 2004). Thus, transformational change in SWAs require a long-term commitment to continually challenging the status quo (Ford, Boles, Plamondon, & White, 1999).

**Recommendations**

The process engaged in by the Michigan WLD can be adapted by other SWAs that want to undergo organizational change. First, when undergoing a process of change, use of an organizational change framework to guide the organizational development process increases the chances of success. Frameworks provide clear steps to follow, as well as opportunities for reflection and learning at each stage. This allows leaders time to decide whether their organization is ready to move forward. The Kilmann (1985, 2001) framework is one such model to guide change efforts.

Second, participation by administrators, employees, and stakeholders in all stages of the change process is beneficial to creating the momentum for change. Participation by all entities before and during a change effort improves commitment to sustained change, which increases the likelihood of successful implementation (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Buchanan et al., 2005). In our case, the WLD engaged employees and external stakeholders frequently throughout the process of change. Although there may have been other factors, subsequent employee data revealed high initial levels of personal commitment to the strategic plan.

Third, creation of a data-driven process throughout the change effort also increases probability of successful change efforts (Falletta & Combs, 2002). Data collected from various internal and external stakeholder groups aid in design and the development of implementation strategies. Data to monitor the progress of the change effort encourage revision and adaptation of the strategic plan around emerging issues (Foster-Fishman & Ford, 2010). Reasons for utilizing a data-driven process are twofold: (a) the SWA can evaluate progress based on metrics that are meaningful to their particular agency—tailored surveys can lead to insights that specifically relate to their mission and goals; (b) engaging SWA employees in survey development encourages further participation in the change effort and creates potentially more accurate and useful feedback for SWA administration about the progress in change efforts.

**References**


