

# **Identifying essential change initiatives in nonprofit organizations: a new, integrative approach**

## **Abstract**

Against the background of a rapidly changing environment, many nonprofit organizations are challenged to implement essential change initiatives. Relying on the principles of the Competing Values Framework, the central aim of this study was to develop and evaluate a group discussion that nonprofit organizations can use to identify necessary change initiatives. This study followed hereby an integrative approach by incorporating key elements of successful change as proposed by change management literature and Self-Determination Theory, such as (respectively) active participation of key internal stakeholders and an autonomy-supportive interaction style, in the group discussion. Results of our research conducted in nonprofit and voluntary sports clubs indicated that participants of the group discussion (n=144) perceived the group discussion as useful and autonomy-supportive, which related to their readiness for change, and in turn their intention to convince others to support the change. Based on these findings, we formulated practical suggestions on how nonprofit organizations can implement the group discussion in an optimal manner.

Keywords: organizational change; Competing Values Framework; change agents; autonomy support; readiness for change

## **Introduction**

Many organizations, including nonprofit organizations, are challenged to make incremental as well as radical organizational changes in order to be able to cope with accelerating environmental complexities such as demographic change and increased competition (Lutz Allen et al., 2013; Wicker & Breuer, 2013). Yet, organizational change does not happen easily and many efforts of organizational change fail (Devos, 2007). The high failure rate of organizational change is often due to the fact that organizations underestimate the resistance of internal stakeholders to endorse the organizational change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Devos et al., 2007). In order to overcome change resistance, change management literature suggests that organizations implement widespread involvement of internal stakeholders in the change process (see for example, Devos et al., 2007; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). Especially in the context of nonprofit organizations, active participation of internal stakeholders in the development of change initiatives (for example, the establishment of a mission and vision) can be considered crucial as many of these organizations rely heavily on stakeholders such as volunteers to implement change initiatives (Renz & Herman, 2016). As such, the central aim of this study is to develop a group exercise for nonprofit organizations in which internal stakeholders can actively participate in the identification of change initiatives. To this end, we rely on a well-established theoretical framework that can be used to identify essential organizational change initiatives, that is the Competing Values Framework, and complement it with strategies to enhance internal stakeholders' active involvement in the identification of these initiatives. Furthermore, we use quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate the use of this group discussion, and develop suggestions for nonprofit organizations on how to use this newly developed group discussion in their organization.

## **Identifying essential change initiatives: Competing Values Framework**

In order to help nonprofit organizations develop essential organizational change initiatives, a number of frameworks with a variety of dimensions have been developed, such as the Organizational Culture Inventory (Cooke & Lafferty, 1989), the Denison Organizational Culture Model (Denison, 1990) and the Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). These frameworks help to gain a better understanding of the organization's culture, defined as the values and beliefs that are held by the members of an organization and the way in which they guide behavior and facilitate shared meaning (Denison et al., 2014). Nonprofit organizations can use these frameworks to assess their current and desired organizational culture. Based on the discrepancies between these culture profiles, organizations are then able to identify areas for essential organizational change (Denison et al., 2014).

According to reviews of Royas (2000) and Schneider et al. (2013), The Competing Values Framework (CVF; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) is the most comprehensive and useful framework to diagnose and change the organizational culture. The CVF integrates major indicators of effective organizations, which are represented by two axes. The horizontal axis reflects the extent to which an organization emphasizes control or flexibility. The second axis reflects the extent to which an organization focuses on its internal (that is, the people within the organization) or external (that is, the organization itself) functioning. Together these two dimensions constitute four quadrants, each representing distinctive organizational culture models: internal process model (internal, stable), human relations model (internal, flexible), open system model (external, flexible) and rational goal model (external, stable) (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The CVF proposes that effective organizations manage to find a balance between these quadrants (or models) and are thus (to a certain extent) engaging with the management processes in each of the quadrants (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Langer

& LeRoux, 2017).

Several nonprofit scholars have used the Competing Values Framework to assess the organizational culture (see for example Grabowski et al., 2015; Colyer, 2000). Most of these scholars employed the Organizational Cultural Assessment questionnaire (OCAI; Cameron & Quinn, 1999) to evaluate the existing and desired organizational culture. This questionnaire was completed by various internal stakeholders including employees and board members (see for example Colyer, 2000). Based on the differences in the average scores between existing and desired culture, essential change initiatives were proposed, which included the clarification of work roles of staff and volunteers (that is, internal processes), and more teamwork between staff and volunteers (that is, human relations) (Colyer, 2000).

Other authors have relied on interviews instead of questionnaires to diagnose the organizational culture. For example, Grabowski et al. (2015) interviewed board members, staff and clients in a public services voluntary organization. Results indicated that the organization would benefit from more structure (for example, the creation of task forces) and a greater internal focus (for example, an effective volunteer management).

### **Identifying essential change initiatives: The importance of widespread participation of change agents**

Although the Competing Values Framework is a useful tool to identify necessary change initiatives in nonprofit organizations, the change management literature suggests that, in order to successfully implement the identified change initiatives, nonprofit organizations must build internal stakeholders' readiness for change, which relates to the beliefs towards the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully undertake these changes (Lutz Allen et al., 2013; Devos et al., 2007). One of the most

effective means to create internal stakeholders' readiness for change is widespread participation of major internal stakeholders during all stages of the change development (Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). It is considered effective because it facilitates a sense of psychological ownership, which is crucial to overcome change resistance (McKay et al, 2013; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017).

However, direct involvement of all internal stakeholders in the change process may not always be possible. As such, it is essential that nonprofit organizations identify, for each important stakeholder group, key internal stakeholders who have a perspective of the overall organization's management and are willing to be involved in the organizational change (Hammond et al., 2011). When these key internal stakeholders can actively participate in the change process, they will be encouraged to provide feedback for fine-tuning the change during implementation, help implement change in a way that even exceeds role expectations, and persist obstacles or setbacks during implementation (Hammond et al., 2011; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017). Furthermore, they can play the role of internal change agents, actively seeking out other individuals in the organization in order to share change initiatives and convince others to support the change (Gerwing, 2016; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Hammond et al., 2011). Thus, they may be more able to more readily influence other individuals than the formal leaders in organizations (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000; Bouckenooghe et al., 2009).

Change management literature further suggests that the participation of these key internal stakeholders in the change process can be facilitated by an external change agent or facilitator (Gerwing, 2016; Armenakis & Harris, 2002). An external facilitator is defined as a professional coming from outside the organization whose role is to bring about a purposeful transformation of the organization and enable others to deal with these change effort (Gerwing, 2016; Armenakis & Harris, 2002). To this end, (s)he helps internal

stakeholders involved in the change process to diagnose the actual and desired future situation and implement organizational change (Gerwing, 2016; Armenakis & Harris, 2002).

### **Identifying essential change initiatives: The importance of autonomy support**

Given the important role of the facilitator, studies in the domain of organizational psychology provide further guidance on how facilitators can support internal stakeholders' participation in the change process (Gagné et al., 2000; Morin et al., 2016). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), an influential meta-theory on human motivation, active participation is best fostered when facilitators of the change adopt an autonomy-supportive style and stimulate internal stakeholders to rely on an autonomy-supportive style themselves (Gagné et al., 2000; Morin et al., 2016). When being autonomy-supportive, the internal stakeholders' perspective is consulted and their input is welcomed, possible negative feelings toward the organization culture are accepted, choice in how to reach organizational change goals is provided, invitational language is used, and meaningful rationales are given (Gagné et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The creation of an autonomy-supportive environment around the change initiatives nurtures the stakeholders' need for autonomy, which refers to a feeling of being the initiator of one's own acts. This is crucial, since when internal stakeholders are involved, yet feel that their doubts and critical thoughts are suppressed when change initiatives are developed, they are unlikely to undertake change.

The relation between an autonomy-supportive style and readiness for change has mainly been investigated in a for-profit setting. For example, Gagné et al. (2000) found that employees of a company in transformation were more likely to accept the organizational change when change facilitators adopted an autonomy-supportive style in communicating and implementing change. Similarly, a study of Mitchell et al. (2012) revealed that employees in an IT company were more willing to use and accept new IT technologies when

they were employed in an autonomy-supportive work environment.

## **Identifying essential change initiatives: gaps in Competing Values Framework**

### **literature**

Based on our review of the change management and organizational psychology literature, we identified several gaps in the way internal stakeholders were involved in the identification of change initiatives in previous CVF studies in nonprofit organizations. In most CVF studies, internal stakeholders were asked to diagnose the organizational culture through questionnaires and interviews. However, our literature review indicated that for successful change, it is crucial that internal stakeholders are able to discuss their opinions and ideas with other internal stakeholders in an autonomy-supportive setting.

Furthermore, internal stakeholders at best also participate in the final, most important step, that is the interpretation of the diagnosis and identification of necessary change initiatives. In previous research, this part was mostly conducted by scholars or external consultants, although our literature review indicated that the role of external parties should be restricted to supporting internal stakeholders' participation in the change process.

Finally, in most CVF studies, not all important internal stakeholders were involved in the development of change plans. One group that was often overlooked were the volunteers, a group that in many nonprofit organizations is crucial for the daily operations (see for example Grabowski et al., 2015; Colyer, 2000)

### **Present study**

Building on these gaps in CVF literature, we examined whether we can add principles of widespread participation as suggested by change management and SDT literature to develop a new and integrative approach to foster change in nonprofit organizations. Specifically, we

developed a (CVF-based) group discussion for nonprofit organizations in which key internal stakeholders of each important stakeholder group were invited to actively participate in the identification of the current and the desired organization culture, and the development of necessary change initiatives. This group discussion was guided by a trained facilitator. To increase the likelihood that these (key) internal stakeholders would be ready for change and would convince others to support the change, the development of change initiatives was conducted in an autonomy-supportive setting. In this study we focused on all-volunteer nonprofit sports clubs, yet we suggest that the principles of the group discussion are applicable for all nonprofit organizations.

In order to evaluate the use of this group discussion, we examined (a) how the participants of the group discussion perceived the usefulness of the group discussion, (b) how the participants perceived the autonomy-supportive style of the facilitator and other internal stakeholders during the group discussion, and (c) whether the participants were ready for the change, hereby relying on quantitative data (that is, average scores of self-report questionnaires) and qualitative data (that is, focus groups). Focus groups were chosen in addition to the self-report questionnaires because they allowed for a more in-depth discussion of feelings and opinions regarding the group discussion, which may yield complementary information. Furthermore, we used regression analyses to gain more insight into (d) how the perceived usefulness of the group discussion and perceived autonomy-supportive style related to the participants' readiness for the change, and (e) how the perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style and readiness for change of the participants related to their intention to convince others in the organization to support the change initiatives developed during the group discussion.



## **Method**

### ***Participants***

A convenience sample of 18 nonprofit sports clubs participated in the newly developed group discussion, after positively responding to a call from the Flemish Sports Federation, the umbrella federation of all Flemish sports federations. This sample included mostly middle-sized clubs with between 100 and 250 members (44%) and large clubs with more than 250 members (44%), providing sports disciplines such as football (22%), athletics (17%), korfbal (17%) and volleyball (11%) on recreational level. In total, 52 board members, 29 coaches, 23 volunteers (providing logistic support), 19 sports club members and 21 parents participated in the group discussion, which means that 144 internal stakeholders (61.8% men; Mage = 41.69 SD= 11.86) were involved in our research. The number of internal stakeholders per club participating in the group discussion ranged from 8 to 12.

### ***Procedure***

All participants (that is, internal stakeholders) were asked to participate in a group discussion in which they identified important areas for change. After participating, they filled in a self-report questionnaire which assessed their appreciation of the session. In three sports clubs (of the 18 participating sports clubs) focus group sessions were organized after the group discussion.

#### *A group discussion to identify areas for essential change*

The group discussion was attended by representatives of important stakeholder groups in the sports club (that is, board members, coaches, volunteers, members and parents). The group discussion, which was guided by a trained facilitator, was designed in such a way as to

foster an autonomy-supportive interaction style among the stakeholders. Specifically, the facilitator emphasized at the beginning of the group discussion the importance of listening to each other and using invitational and constructive language such as “I understand your perspective to be”, “How did you come to that position?” and “I can see how you came to such stance.” The facilitator also mentioned that it was important that participants explained the rationale behind their beliefs and ideas. Furthermore, facilitators were also taught, in line with the principle “practice what you preach”, to rely on an autonomy-supportive style themselves. For example, they were trained to value the input of all participants and involve everybody in the discussion. When conflicting ideas or positions occurred, they were taught to search for common ground in what different stakeholders were saying.

At the beginning of the group discussion, the participants (that is, the internal stakeholders) were asked to sit down around a template. The template, which represented the two axes and four quadrants (or models) of the CVF, provided a structure to the session. The facilitator of the session wrote down a question/problem identified by the sports club's board members in the center of the template. As an example, a central question in a sports club was “We want to attract more volunteers, but do not manage”.

Next, the facilitator used the four quadrants of the template to construct the organizational culture (and necessary culture changes) in three different steps. In the first step, participants discussed the existing organizational culture (that is, where are we today) in relation to the central question. This was realized in three consecutive parts. In the first part, aspects, problems and possible causes that were related to the formulated central question were discussed. Each participant received cards on which (s)he could note his/her thoughts and opinions in relation to the current situation in the sport club. In the second part, the group was divided in subgroups. In this subgroup, participants were asked to find consensus on which cards were to be discussed in total group. In the third part, these cards

were placed in one of the quadrants of the template, either by the facilitator or by the participant. This method allowed to construct an existing culture profile based on the participants own input. Examples were : “Workload of current volunteers is high” and “Communication in the sports clubs is chaotic”, with the former being placed in the human relations quadrant, and the latter in the internal process quadrant.

In the second step of the group discussion, participants moved on to describe the preferred or desired culture. In order to create the desired culture profile based on the participants' input, the three parts of the first step were repeated, with each participant receiving cards on which they wrote down their ideas regarding the warranted future situation. Examples were: “A sports club that is open for everybody” and “More structured communication”, with the former being placed in the open system quadrant, and the latter in the internal process quadrant. Plotting the current and preferred culture profiles on the template allowed to highlight possible discrepancies. Furthermore, it became clear which quadrants were less or more present in the organization.

In the third step of the group discussion, initiatives that could resolve discrepancies between the current and preferred culture, or could tackle the absence of crucial processes missing in the organization were discussed. Example of change initiatives were: “Adopting more innovative communication strategies in order to try to reach the younger people (for example, Instagram, WhatsApp) ” and “Appointing a person responsible for communication”. At the end of the discussion, change initiatives were given a level of priority.

## ***Measures***

### *Self-report questionnaire*

All participants in the group discussion (n= 144) filled in the self-report questionnaires. Participants were asked to rate items of the self-report questionnaire on a 5-point Likert

scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). This questionnaire consisted of the following items:

*Perceived usefulness of the group discussion.* To measure the perceived usefulness of the group discussion, we used the item "The group discussion was useful".

*Perceived autonomy-supportive style.* In order to measure the perceived autonomy-supportive style (of other internal stakeholders and the facilitator) during the group discussion, we relied on a slightly adapted version of the Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire (TASCQ; Belmont et al., 1988). The Dutch version of this questionnaire has been validated (Sierens et al., 2009) and used (see for example, Haerens et al., 2013) in previous research. For the current study, the questionnaire was adapted to the context of the developed group discussion by including the stem "During the group discussion . . ." and by replacing specific references to academic subjects. We used three positively worded items from the TASCQ autonomy support scale (for example, "... others listened to my opinion."). This scale had a solid internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ).

*Readiness for change.* Nine items from the (Dutch-language) questionnaire developed by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) were used to measure three dimensions of readiness for change. Three items assessed emotional readiness for change (for example, "I have a good feeling about the change initiatives"). Three items measured intentional readiness for change (for example, "I want to devote myself to the process of change"). Three (negatively-worded) items measured cognitive readiness for change (for example, "I think that most changes initiatives will have a negative effect on the members we serve"). Consistent with previous studies (e.g, Kirrane et al., 2017), we averaged across these three dimensions. To this end, the items of the cognitive readiness for change dimension were reverse scored. Internal consistency of this 9-item scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Intention to convince other to support the change initiatives.* To measure the

stakeholders' intention to convince others to support the change initiatives developed during the group discussion, we included the item, "I intend to try to convince others to support the change initiatives developed during the group discussion."

### *Focus groups*

Focus group sessions were organized in three (randomly selected) sports club after the group discussion. In total, 9 board members, 6 coaches, 6 volunteers providing logistic support, 3 members and 1 parent, who also participated in the survey, were involved in the focus groups interviews (68% men; Mage = 42.84 SD= 13.71). The number of stakeholders participating in the focus groups sessions ranged from 7 to 9.

The three focus groups sessions were facilitated by a trained moderator and an assistant-moderator. The facilitator of the group discussion was not present during the focus group interviews. The (assistant-) moderator used a semi-structured questioning route that was developed to facilitate conversation amongst participants. Furthermore, it ensured consistency in questions asked across focus groups. The main themes included (a) perceived usefulness of the group discussion, (b) perceived autonomy-supportive style during the development of the change initiatives and (c) participants' readiness for change.

An entire focus group interview lasted on average 29 minutes. All sessions were audiotaped and the recordings were later used to conduct a content analysis of the conversations.

### *Plan of analyses*

To analyze the use of the newly developed group discussion, we first calculated average scores of the perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style and readiness for change. The qualitative data (that is, focus groups recordings) were used to gain a more in-depth insight of the meaning of these quantitative average scores. We

used thematic content analysis (NVivo 12 Pro) to analyze the focus group transcripts. Two researchers independently conducted a priori (deductive) content analysis on each of the three transcripts. The transcripts were coded using a presupposed tree structure, including 3 'parent' nodes representing the different topics of the focus group questioning route (that is, perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style and readiness for change), which were subdivided in one or more 'child' notes.

We relied on bivariate and multivariate analyses to further analyze the relations among perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style, readiness for change and intention to convince other to support the change initiatives. First, we calculated bivariate correlations among the study variables. Next, a hierarchical regression analysis (SPSS version 25) was conducted with the perceived usefulness of the group discussion and perceived autonomy-supportive style as independent variables and readiness for change as dependent variable. Age, gender and function in the sports club (that is, board member, coach, volunteer, member or parent) were added as covariates. Finally, we conducted a second hierarchical regression analysis with the perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style, and readiness for change as independent variables and intention to convince others to support the change initiatives as dependent variable. Again we added age, gender and function in the sports club as covariates. In both regression models, covariates were entered in the first step, and predictors were entered in the a second step.

## **Results**

*Participants' perceptions of the usefulness of the group discussion, autonomy- supportive style and their readiness for change: quantitative (that is, average scores) and qualitative findings (that is, focus groups)*

Average scores of the perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style and readiness to change on a five point-scale revealed that participants indicated that the group discussion was very useful (M= 4.33), that they perceived the style of the facilitator and other internal stakeholders as highly autonomy-supportive (M= 4.39) and that they were ready for the change (M= 4.40).

Qualitative findings indicated that participants perceived the developed *group discussion as useful* as it urged them to think about the existing club culture, the preferred culture and possible change initiatives. Especially the discussion about the preferred culture was considered innovative, as shown by the following quotes “Many group discussions involve discussions about existing problems and possible solutions. Yet, also the discussion about the preferred culture is crucial.” and “It is important to have a concrete idea about the ideal organizational culture as it allows to evaluate whether change initiatives to improve the sports club were successful.”

The three steps provided a clear framework for the group discussion. For example, one participant commented: “Without the three steps, we would have been brainstorming without structure, and the group discussion would have lasted much longer.” The four quadrants of the template were also considered an added-value as they enabled participants to organize their thoughts: “The template with its four quadrants gave us the opportunity to structure and visualize our ideas and suggestions related to the existing and preferred culture and change initiatives.”

Yet, at the end of the group discussion, the practical implications of the culture profiles were not clear for some participants, as indicated by the following comments: “In our sports club, most cards were placed on the internal processes quadrant. Does this mean that we should focus on our internal processes in the (near) future? Or are all four quadrants important?” and “The template indicated that we should work on our task distribution. Or

should we also work on our human relations? We only placed a few cards in this quadrant.” Participants provided us with a number of suggestions in order to optimize the use of the four quadrants, which included “The (final) purpose of the four quadrants should be introduced at the beginning of the group discussion.” and “The group discussion should end with a clear conclusion based on the position of the cards on the template.” Another suggestion was to hang the template on a wall instead of placing it on the table. This way everyone can see the template and follow the discussion.

We also attempted to nurture participants’ *psychological needs for autonomy* by organizing the group discussion in an autonomy-supportive setting. To this end, it was important that the facilitator, as well participants, relied on an autonomy-supportive style. Several statements of participants indicated that this open and constructive setting stimulated them to voice their opinion: “I felt that every contribution was considered useful in its own way. Every time my idea was well-received, I was motivated to bring up another idea.” Another participant “appreciated the fact that there was trust among the participants, that you could say anything without being criticized. Everyone had the opportunity to say his/her opinion.” The openness during the group discussion contributed to the participants' positive feelings about the outcome of the group discussion: “I liked the fact that we could sit together with people who already do a lot for the sports club, but also with people who are less familiar with the sports club's operations. Even though we sometimes disagreed, I had the feeling that we were all on the same page at the end of the evening. That is a satisfying feeling, especially for the young people.” Another participant commented: “I felt that the sports club was one big family, with the same intentions and goals.”

According to the participants, the facilitators played in key role in the creation of an autonomy-supportive environment, as revealed by the following comments: “The facilitator was a very good listener. He gave everybody the feeling that their opinion mattered. He did



not impose his opinion on the group” and “He never said that your opinion was wrong. He was receptive to our ideas and neutral.” The facilitator also tried to involve all participants in the discussion: “People who were less involved in the group discussion were asked for their opinion. The facilitator asked if they wanted to add something to the discussion.”

Yet, the participants indicated that the (autonomy-supportive) role of the facilitator in the development of the change initiatives should also be clarified. That is, during the group discussion, cards were mostly placed on the template by the facilitator, hereby frustrating the participants' need for autonomy as it was sometimes unclear why the facilitator put the card in a certain quadrant. Therefore, participants suggested that anyone who placed a card on the template (facilitator or participant) should give an explanation for her/his decision.

As for the participants' *readiness for the change*, many participants felt that everybody was willing to devote themselves to the change process. For example, a participant commented: “I felt that everybody had the drive to achieve the same goal, that is, making sure that everyone can enjoy what the sports club has to offer.” Another participant said: “I felt that there was a broad support for the change initiatives that were formulated today.” All participants agreed that a broad support base is essential for the success of the change initiatives: “I think that if everyone is on the same page, has the same vision and is willing to put energy into the development of the change initiatives, we can successfully implement the change initiatives in our sports club.” To create a broad support base for the change initiatives in the sports club, participants believed that it is essential “to involve as many people as possible in the change process as these persons can talk to other individuals in the sports club about the change initiatives”, as well as “develop initiatives that can have a substantial impact on the sports club's way of doing things.”

Furthermore, participants indicated that the sports club should implement change initiatives as soon as possible. Participants made some suggestion for a feasible and realistic

implementation of the change initiatives: “It is important to distinguish between short-term, middle-term and long-term initiatives” and “We should have a clear action plan which includes the content of the change initiatives, how we want to implement the change initiatives and a clear task distribution.”

***Relation between perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style, readiness for change and intention to convince others to support the change: findings from regression analyses***

Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
1. Usefulness	144	4.33	.65				
2. Autonomy-supportive style	143	4.39	.48	.40**			
3. Readiness for change	139	4.40	.50	.40**	.44**		
4. Intention to convince others	141	4.28	.65	.22*	.29**	.60**	

\* p<.05, \*\*p<0.01

In the first hierarchical regression model (see table 2), none of the covariates related significantly to readiness for change. R<sup>2</sup> was not significant. In the second step, we added perceived usefulness of the group discussion and autonomy-supportive style as predictors to the regression model. These variables contributed significantly to the explanation of variance in readiness for change (R<sup>2</sup> change = 0.25, p <.001). Results revealed that the perceived usefulness of the group discussion ( $\beta = 0.32$ , p <.001) and the perceived autonomy-supportive style ( $\beta = 0.28$ , p <.01) related positively (and uniquely) to participants’ readiness for change.

Table 2: multiple regression model predicting readiness for change (n = 137)

	Readiness for change			
	<i>B (S.E.)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (S.E.)</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	4.12 (0.22)		1.73 (0.41)	
<b>Covariates</b>				
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.05	0.00(0.00)	0.06
Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.10 (0.09)	0.10	0.06 (0.08)	0.06
Board members <sup>b</sup>	0.21 (0.14)	0.20	0.22 (0.12)	0.21
Coaches <sup>c</sup>	0.31 (0.16)	0.25	0.29 (0.14)	0.23
Volunteers <sup>d</sup>	0.06 (0.16)	0.04	0.07 (0.14)	0.05
Members <sup>e</sup>	0.02 (0.18)	0.01	0.04 (0.15)	0.03
<b>Predictors</b>				
Usefulness			0.25 (0.06)***	
0.32***				
Autonomy-support			0.30 (0.09)**	0.28**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05 (.50)		0.30 (0.43)***	
R <sup>2</sup> change			0.25***	
F (df)	1.14 (6,130)		6.92 (8,128)***	

\* p<.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

<sup>a</sup> men = 0; women =1

<sup>b</sup> Board members = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>c</sup> Coaches = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>d</sup> Volunteers = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>e</sup> Members = 1; other functions = 0

As for the covariates in the second hierarchical regression model (see table 3), only the relationship between the (dummy) variable 'Board members' (with reference group other functions in the sports club) and intention to convince others to support the change was significant ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However,  $R^2$  of this model (with only covariates) was not significant. Perceived usefulness of the group discussion, perceived autonomy-supportive style and readiness for change added significantly to the explanation of variance in intention to convince others to support the change initiatives ( $R^2$  change = 0.34,  $p < .001$ ). Results further revealed a significant (unique) relationship between readiness for change and intention to convince other in the organization to support the change initiatives ( $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Perceived usefulness of the group discussion and autonomy-supportive style were not directly related to the intention to convince others to support the change initiatives.

Table 3 multiple regression model predicting intention to convince others to support the change initiatives (n= 137)

Intention to convince others				
	<i>B (S.E.)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (S.E.)</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	4.10 (0.28)		0.87 (0.52)	
<b>Covariates</b>				
Age	0.00 (0.01)	-0.05	0.00 (0.00)	-0.07
Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.12 (0.12)	0.09	0.03 (0.10)	0.03
Board members <sup>b</sup>	0.40 (0.18)*	0.29*	0.22 (0.15)	0.16
Coaches <sup>c</sup>	0.30 (0.20)	0.19	0.02 (0.17)	0.02
Volunteers <sup>d</sup>	0.15 (0.20)	0.09	0.09 (0.17)	0.05
Members <sup>e</sup>	-0.03 (0.22)	-0.02	-0.06 (0.18)	-0.03
<b>Predictors</b>				
Usefulness			-0.05 (0.08)	-0.05
Autonomy-support			0.08 (0.11)	0.06
Readiness for change			0.77 (0.11)***	
0.59***				
R <sup>2</sup>	0.06 (.64)		0.40 (0.52)***	
R <sup>2</sup> change			0.34***	
F (df)	1.40 (6,130)		9.37 (9,127)***	

\* p<.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

<sup>a</sup> men = 0; women = 1

<sup>b</sup> Board members = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>c</sup> Coaches = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>d</sup> Volunteers = 1; other functions = 0

<sup>e</sup> Members = 1; other functions = 0

## Discussion

To overcome three important gaps in the procedures as adopted by CVF studies in nonprofit organizations, we developed a (CVF-based) group discussion in which all important internal stakeholders, guided by a trained facilitator, developed essential change initiatives in an autonomy-supportive setting. We used quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the potential of the group discussion.

### *Perceived usefulness of the group discussion*

Average scores revealed that participants of the (CVF-based) group discussion indicated, in line with other CVF-based interventions (see for instance Colyer, 2000), that the group discussion was a useful tool to implement change (average score was 4.33/5). Interestingly,

the usefulness of the group discussion also related significantly to readiness for change, underscoring the importance of the development of a useful group discussion for participants' readiness to support the change. Qualitative data were consistent with the quantitative findings, revealing that the three steps used to develop change initiatives and the four CVF quadrants allowed participants to discuss their ideas in a structured and an effective way. Based on quantitative and qualitative results, we can thus conclude that these three steps and the template with its four quadrants are useful and essential parts of the group discussion.

Yet, qualitative findings also indicated that the final purpose of the positions of the cards that were placed on the template was not clear. This finding suggested that the participants were not familiar with the theoretical foundations of the CVF, that is, the importance of finding a balance between the four competing CVF quadrants or models. However, a deeper understanding of the CVF theory and its practical implications is important as it may broaden the participants' thinking about their organization's culture and stimulate them to look further and not think of obvious (operational) actions (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). To illustrate, many organizations in our study had a strong people-oriented culture and therefore often focused on change initiatives related to the human relations and internal processes quadrant (for example, better communication with the volunteers). As such, most cards were placed in these quadrants, with the open system and rational goal quadrants receiving less attention. Yet, it can be suggested, in line with CVF theory, that also a focus on the open system quadrant (for example, implementing innovative initiatives) or rational goal quadrant (for example, developing a mission and vision) may help these organizations to strengthen the organization's operations and processes. Similarly, CVF postulates that organizations with a more growth-oriented culture (with clear and challenging goals) might benefit from (also) focusing on human relations and internal

processes. It is therefore important that these theoretical principles are introduced and explained by the facilitator during the group discussion.

### ***Perceived autonomy-supportive style during the group discussion***

During the group discussion, participants developed essential change initiatives together with other internal stakeholders in an autonomy-supportive environment, which according to SDT (Gagné et al., 2000; Mitchell, 2012; Morin et al., 2016 ), (positively) affects their readiness for change. Quantitative data were in line with these theoretical premises, revealing that the participants' perceptions of the autonomy-supportive style of the facilitator and other internal stakeholders (average score was 4.39/5) related strongly and positively to their readiness for change. Qualitative findings confirmed the importance of an autonomy-supportive setting, revealing that this open and constructive atmosphere allowed participants to freely express their opinion without the fear of saying something wrong or being interrupted. Furthermore, participants indicated that the facilitator played a key role in the creation of an autonomy-supportive environment by offering choice during the group session and acknowledging their opinions towards organizational change. Although these (autonomy-supportive) strategies are indeed effective in the context of organizational change (Gagné et al., 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000), SDT scholars indicated that these practices can be embedded with other autonomy-supportive strategies (Gagné et al., 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Especially the provision of a meaningful rationale deserves special attention as this form of autonomy-supportive behavior predicted greater acceptance of change in previous studies (Gagné et al, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Specifically, these studies revealed that when people were given a clear rationale for why the change is enacted, they generally became more interested in the change initiatives and were more likely to continue their engagement in the change process, especially when their ideas and feelings with

respect to the change initiatives were also taken into account (Gagné et al., 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Since our qualitative findings revealed that facilitator often failed to give clear rationale for their decisions regarding the position of cards on the template, this specific ingredient of an autonomy-supportive style may require particular attention when optimizing the group discussion.

### ***The crucial role of participants' readiness for change***

Change management literature suggested that the participants' readiness to support the change was crucial for the success of the developed change initiatives (see for example, Devos et al., 2007). Indeed, participants who are ready for change will not only (help) implement the change, but will also share change initiatives with other people within or outside the organization (see for example, Devos et al., 2007). In that respect, it was encouraging to find that participants reported high levels of readiness for change after having participated in the group discussion (the average score was 4.40/5). Quantitative data were further consistent with change management literature, revealing that participants' readiness for change related positively to their intention to convince others in the organization to support the change. The importance of readiness for change for the success of organizational change was also revealed in the qualitative analyses, with participants stating that it was crucial to find a broad support base for the change in the organization. According to the participants, organizations can do this by involving stakeholders in the group discussion as they can approach other individuals in the sports club to share their thoughts about the change initiatives.

Overall, quantitative and qualitative data indicated that participants of the group discussion intended to play the role of internal change agents. This is an important finding, as previous literature has indicated that internal change agents are critical to the entire change process (Cawsey et al., 2012; Gerwing, 2016). Indeed, although internal change

agents might not always possess the required knowledge, skills and objectivity to implement change successfully (for which organizations can appoint an external facilitator), they help to develop a realistic and feasible action plan as they know the organization, the type of business, the process, the culture and people. Furthermore, they can influence other individuals in the organization as they are already known and respected by others (Cawsey et al., 2012; Gerwing, 2016). It is thus imperative that all important stakeholder group are represented in the group discussion as without their involvement, a broad support of all internal stakeholders group in the organization is not possible (Hammond et al., 2011).

### **Theoretical contributions and practical implications**

This study contributed to the extant literature by adopting a more integrative approach towards successful change. Specifically, whereas literature in the domain of nonprofit management, change management and organizational psychology focused on (respectively) the importance of the use of the CVF, change agents and an autonomy-supportive style for successful (readiness for) change, these principles were incorporated in a newly developed group discussion that nonprofit organizations can use to realize inclusive and (thus) more sustainable organizational change. In addition, the results of this study provided further practical recommendations on how nonprofit organizations can implement this group discussion in an optimal way. Firstly, to ensure that the theoretical principles of the CVF are clear, it is important that the facilitator provides (theory-based) guidance during the group discussion. Facilitators can do this in a motivating way by explaining the CVF theory in an understandable manner and offering appropriate help and assistance when (some of the) theoretical principles are not clear (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Secondly, active involvement of internal stakeholders in the group discussion is best fostered in a broad autonomy-supportive climate in which several strategies can mutually reinforce each other, so stakeholders can



fully engage themselves in the development of the change initiatives. To this end, it is essential that the facilitator adopts and stimulates participants to rely on an autonomy-supportive style, which includes participative approaches such as offering opportunities to provide input and suggestions, and more attuning strategies such as the provision of a meaningful rationale when cards are placed on the template (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Thirdly, since our results confirmed the important role of the facilitator, organizations can appoint a facilitator that possesses the necessary skills to enhance internal stakeholders' readiness for change through (theory-based) guidance and autonomy support. This is essential, as internal stakeholders who are ready for change, can take on the role of internal change agent.

### **Limitations and future directions**

An important limitation is that our study could not shed light on the directionality of the link between the study variables. A very interesting next step is the implementation of an intervention study with pre- and post- measurements in an intervention and control group, as it will allow to investigate whether this group discussion effectively has an impact on participants' readiness for change and intention to convince other individuals in the organization to support the change. In addition, intervention studies can also reveal the (broader) impact of the group discussion on the organizational culture of nonprofit organizations. Specifically, it will be interesting to investigate whether the group discussion affects internal stakeholders' feelings towards the change, or their general attitude towards their work and responsibilities in the organization (for example, their motivation, satisfaction and commitment). Future intervention studies might also focus on the effect of the group discussion on organizational variables such as management processes and the motivating climate (as perceived by internal stakeholders), or more fact-based variables such as the number of members, volunteers or financial power.

Another limitation is that we conducted our study in the specific context of Flemish nonprofit sport clubs. We therefore urge scholars to study the effect of the group discussion in different nonprofit organizations or geographical locations.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, we developed a group discussion which can help nonprofit organizations to develop change initiatives. To this end, we adopted a comprehensive approach by integrating key elements of successful change as proposed by nonprofit management literature, change management literature and organizational psychology in this group discussion. Nonprofit organizations can use this evidence-based group discussion and the practical recommendations formulated in this paper to initiate organizational change.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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