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# The Emotions of Change: A Case Study

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# The Emotions of Change: A Case Study

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**The purpose of this article is to report on a specific team intervention, a rapidly constructed response to a request for help with a situation that was believed by the chief executive officer (CEO) to have reached a crisis stage. The effort was, of necessity, "on the fly," and the roles of consultant, participant, researcher, and collaborator were blurred and evolving as answers to the immediate problem were sought. This article presents and reflects on four tools used as a part of the intensive work with the emotional aspects of the team's experiences of revolutionary organizational change. In extended follow-up activities, the author collaborated with a single employee to follow her ongoing efforts to internalize, manage, and move forward from an emotionally frozen state. The employee later reflected on her experiences from a distance of 6 years. The outcomes suggest that tools like the four presented—tools supported by research literature but formed in the fires of the field—demonstrate promise for change-related emotional processing. *Organization Management Journal*, 10: 110–119, 2013. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2013.801744**

**Keywords** organizational change; emotions; drawings; grief

Absolute silence followed the instructions I had just given the women who were gathered on the floor of a large training room: "Draw a picture or series of pictures that describes what this change has been like for you—your experience of the change. Do not use words or other components of any language. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. 'Stick people,' for example, are fine." Surrounded by colored markers and in possession of a blank piece of flip-chart paper, each member of the company's operations team sat separately but seemed unified in some way by their complete silence. The unofficial leader of this team, Lilah, also seemed frozen. While her face was initially expressionless, except for physical signs of exhaustion, the drawing instructions produced observable changes in her impassive demeanor. Ultimately, it unleashed a flow of emotions in her that, along with other unique processing tools, would jump start her processing of revolutionary organizational change.

In the last decade, the study of emotions in organizations, and particularly of emotions in organizational change, has received a great deal of attention and, at least in the research literature, has become generally accepted as an integral component of today's organizations (Agarwal & Weill, 2012; George & Jones, 2001; Kanov et al., 2004; Liu & Perrewe, 2005). The study of emotions has also produced several organizational change models that incorporate individual emotions (Bridges, 2009; George et al., 2001; Hartel & Liu, 2012; Liu et al., 2005). However, as is a common weakness with models of all kinds, the events reported in this article highlight the difficulties, perhaps the impossibilities, of applying any two-dimensional model to such a complex, people-centered situation—especially those models that appear to be associated with time, stages, and/or collaborative/shared progress (rather than being individually based).

We continue to be challenged to translate what is conceptually known in the organizational change research to practical tools for those who serve in the trenches of change in organizations. Even if leaders and those who follow them understand and accept the pivotal role that individual emotions play in the process of organizational change, as noted by Rafaeli and Sutton (1987), employee self-reports of emotions are often considered suspect because of the long-entrenched efforts of organizations to distance themselves from human emotion. In addition, leaders' interpretations of emotions are "difficult because emotions are displayed through a complex combination of facial expression, body language, spoken words and tone of voice" (p. 33). Thus, leaders may be challenged not only to recognize the presence of emotions but also in how to appropriately acknowledge, interpret, and facilitate them in a way that allows individuals, and therefore organizations, to move through change. As shown in this case study, individuals process change uniquely and not necessarily in step with each other. Yet, with few exceptions (Huy, 2002; Kanov et al., 2004), the organizational change literature is relatively silent on practical, field-based solutions for these dilemmas.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to report a team intervention effort that occurred at the request of the chief executive officer

(CEO) of a small consulting firm. While the situation had been unfolding for some time, the request for help arrived suddenly; the situation was believed by the CEO to have reached a crisis stage for the operations team of the small company. There were only 24 hours between the initial call and the first moments of the intervention activities—part of which was spent on an airplane to the site. Of necessity it was work "on the fly," where the roles of consultant, participant, researcher, and collaborator were blurred and evolving as the consultant and the team collaboratively sought answers to the immediate problem. Such is the essence of true fieldwork—sometimes messy and unplanned yet critical to the organization. However, this type of experience, in all of its messiness, is also often rich with lessons to be learned.

## AUTHORS' POSITIONALITY

The original draft of this article was written only by me, the first author, based solely upon data collected. Because of excellent suggestions made during the publishing review process, I returned to Lilah (a pseudonym and the study's primary participant) for her additional thoughts and reflections on her experience. A time period of 6 years had passed and Lilah was happily at work with another organization. In an unusual and courageous move, she not only agreed to revisit the data with me but also to add her voice to mine as a co-author on this piece; thus, she has voluntarily revealed her identity and yet allowed us to continue to use data on her very private experience of deep organizational change. The following paragraphs include reflective text written by each of us on our own positionality within this case study.

I (consultant and first author) have been professionally involved with organizational development activities for all of my professional life. I was a key player in the startup of the original consulting organization featured in this piece; at the time of the intervention, I had been away from full-time work with the company for several years. However, my prior familiarity with the company and established trust were certainly factors in the CEO's sudden decision to ask for my help. While the company had relocated to a different state and the employees except Lilah were new to me, I had a long-term familiarity with the personality and behavior of the CEO. In our past working relationship, her strengths tended toward strategy and external sales, while I served as somewhat of an internal anchor for the company's infrastructure and people. Although no longer a part of the company, I certainly had a desire to see it continue to be successful, if only because I was a part of its past.

Who knew organizational changes could ignite such emotion?!! This is still my primary thought even after providing data for the original case article, and now in joining as second author in a reflective role. I entered into the change intervention event described in this article with a high level of trust and respect for the consultant because of our past working relationship; however, I was also very aware that she was asked to work with us by the CEO, with whom the consultant also had

a long-time association. I was one of the original three people hired by the company and I felt personally invested. I also felt numb in many ways from the ongoing effects of the changes—neither hopeful nor upset about the consultant's arrival. With a background in people development, I was periodically at odds with the CEO over people management issues and unsure what the future would bring. Believing I had little else to lose, I chose to follow our consultant's guidance. Three years after this intervention, continuing high conflict with the CEO led me to other employment. With the passage of several additional years, today (6 years later) I can look back on the experience with much greater insights into myself and organizational change. While we can never assume that any one person will experience the same reaction to major change, I am grateful to have the opportunity to join in providing a real and somewhat unedited voice to what revolutionary change looked like for me . . . from inside the storm.

## STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

Characterized by a lack of separation of roles and with a focus on practice and reflection (for an excellent description of the role of field research see Wooddell, 2009), field research provides a critical conduit of information between theory, field experience, and improved practice. Unlike Wooddell's (2009) report of his experience in a local government agency, however, the rapid pace of this intervention did not allow for it to be reported in tidy stages. In fact, part of its contribution is its stark presentation of an unfolding reality that did not appear to fit neatly within any existing organizational model for change. Nevertheless, this article reports the tools used, the outcomes, and, as its primary contribution, a unique collaborative reflection by the consultant and a team member named Lilah that uses (a posteriori, or after the fact) therapeutic theory for heightening our understanding of the efficacy of the tools used.

The outcomes and reflective discussion presented are based upon observations and experiences resulting from four distinct employee change intervention tools, in addition to various interactions (both written and verbal) with the company CEO and other employees, postworkshop activities by Lilah, and ongoing collaborative reflection with Lilah. In fields other than business, engineering, and the hard sciences, the feminist research perspective that highly values personal narrative is more common. Unfettered access to an employee's emotions and internal processing, such as that which was allowed by Lilah, is particularly unique because during revolutionary organizational change employees often feel threatened; their discomfort discourages them from "baring" their internal angst—despite how crucial such data are to our understanding of human-focused organizational change. Lilah's collaborative efforts created such an unusual and rich picture of the internal life of an employee in the midst of deep change;it alone has much to say about practical tools for managing the human side of organizational change.

## THE STUDY CONTEXT AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

The company was an organizational consulting firm that consisted of its original founder serving as CEO, two senior managers, a recently expanded operations team of four women, and approximately 30 contracted senior organizational consultants and other support people. The company had recently experienced a significant spike in long-term client contracts that were expected to move it from a young startup operation to a fully developed company. New office space, which included event space for internal and external use, had opened approximately 2 months earlier and continued to be under construction. With the new space came the requirement that administrative and management personnel accustomed to working from their homes report in to the common office location and become a part of an operations "team." The ages of the members of the operations team ranged from mid-20s to early 30s with tenures ranging from a few months to Lilah, who had been with the company for 5 years. The structure of the operations team was flat; however, Lilah served as the unofficial but generally acknowledged leader of the team. Several years later Lilah remembers that

> As a long-term employee of the company, the new space and new team members were changes that were unsettling to me. Our CEO was also focused on selling and delivering our services to our growing number of clients, which left our changing operations team to swim against the current with no real leadership. The new event space split the efforts of the company across a dual focus (consulting and coordinating space). Getting the event center furnished and set up fell on the operations team with the increased pressure of needing to quickly create a return on the capital investment made by the company. Our roles were not clearly defined. Operations team members were not hired to manage an event center but we were now expected to. Frustration was a rapidly growing thing within our group of four.

Lilah also remembers that leadership was shaky.

> There was a clear lack of leadership, vision, and direction for the operations team. The CEO's unrelenting focus on outward growth was driving a crazed and uncontrolled internal revolution. The changes were sudden with no vision created to help the current team adjust and find their places within the new demands. Internal changes were solely reactive. In an attempt to fill the gap, the CEO put an inexperienced consultant in a [senior management position over] the team. This new leader did not have any equity or trust from the team. [We were] already feeling the weight of an increased workload, a fragmenting mission, and insufficient processes for managing. We now had a leader who did not establish trust or provide the needed direction. And yet the pressure from the CEO for us to produce continued to increase. Everything I had come to know was changing.

The employees found themselves in the midst of a revolutionary change, defined as a significant "jolt (perturbation) to the system" (Burke, 2011, p. 77) that significantly affected the *deep structure* of the organization—the organization's culture, structure, decision-making systems, and the way it related to its external environment. The newly formed operations team members struggled with how to reform and work within a new context. In reflection 6 years later, for Lilah, it was perhaps much more personal:

> The value I found in being able to be a part of this company from the beginning was crucial. I felt personal ownership in this company and in the role I played. In the early days, I wore many hats, set up new processes and systems, and learned details about running a startup organization. Initially hired as an executive assistant to the CEO, my responsibilities continued to grow. I felt valued and needed; in many ways, I was the public face of this small company with client proposals and onboarding new consultants. There was a sense of status and influence within my role. As the company began to grow, others began to take some of these responsibilities without any input from me. I felt like I was losing the very thing I valued so much. It was hard to clearly articulate at the time because I was also at a point of really having too much on my plate . . . and indeed I needed some relief.

The struggles of operations team members became intertwined with emotion (theirs and others'). "Fundamental change in personnel, strategy, organizational identity, or established work roles and interests often triggers intense emotions" such as anxiety, uncertainty, and depression (Bartunek, 1984, in Huy, 2002, p. 32). Employees' identities and constructed meanings of their organizational roles, values, security, and like concerns are brought into question. The strength of the resulting emotions blocks "all learning efforts when people perceive that they cannot achieve valued outcomes, feel irrevocable loss, or are pessimistic about potential improvement in their situation" (Schein, 1996, in Huy, 2002, p. 42). Individuals, and teams, become frozen despite their best intent and efforts.

In a brief preparatory conversation prior to the workshop (limited to the four members of the operations team), Lilah and one other senior member of the operations team shared perceptions that their senior managers were absent, disconnected, and nonsupportive. They reported feeling overwhelmed. An also overwhelmed and frustrated CEO said that the operations team seemed frozen and unable to cope—this as business demands increased daily. Frustration and anger were the prominent observable emotions that all parties seemed to share. Lilah remembers the following about her own situation:

> The key word for me was disconnected. If you can imagine how frustration erupts when your cable is "disconnected" during one of your favorite shows. You watch it consistently on the same night each week and have set routines and tasks around this particular show and now you're no longer able to watch it like you always have. Frustration. I felt disconnected from the actual changes or the reason behind them and disconnected from the leader making it all happen right in front of our eyes. The tidbits of information were never enough. While willing, we didn't know what we needed or where we were going and the CEO did not see our need for a visionary leader to help us stay connected. We lost momentum in every part of our operational functions. Each new question, change, or issue was met with a sigh, a huff, or a statement of blame. It became a blame game. The CEO finally felt the fragmentation and the operations team felt the blame. That is when the CEO made the call to ask a consultant to help us . . . essentially so the CEO could return to focusing on the outside environment.

## FACILITATING EMOTIONS LITERATURE

The outcomes and experiences within and following the initial intervention workshop are presented as a part of our reflection on the experience. As a first step in our reflection, we sought an improved understanding of the process through which human emotion is processed, or gets stuck. From the field of psychology, a therapeutic perspective of facilitating change emotions (Greenberg, 2004; Greenberg & Hinings, 1996) was used as an a posteriori analytical framework.

According to Greenberg and Hinings (1996), the purpose of primary (also called evolutionary) emotions is to *cause* a change due to some type of perceived disequilibrium between the person and his or her external environment. Primary emotions, which are presented in the model as socially negative emotions that indicate a problem, emerge automatically and may occur as a result of change in the environment such as organizational change; however, the job of the primary emotion is to serve as a sign to the individual that further change needs to occur in order recreate equilibrium. "Unpleasant feelings draw people's attention to matters important to their well-being" (Greenberg, 2004, p. 4). As the individual recognizes and owns the emotion as his or hers, the individual takes action. "Thus, when I cry I increase the probability of receiving comfort from self and other, when I am angry I increase the probability of chasing the other away, and when I am afraid I increase the probability of escaping" (p. 317). With a successful change in the relationship to the environment (e.g., comfort, threat, or escape is achieved), the primary emotion is no longer needed and simply disappears. Greenberg and Hinings's visual depiction of this process and purpose of primary emotion has been recreated in Figure 1.

It may at first seem lacking to consider only socially negative emotions resulting from organizational change; however, research has long since taught us that even change perceived as positive or good results in some (varying) level of loss, which results in loss emotion. In order for change to occur, we must let go of something. Thus, while certainly positive emotions may be intertwined with initial change responses, the focus of this article is on the elements of loss in organizational change.

In early studies of organizations, "best" organizational designs were said to be those that mimicked machines (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2010); these classical theories of organizations neither recognized nor left room for human emotion. While newer perspectives have cleared the way for a deepening focus on individuals and their emotions, the classical "organization as machine" perspective continues to influence much of our organizational thinking and actions (Rafaeli et al., 2001). As such,

the straightforward processing of emotions, as described by Greenberg and Hinings, rarely has space or support to occur within the organizational environment. Thus,

> We no longer automatically attend to the felt referents of our experience, nor do we symbolize them in awareness, create new meanings, and promote action, thereby enabling us to carry forward our experience to a next step; rather we remain stuck in a state of continued avoidance. (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996, p. 321)

Since primary emotion is often avoided when it appears as an initial response to an environmental change, it does not achieve its goal; the natural processing (or action) is interrupted or blocked—compromising our natural ability to deal with emotions. Employees experiencing the normal, yet often unaddressed, emotional responses to organizational change thus may develop secondary and more general and ongoing states of feeling anxious, upset, guilty, apprehensive, and powerless. Feeling upset or anxious, sometimes without even knowing why, is often a result of the avoidance of primary emotions that, if addressed, would have dissipated (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996).

In facilitating secondary emotional states, it is important for individuals to psychologically "unpack" and, ultimately, access the primary emotions they were avoiding (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996). The process of facilitating secondary emotions is one of "letting go, an undoing of the avoidance, and the allowing of new [emotional] experience and contact" (p. 326). Simply getting out the primary emotions and bad feelings can be helpful. Attending to bad feelings and their triggering emotions

> Reorganizes current experience by changing attitudinal focus. Change in attitudinal allocation is highly related to change in both experience and action because it promotes new awareness . . . [and] leads to the possibility of new options and choices. Action generally occurs in response to new perception or understanding of the situation and to new perceived options. Change in awareness, therefore, is the key to altered action and [redirecting] of attention is the key to change of awareness. (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996, p. 6)

One significant cost of avoiding painful primary feelings is that it often deadens the ability to feel all emotions, including joy and excitement (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996)—which are significant, positive components of successful organizational change. However,

> The transformation that occurs in the allowance of painful feelings has been one of the most undocumented mysteries of psychological healing . . . it is not just the relief [acceptance,] and release that comes from feeling one's pain. This experience also involves a cognitive change . . . The acceptance of the pain offers a

emergence → awareness → owning → expressive action → completion

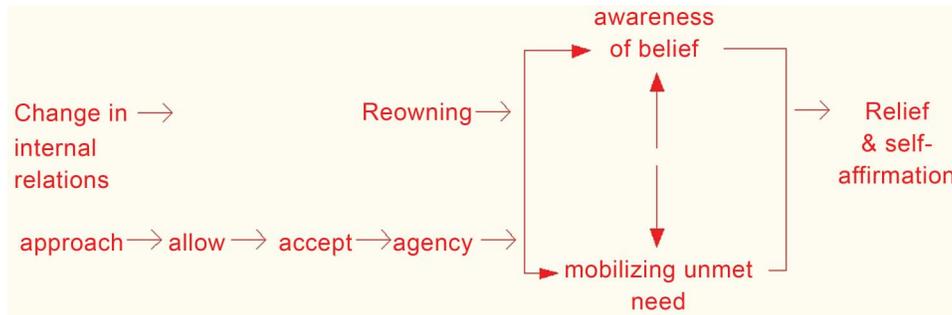FIG. 1. The emotion cycle, from Greenberg and Hinings (1996, p. 316).

FIG. 2.    Allowing of painful experience, from Greenberg and Hinings (1996, p. 330).

form of containment that helps create a safe distance from the feeling . . . and allows the goal associated with the feeling to be recognized and mobilized, thereby empowering [the person] . . . this allows the person to emerge in a new, self-affirming manner." (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996, p. 329–330)

A visual depiction of this process appears in Figure 2 and provides a framework for reflecting on the role and efficacy of the tools used in this study.

Two conditions that Greenberg (2006) and Greenberg and Hinings (1996) note as important for assisting with the processing of emotions are (a) the presence of a safe, empathetic and affirming person/relationship and (b) a "safe relational environment" (Greenberg, 2006, p. 6) or "a place to stand in which one has a view of the painful experience and how it was created" (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996, p. 331). Human cognition and emotion are intertwined, and an intervention in emotions may naturally lead to a shift in thinking; people have a biologically ingrained desire to avoid continued pain—thus, they seek to move forward in a positive way. The focus of this article is on the emotionally related tools that were used in the attempt to create cognitive shift, or a shift in how the participants thought about or understood the change, that resulted in action.

## THE TOOLS AND THEIR OUTCOMES

Tools used in the intervention workshop included participant-produced drawings, presentation and discussion of a grief model, and a kinesthetic processing exercise called "the bonfire." Workshop follow-up activities were only with Lilah and included her use of a diary, as well as extensive reflective conversations with the consultant.

### Participant-Produced Drawings

In the hours prior to the workshop, participant and manager reports revealed that the organizational stakes, and therefore the pressure felt, were high. Operations team members had withdrawn both from the organization and from each other. It was critical to unlock participants' emotional handcuffs and get them interacting. For this purpose, a nonverbal participant drawings exercise was used.

Each participant was provided a blank sheet of flip-chart paper as well as a set of crayons. The following instructions were given verbally:

> Draw a picture or series of pictures that describes what this change has been like for you—your experience of the change. Do not use words or other components of any language. You are not going to be evaluated on your artistic ability. "Stick people," for example, are fine.

While no time limits were imposed, all drawings were completed within 10 minutes. Each participant was then asked to orally interpret her drawing for the group. After an initial and brief hesitation, every member of the group of four produced a drawing, offered an initial interpretation, and posted her drawing on the wall.

While there was some half-hearted laughter about artistic abilities, drawing was, in general, a serious activity. Participants were quiet, introspective, and kept group interactions to a minimum. Some discomfort was evident, in one case from a participant who opened her interpretation with a comment that she doesn't "do" emotions but then went on to produce a drawing and interpretation showing a ruptured tie to the company's CEO and an empty box for her role.

During and after her interpretation Lilah continued to gaze at what she had produced as if fascinated or puzzled by it. A copy of her drawing appears in Figure 3.

Following interpretations of participants' drawings, the author/consultant presented the Kubler-Ross (1969; Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) grief construct and facilitated participants' discussion of their drawings when viewed through the model. (Additional information on the use of the grief model appears in the next section.)

As her drawing suggested, and Lilah confirmed in a later entry in her diary, the combination of drawing and receiving the grief model information elicited emotions that were previously unknown, even to Lilah herself.

> We each had to draw our Experience. I did 3 or 4 steps in a cycle—I explained my picture first to the group—Mine was a cycle—I drew a picture of me sitting behind my desk saying 'No problem' as I always do—another picture with stacks of papers and to-do's behind me while my hair is completely frazzled—me
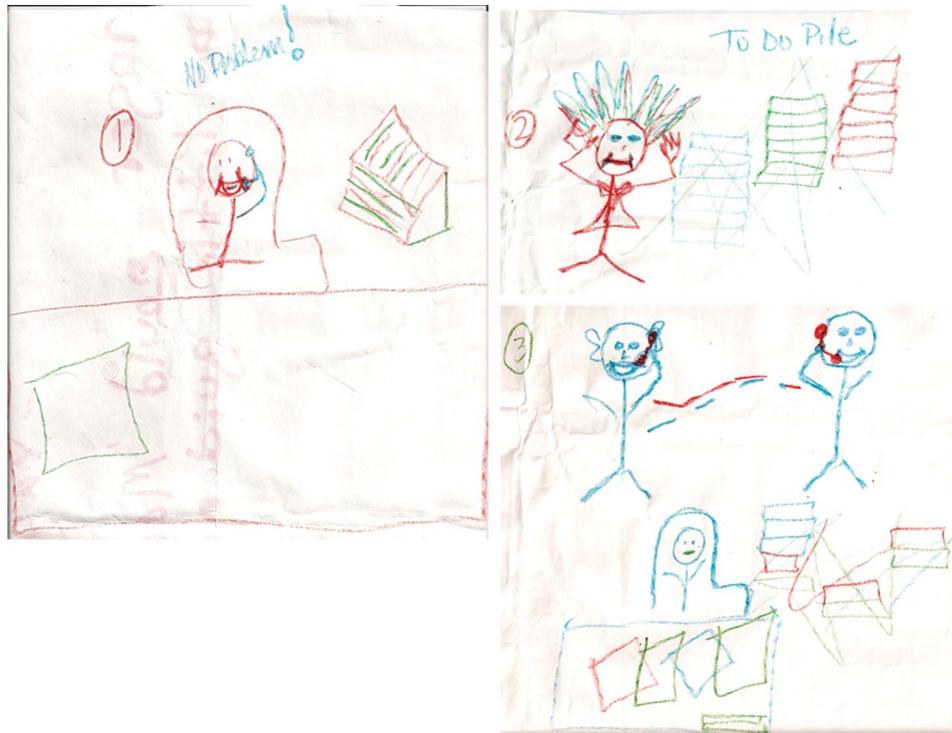
FIG. 3.   Lilah's drawing. *Note*. Modifications made: Drawing was cut apart for scanning purposes but replaced in original order and position. Associated text from Lilah's diary: "Mine was a cycle—I drew a picture of me sitting behind my desk saying 'No problem' as I always do—another picture with stacks of papers and to-do's behind me while my hair is completely frazzled—me talking on the phone either venting or trying to prioritize. This exercise was eye-opening for me—I mean I could tell you that I was frustrated—but I wouldn't have said. Angry—and depressed! What! I'm depressed!"

talking on the phone either venting or trying to prioritize. This exercise was eye-opening for me—I mean I could tell you that I was frustrated—but I wouldn't have said. Angry—and depressed! What! I'm depressed! Wow. I am depressed. Quietly I begin to take in this information.

In addition to the primary emotions (e.g., anger) Lilah described for the group and in her diary, Lilah's drawing also suggested that she had created a false, positive front—an emotional façade (Ashkanasy & Daus, 1993; Hewlin, 2003)—that she perceived as in line with emotional management expectations. Her drawing shows that in two telephone interactions with others, she has a smile on her face and a relatively clutter-free environment; however, when she depicts herself alone, a frown is prominent and the environment appears overwhelming. In a later diary entry, Lilah said, "In my accommodating fashion—I would do what needed to be done—but internally it was tearing me down."

In retrospect, Lilah's self-identified depression appeared to be a secondary state of emotion (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996), or general state that resulted from untended primary emotions, and it compromised her ability to deal naturally with change-related emotions. It also likely played some role in the observed outward change from a sunny personality to a withdrawn persona; Greenberg and Hinings (1996) point out that avoiding pain tends to lead to a complete avoidance of emotions, including those that are positive and energy-giving. The drawings exercise prompted the process of accessing and acknowledging those emotions.

The use of participant drawings to elicit emotions is well grounded in the field of art therapy (Allen, 1995; Malchiodi, 2011; McNamee, 2004) and qualitative research methodological studies (Guillemin, 2004; Kearney, 2009; Kearney & Hyle, 2013; Theron, Mitchell, & Smith, 2011). The use of art can uncover very strong emotions, including despair (Allen, 1995). "Once that despair is felt and acknowledged, however, it passes and new options arise that empower individuals to think of new ways to view the problems and create new solutions" (p. 3–4). The previous quote from the field of art therapy clearly aligns with the Greenberg and Hinings' (1996; Greenberg, 2004) description of the outcomes of accessing and experiencing the avoided emotion. Whether one looks to art therapy or therapeutic psychology, this process was evident for Lilah. Her acknowledgment and processing of her change-related feelings, which began with the drawings exercise, resulted in a renewed sense of agency and energy that was reported both verbally and in her diary entries—a positive effect that was also reported by Huy (2002) in her study of emotional balancing efforts by middle managers during organizational change. As with Huy, Lilah's transformation was initiated within the work environment.

## The Grief Construct

As previously noted, the Kubler-Ross (1969; Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) grief model was presented to the group as a companion to the drawings exercise. Originating in the study of death and dying, the emotional stages identified by Kubler-Ross and her students were denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Hope was also threaded throughout the grieving process, which was comprised of fluid and overlapping stages (although it is typically presented in a concrete U-shaped stage model that depicts depression at the bottom of a figurative trough). Grief models have been used by previous organizational change researchers and consultants (Daugird et al., 1996; Kearney et al., 2003; Perlman et al., 1990; Schoolfield et al., 1994)—however, typically for their own understanding. Providing the lens directly to organizational participants as an opportunity to better understand their own emotions is a relatively new application. (A grief model was also used in the Huy [2002] study, but data about its specific efficacy were not reported.) It was hoped that the Kubler-Ross model would provide the four operations team members (all women) "handles" for grasping their emotional experiences, as well as for gaining clarity and a sense that what they were experiencing was "normal."

Lilah's recognition of her own depression on the day of the workshop, and as later noted in her diary, linked to the U-shaped visual of Kubler-Ross' model.

> I guess if you're falling to the bottom of a canyon—It's always nice to have your glasses on so you see clearly/exactly where you are and exactly where you need to go. Being at the bottom of a canyon is a growth point in life—looking around with new lenses—you begin to see new steps that were a complete blur before. Once I clearly realized where I was, I began looking around—trying to figure out what I needed to do to get out. How did I get here? Why did I allow it to get to this point?

This entry in Lilah's diary provides support for earlier statements that facing and re-owning the emotions allows participants a new sense of agency and forward motion.

## The Bonfire

Bonfires are historically powerful symbolic and political tools that activists have used, for example, to call attention to social problems—librarians burned books in bonfires to protest and symbolize the deterioration of a reading culture and the public's decreasing value of reading. During the second wave of the feminist movement, women demonstrated against patriarchal objects and oppressions with symbolic burnings in trash cans. In this instance, the bonfire was used as a powerful symbol of loss and renewal from the problems associated with revolutionary change. Lilah's comments and actions during the workshop revealed her ongoing struggle to sort out the linkages among the emotions surfaced by the drawings exercise and discussion, her underlying emotions, and the organizational change. Her frustration, agitation, and felt loss of control

over her bubbling emotions were observable, and other team members were beginning to discuss their concern about her in whispered conversations. Three years later, she said:

> No one really seemed to understand why the emotions were so evident from me and even in the moment, I had a very difficult time putting my finger exactly on the why behind it all. But it was there and I was standing in the middle of some huge changes without any clear direction . . . except we gotta keep moving.

The "bonfire" was an effort to assist Lilah in understanding her reactions. Structured as a paired exercise approximately 2 hours after the drawings discussion, each woman was asked to write down, on separate pieces of paper, every identifiable loss—big and small—that she was experiencing as a result of the current change. Lilah and her partner took turns identifying their losses and, if one was considered an irretrievable loss, ceremoniously throwing the piece of paper on which that loss was written into the mock bonfire. Through this exercise Lilah began to identify the losses associated with her emotions and, therefore, began to connect and process them. In her diary, Lilah later wrote:

> Bonfire . . .
> What have you lost that you will never get back?
> What have you lost that you see coming back?
> This [again] ignited my emotional whirlwind. Some things were easy to see—and my losses in the Bonfire were things like—commonality (we used to all work from home), my part-time job, there were more . . . "there's something else—I just don't know what it is." Well I figured it out and the tears were flowing.—

At this point Lilah made a connection between her feelings of anger and depression and her belief that "I have lost my importance in the company. I'm not needed like I used to be." Her reaction to this realization was uncontrolled tears and a hasty departure from the room, an incident that was later recorded in her diary.

> GREAT! Now here I am just all out crying in the bathroom. I look weak. But I've realized what is causing this—I have lost my importance in the company. I'm not needed like I used to be. We've added people and we're passing off my responsibilities like it was nothing. Doesn't it mean something?

Lilah returned to the room, approximately 20 minutes later, with observably different behaviors. While still quiet and internally focused, Lilah's boiling outward emotions and agitation had somewhat abated. From this point forward, her actions and the tone of her diary were markedly different, and it was only a short time after the workshop that she began to look for options for moving forward.

The bonfire was an exercise that was created "in the moment"; however, its theme of identifying losses does have links to the grief and organizational change literature (Agarwal et al., 2012; Kanov et al., 2004; Kearney et al., 2003; Kubler-Ross et al., 2005; Liu & Perrewe, 2005). Likewise, an empathetic environment (Greenberg, 2004) or "a place to stand in which one has a view of the painful experience and how it

was created" (Greenberg & Hinings, 1996, p. 331) is noted by Greenberg as one of two important conditions that are critical to the processing of emotional pain. In Lilah's case, it appeared the bonfire exercise provided this important component and thus provided a turning point in her processing of emotions and renewal of strength.

**Lilah's Diary**

After the workshop, Lilah kept a diary as a way to process her experience of the organization's ongoing change. Diaries have a long association with intimate and personal processing and have served as a vehicle for individuals to record and process events. Given the origins of diaries, keeping one may seem at odds with formal institutional processing or an undertaking best relegated to an individual's off-work time—essentially a permeating of the personal/professional boundary. However, such artificial separations of the work/personal boundary are at odds with the emotional nature and investments human beings have in their daily work life. In addition, Lilah's diary was a spontaneous, work-focused effort that, while inclusive of personal feelings, was focused on processing work events.

Lilah's diary was a simple $8 \frac{1}{2}$ by 11-inch spiral-bound notebook. Entries were hand written in ink and her writing form varied across the diary, sometimes in reaction to her emotion at the time (e.g., in times where content suggested or stated emotional distress, the writing varies in size and type across the entry and is, generally, less carefully formed). A sample page of Lilah's diary appears in Figure 4. Occasionally a word was scribbled out on a diary page and a new word was written above it in a different type of ink, indicating that the entry was reread, reprocessed, and edited. Few of the entries were dated; however, sufficient dates were available to later know that Lilah's diary encompassed spontaneous entries for an additional 2 months

following the workshop. While entries in Lilah's diary demonstrate the emotions processing, sensemaking, and self-renewal she experienced, later entries in the diary speak to the issue directly.

> So, at this point I am clear on how I got to where I am —crystal clear. And the past has shown me that I am going to have to be the one to get me out . . . Step One . . .

Lilah's entry later continues:

> Being in the canyon, you really have to look inside yourself and reassess Everything. I mean the only way to truly *GROW* from being down here is to pull strength from within and *visualize* where you want to go.

Lilah's diary seemed to provide an opportunity for sensemaking through writing, for recording her experience in a way she could revisit and reprocess. As evidenced through previous excerpts, her diary entries also make a significant contribution to our understanding of the internal processing of change-related emotions.

**APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

As is typical in most organizations today, this company's revolutionary change was followed by other changes, both big and small. There was no identifiable ending to the processing of the change described in this case study and, other than the continued existence of the company, little concrete evidence that established either the success or failure of the intervention. Realistically, the "results" could likely only be considered a mishmash of success and failure, depending upon the individual person's perspective and original goals. Such is life away from the textbook models of change. Such is also the frustration of
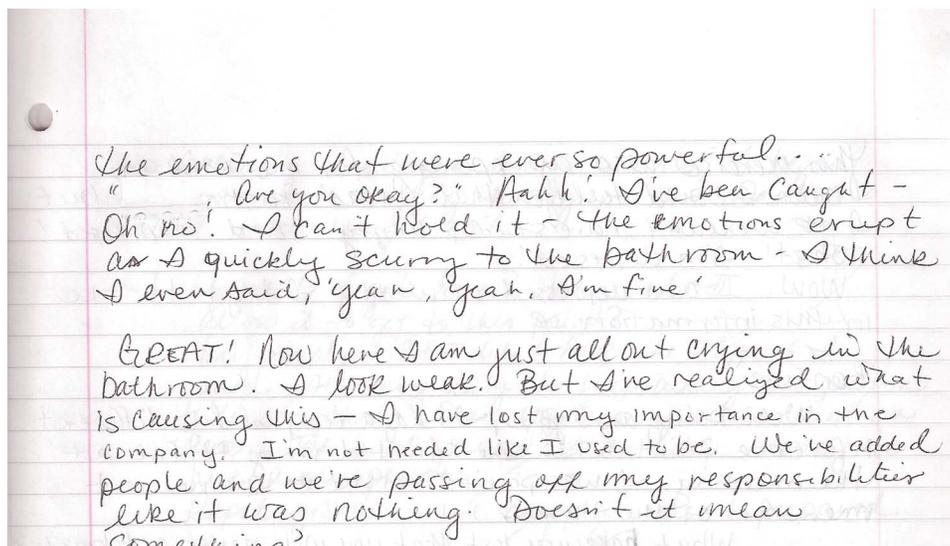


FIG. 4. Scan of one of Lilah's diary pages.

trying to adequately "measure" the success or failure of organizational intervention; often, clear categorizations of successful or unsuccessful cannot be the goal.

One year after the intervention, in a written note and follow-up conversation about how her thoughts had coalesced and smoothed with time, Lilah acknowledged the significance of the drawings exercise, and the related processing activities, in freeing herself from the crippling emotions that were associated with her organizational change experience. In further reflection 6 years following the intervention, she said:

> These processing tools provided the outlet for me to go deeper and actually pinpoint why the emotions were so strong. Emotions from the CEO were rare and a weakness from her perspective. I needed permission to feel what I was feeling so I could process that and figure out how to move forward, not just for the company but for me.

Lilah believed that the tools used had significant impact on her ability to acknowledge her emotions as appropriate and, in fact, were fuel for forward motion.

Additional considerations surrounding the applications of these and similar tools follow.

1. The notion that tools such as diaries are strictly personal efforts obscures the artificiality of the organizational/emotional boundary and the ways tools traditionally considered "personal" could be institutionalized for processing change-related emotions. Work is profoundly personal and emotional. Thus, fields such as psychotherapy and grief counseling may offer insights previously thought to be unrelated to the organizational environment.

2. Emotions that Lilah related directly to the Kubler-Ross (1969; Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) grief construct were omnipresent in this data. Other team members also spontaneously remarked on the linkages of their elicited emotions to grief. The experiences of the participants suggest that a grief model gives individuals a framework for making sense of their emotional reactions to change; data from this study also affirm earlier statements in the literature that negative emotional reactions to change are quite normal.

3. As with therapeutic tools, it is critical that the tools used in change intervention are used to *facilitate* the emotional-related information presented by participants. The consultant in this study made decisions about which tool seemed appropriate within the rapidly evolving needs and processing of the participants, decisions that could have been considered to have either good or bad outcomes. The internal or external consultant must be armed with a significant level of facilitation skills, a commitment to the importance of acknowledging the emotional components of change, a willingness to accept and support participant experiences, and a strong knowledge of the human implications of organizational change. Likewise, he or she should be in a shared understanding with the company's leaders that change intervention is neither a clean nor a clear process. Outcomes

will be unfolding and perhaps unpredictable except for in retrospect and over time.

4. While the use of each of the tools in this in-depth case study appeared to prompt emotional processing, numerous questions about each of the tools remain. For instance, while the diary tool appeared to be extremely effective for Lilah, she spontaneously began the diary process prior to the author's request. Would others less drawn to this type of sensemaking have similarly positive effects? Would "drawing at work" be resisted by those who believe that emotions belong at home?

The tools used in this study are compelling in that they may suggest concrete, affordable, and manageable tools that can assist with change-based emotions; however, a range of other tools might be equally effective. Ultimately, the choice of tool may be less important than that the tools, at minimum, (a) communicate that there is space in the organization to affirm but not legislate the complex nature of emotions during organizational change, (b) provide information that supports the importance of processing emotions at work, and (c) make available different strategies for eliciting and normalizing individual experiences. Overall, this workshop and the collaborative reflections on its outcomes suggest that tools like these, supported by research literature but formed in the fires of the field, demonstrate promise for change-related emotional processing. Likewise, this article presents an example of the challenges, the messiness, and the pressures of dealing with real-world change—change that occurs well away from organizational textbooks and theoretical ideals.

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