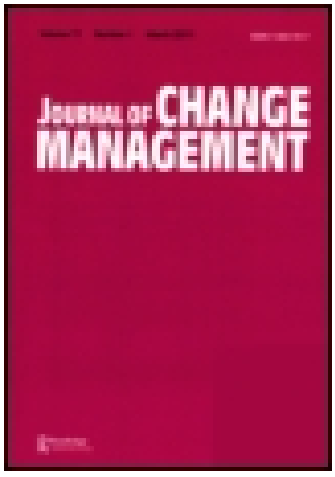

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Minds, hearts and deeds: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change

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Minds, Hearts and Deeds: Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Responses to Change

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ABSTRACT *When people are faced with changes to some aspect of their working lives they respond on a number of levels: cognitive, affective and behavioural. The behavioural responses are outcomes of the cognitive and emotional reactions, and are mediated and moderated by a number of variables, some of which lie in the context of the employee, some in the context of the change managers, and some in the context of the organisation. In this article a model will be presented that identifies a range of reactions to change and a series of propositions that can be tested empirically.*

KEY WORDS: Organisational change, cognitive, affective, behavioural responses

Introduction

Leaders of change will hope, if not expect, that organisational members will comply with the change initiative, and preferably enthusiastically support it with appropriate action (Piderit, 2000). Duck (1993) suggests that organisations that introduce change need to gain the hearts and minds of their members if the change is to be successful. A number of researchers into organisational behaviour have criticised the neglect of emotion, both by managers and fellow researchers (e.g. Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Fisher and Ashkanasy, 2000). Studies of organisational change in particular have also been criticised for excluding the affective domain and focussing on cognitive and behavioural aspects (Mossholder *et al.*, 2000). Since change is often an "affective event" (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Basch and Fisher, 2000) analysing its emotional impacts is critical.

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Gersick (1991) has distinguished between incremental and radical change and points to the resulting positive and negative emotions. While she did not differentiate between the emotions that are likely under different types of change it seems logical that radical change will produce more emotional reaction than incremental change, since the ramifications of the former are much greater. It must also be noted that change is often a process that unfolds over time, sometimes years (Piderit, 2000; Isabella, 1990; Paterson and Cary, 2002), and that the human responses will be as dynamic as the changes themselves. Changes of greater complexity are likely to generate more negative and more intense emotions (Kiefer, 2004) and more resistance (George and Jones, 2001), and therefore require more careful and sustained management. However, it will be suggested in this article, that no matter what type of change is contemplated, leaders will need to gauge how employees might respond on all three levels.

In this article I will review literature on the relationship between cognition and emotion in the context of change, present a model of cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change, analyse the variables that mediate and moderate these responses, and derive a related set of propositions that can be tested empirically.

Cognition and Emotion in the Context of Change

The relationship between emotion and cognition has been debated for centuries by philosophers, psychologists, novelists and organisational theorists, with a number of different conclusions—emotion is the opposite of reason (Weber, 1946), emotion is deeply interwoven with reason (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995), emotion can occur independently of reason (Zajonc, 1980; Izard, 1992).

Cognition is a process of thought in which a person first becomes aware of stimuli, appraises the significance of those stimuli and then considers possible behavioural responses (Scherer, 1999). Emotions are immediate responses to environmental stimuli that are important to the individual and tend to be short in duration (Frijda, 1988; Gray and Watson, 2001). Emotion needs to be distinguished from moods, which are more diffuse in nature, not specifically linked to events or objects, lower in intensity and longer lasting (Gray and Watson, 2001; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), and from temperament, which is a facet of disposition and is a relatively stable and biologically-rooted pattern of individual differences (Bates, 2000). Affect comprises emotion, mood and temperament. Circumplex models of affect have analysed its dimensions along two main axes, pleasantness (positive and negative emotions) and arousal or activation (high and low) (Tellegen *et al.*, 1999; Russell and Carroll, 1999).

Lazarus (1991) suggests that the relationship between cognition and emotion is bidirectional—emotion influences cognition, cognition elicits emotion. He asserts that while cognition does not necessarily lead to emotion, emotion cannot occur without cognition. Emotion alerts the individual to factors in the environment which are potentially significant. For example, a feeling of anxiety may heighten awareness of the need to take action, while guilt and anger produce thoughts that may lead to redress of an injustice.

In the context of organisational change employees become aware of change through a variety of mechanisms, from formal communication, peer discussion

and other observable cues. Through primary appraisal (Lazarus, 1999) employees evaluate the significance of the change event for themselves (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and can extend this to the impact on others and the organisation itself. Secondary appraisal focuses on the causes and agents of change, and on possible coping strategies (Lazarus, 1999; Scherer, 1999; Paterson and Hartel, 2002; Jordan *et al.*, 2002). George and Jones' (2001) model of resistance to change delineates the steps that occur when employees use a combination of cognitive and affective processes to make sense of the impending changes, particularly when the existing schemata (cognitive frameworks that help people to understand events) are challenged.

Cognitive and affective responses create attitudes to change that may contain positive and negative elements (Piderit, 2000) and will be influenced by a range of factors, including perceived favourability of outcomes and fairness of outcomes, processes of decision making and communication (Weiss *et al.*, 1999; Paterson and Hartel, 2002; Matheny and Smollan, 2005).

The question that now arises is to what extent cognitive and affective processes predict behavioural responses. Do employees follow their minds *and* their hearts when deciding how to respond to organisational stimuli, and specifically in the context of this article, change events? The model presented below depicts the nature of the responses and the factors that affect them.

A Model of Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Responses to Change

Figure 1 shows that organisational change triggers cognitive responses (positive, negative, neutral or mixed evaluations) which are mediated by perceptions of the favourability of the outcomes, and the justice, scale, pace and timing of change. Cognitive responses impact on, and are impacted by, affective responses (positive, negative, neutral or mixed emotions) (Lazarus, 1991). Before behaviour occurs (positive, negative, neutral or mixed—from the view of the organisation), people usually consider the implications of behavioural choices. Piderit (2000), for example, suggests that employees rarely engage in resistant behaviour without considering the possible personal consequences. Some, however, may be moved to act on affective impulses without considering the ramifications of their actions. Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses are moderated by factors within the individual (emotional intelligence, disposition, previous experience of change, change and stressors outside the workplace); factors within the change manager/s (leadership ability, emotional intelligence and trustworthiness); and within the organisation (culture and context). Employee responses may alter some aspect of the change programme, highlighting the dynamic and circular nature of the process. The model is applicable to a wide spectrum of change events but the nature of the change will clearly have differing impacts on employees. An organisational restructuring to accommodate growth, accompanied by the recruitment and promotion of staff, will naturally evoke different emotions from one that results in downsizing. The concept of the change context will be revisited towards the end of the paper as a moderating variable to cognitive, affective and behavioural responses.

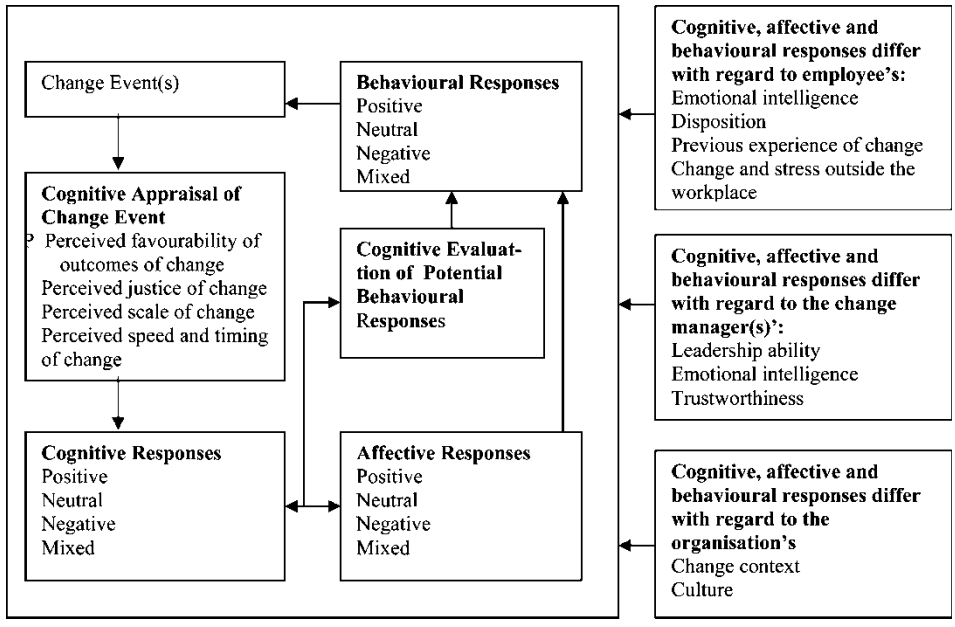

Figure 1. Model of responses to organisational change

Positive responses: Employees may believe that the changes will be beneficial, to the organisation, some of its external stakeholders, to groups of employees or the individual employee. Positive cognitions should lead to positive emotions that could range in intensity from exhilaration and enthusiasm to pleasure and contentment (French, 2001; Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001). On the behavioural level employees willingly engage in the tasks expected of them and may even attempt to exceed performance expectations. Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (Organ, 1988; Spector and Fox, 2002), which encompass a range of prosocial behaviours, such as helping others, showing initiative, altruistic actions, loyalty and increased effort, may result.

Neutral responses: The changes may have little perceived impact on some employees including little, if any, emotional arousal. They are likely to demonstrate acquiescence or submissive collaboration (Bacharach *et al.*, 1996).

Negative responses: Employees who experience strong cognitive reactions, accompanied by strong negative emotions, such as fear or anger, will be likely to reject the changes (Kiefer, 2004). Rejection is a term that encompasses but is not confined to the term resistance, and manifests itself in many ways: disloyalty, neglect, exit or intention to quit (Turnley and Feldman, 1999), lower trust (Kiefer, 2004; Brockner *et al.*, 1997), active campaigning against the change (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998), deception (Shapiro *et al.*, 1995), sabotage (La Nuez and Jermier, 1994; Spector and Fox, 2002), violence and aggression (Spector and Fox, 2002; Fox *et al.*, 2001; Neuman and Baron, 1998), industrial action, such as strikes, go-slows and refusal to work or complete certain tasks (Skarlicki *et al.*, 1999). Researchers have used the terms Organisational Resistance Behaviours

(Skarlicki *et al.*, 1999) and Counterproductive Work Behaviours (Spector and Fox, 2002) to categorise a number of dysfunctional and anti-social behaviours, some of which are targeted at organisational members, and some at the organisation itself. It should also be noted that negative cognitive and affective responses are often well-intentioned (Piderit, 2000). They may result in action construed as appropriate, and which lead to further discussion and the implementation of more acceptable, and possibly more beneficial, organisational outcomes.

The term resistance to change has been criticised by Dent and Goldberg (1999) and Piderit (2000). They allege that it is overused and inaccurately used. Resistance is often seen as refusal to engage in the change or subverting it, but can also be conceptualised as reluctance (Piderit, 2000) or inertia (George and Jones, 2001). Anticipated resistance becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby managers have been educated and trained to see resistance as inevitable, negative and largely due to the ignorance or wilfulness of recalcitrant employees. Resistance is not always confined to "workers"—managers themselves are often sources of resistance too (Spreitzer and Quinn, 1996; La Nuez and Jermier, 1994).

Mixed responses: Employees who have mixed cognitive evaluations of different aspects of change, mixed positive and negative emotions, or, say, a positive cognition but a negative emotion, may demonstrate positive, negative, neutral or mixed behaviours. For example, employees could consider an extended work schedule to be in the interests of the customers, and therefore the organisation, but not believe that all employees should be required to work inconvenient shifts, and feel anxiety and anger if they are forced to do so. The behavioural outcome could be to persuade management to change the schedule or a colleague to change shifts. An employee may however simply accept new methods of record keeping that accompany the change, and comply with them, yet simultaneously experience happiness in dealing with different customers and perform at a high level. Piderit (2000) notes the ambivalence within and among the three dimensions of attitudes to change. Behavioural responses in particular, can be contradictory, for example overt support for the change, accompanied by a covert rejection by means of an anonymous submission to a suggestion box. The need for a specific change might be accepted on a cognitive level but there could be emotional resistance. The nature of the behavioural response is therefore not a simple outcome of cognitive and affective reactions. There are a number of forces at work that prevent what would seem a logical, if not preferred, response (Piderit, 2000). Research propositions cannot automatically state, for example, that negative cognitive and emotional responses to change will lead to negative behavioural responses.

Variables Mediating Cognitive Responses to Change

Before a judgement takes place (a cognitive evaluation), people use a number of lenses through which they view the changes:

Perceived Favourability of Outcomes

Employees will analyse the favourability of outcomes for themselves, others and for the organisation, and there may be differing outcomes for various stakeholders

(Paterson and Cary, 2002). For example, Matheny and Smollan (2005) found that individuals saw different outcomes for themselves, for others and for the organisation. Where employees find it difficult to predict outcomes their responses will remain either neutral or ambivalent. Disposition (which will be considered in more depth later) can play a significant role, with optimists and pessimists experiencing opposite forms of anticipation (Wanberg and Banas, 2000).

Proposition 1: Cognitive responses to change are mediated by the perceived favourability of the outcomes of change.

Perceived Justice of Change

Employees' cognitive and affective responses to change are tempered by their perceptions of fairness (Cobb *et al.*, 1995; Skarlicki *et al.*, 1999). A considerable body of research on organisational justice has identified distinctive elements. Distributive justice refers to the fairness of outcomes (Homans, 1961). Procedural justice relates to perceptions of the fairness by which decisions are made (Thibaut and Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1980; Tyler and Lind, 1992). This includes interactional justice (Bies and Moag, 1986), divided into interpersonal justice and informational justice (Greenberg, 1993), and is manifested in the ways in which managers communicate outcomes and procedures to staff. Systemic justice (Sheppard *et al.*, 1992; Harlos and Pinder, 2000) is an overarching term for the perceived fairness of a wide variety of practices over time, and is a facet of the organisational culture. In the context of organisational change employees may view announced changes against the backdrop of historical practices, including previous change initiatives.

While perceptions of each form of justice have their own distinctive impact (Paterson and Cary, 2002; Matheny and Smollan, 2005) Lind's (2001) Fairness Heuristic Theory suggests that people take a holistic view of events and issues when making fairness judgements. While perceptions of justice would tend to produce positive emotions, perceptions of injustice will lead to more intense negative emotions (Mikula *et al.*, 1998; Weiss *et al.*, 1999). Negative perceptions and feelings are likely to lead to negative behavioural responses.

Violations of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1988; Robinson and Rousseau, 1989) also produce a sense of injustice and strong emotional reactions. The psychological contract, an employee perception of mutual obligations of employer and employee, is a distinct construct to that of organisational justice but there are considerable overlaps (Cropanzano and Prehar, 2001). Violations of the psychological contract lead to various negative behavioural responses, such as intentions to quit, neglect and a decrease in Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Kickul *et al.*, 2002).

Proposition 2: Cognitive responses to change are mediated by employees' perceptions of justice.

The Scale of the Change

Cognitive reactions to change will be influenced by the scale of the change (Mossholder *et al.*, 2000). Dirks *et al.* (1996) propose that individuals with a strong sense of psychological ownership of some aspect of their jobs will find revolutionary change threatening, and tend to resist it. George and Jones (2001) argue that changes to existing schemata will have a more profound impact on people than changes within the schemata themselves, a point also made by Gersick (1991). While welcome change outcomes may engender positive reactions (French, 2001) the sheer scale of the change or too many new events occurring simultaneously (Blount and Janicik, 2001; Kiefer, 2004) may trigger negative reactions.

Proposition 3: Cognitive responses to change will be affected by the perceived scale of the change.

Perceived Speed and Timing of the Change

There is little management literature dealing with individual responses to the speed of change. Most research has focussed on organisational pacing from a strategic and tactical perspective (e.g. Gersick, 1994; Sastry, 1997) or the extent to which an individual's work pace is affected by schedule changes. For example, Blount and Janicik (2001) propose that an unwanted schedule delay will be viewed particularly negatively if it is unexpected, if the period of delay is unknown, and if impatience is a dispositional influence. Conversely, if the pace of change is deemed too fast employees may believe they cannot take the necessary steps in time, or do so with severe disruption to normal routines, and they are likely to react negatively (Blount and Janicik, 2001; Huy, 2001).

Huy (2001) provides a useful model of how different styles of management intervention impact on different types of change. For example, more radical forms of change require a longer time frame for implementation. Since using an inappropriate approach creates negative employee perceptions he urges managers to be aware of individual responses to not only the pacing, but also the timing and sequencing of organisational changes. The introduction of a major change at the busiest time of the year or month, or the announcement of a new executive bonus scheme following downsizing, are bound to be perceived negatively by many employees.

Proposition 4: Cognitive responses to change are mediated by the perceived speed and timing of the change.

Variables Moderating Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural Responses to Change

A cognitive response triggers an affective response although the impact has also been considered bi-directional (Lazarus, 1991). Perceived favourability of outcomes, justice, scale, and speed and timing of change, all have affective elements.

There are a number of variables that moderate cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Some of the moderators lie within the individual, and some within the manager(s) leading or implementing the change, and some within the broader context of the organisation itself.

Variables within the Employee

Employees' Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Competing models of emotional intelligence have focussed on EI as ability (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) and on EI as a combination of ability and disposition (Goleman, 1998; Bar-On, 1997). Goleman (1998), for example, identifies empathy and integrity as key characteristics of EI. Focussing on the ability model emotional intelligence is seen as the ability to accurately perceive the emotions of oneself and others, to regulate one's emotions and respond appropriately to the emotions of others (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). In the context of organisational change employees who are high in EI are able to discern and control the feelings they experience. Employees high in EI will be aware of the potential impact of their behaviour on their peers and managers and moderate their words and actions. Cognitive processes are thus embedded in the affective processes and the two promote or constrain behaviour. For example, Jordan *et al.* (2002) propose that employees with high EI are able to cognitively and affectively process issues pertaining to job insecurity, and devise appropriate coping strategies.

> *Proposition 5:* Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by employees' emotional intelligence.

Disposition of Employees

It is commonly believed by lay people that the way in which employees respond to organisational change is directly related to disposition (Wanous *et al.*, 2000). Change often involves uncertainty and those who have what French (2001, p. 482) refers to as negative capability are able to "tolerate ambiguity and paradox" since they have the "capacity to integrate mental and emotional states" and consequently adapt their behaviour. Watson and Clark (1997) specifically identified a predilection for change in various facets of life as representative of people with high positive affectivity, a characteristic which will also be found in organisational contexts (Spector and Fox, 2002).

In an empirical study Judge *et al.* (1999) found seven personality factors predicted reactions to change, which they grouped into two main categories. Positive self-concept included locus of control, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and positive affectivity, while risk tolerance included openness to experience, tolerance of ambiguity and risk aversion. In particular, tolerance for ambiguity and positive affectivity were strongly correlated to self-reported ability to deal with change. Wanberg and Banas (2000) revealed that self-esteem, optimism and perceived control were related to acceptance of change. Jimmieson *et al.* (2004) reported change-related efficacy to be a significant variable in determining responses to

organisational change. In developing and testing a scale to measure dispositional reactions to change, Oreg (2003) found four major relevant personality factors: need for routine, emotional responsiveness, short-term focus on outcomes and cognitive rigidity. In a number of empirical studies he found that disposition predicted reaction to change, regardless of context.

Proposition 6: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by employee disposition.

Employees' Previous Experience of Change

Previous experience of change has the potential of producing two opposing responses to a newly announced change. An employee who has previously experienced a positive change, or who has coped well with a negative change, may respond positively, while an employee with a negative experience would view the new change with unease. Past failures in organisational change breed cynicism, which, according to Wanous *et al.* (2000), becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this context the employees are pessimistic about outcomes, attribute blame to management (Wanous *et al.*, 2000), and their lack of commitment can undermine the changes (Abraham, 2000). Even if previous initiatives have been successful frequent changes will trigger negative reactions (Kiefer, 2004).

Proposition 7: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by employees' previous experience of change.

Change and Stress Producing Events Outside the Workplace

An organisational change impacts on one part of an employee's life. The manner in which an employee reacts to the change depends on the broader context of his/her life. The Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Rating scale, developed in 1967, and other instruments that have followed, have over the years demonstrated high correlations between recent life changes and physical and psychological symptoms (Rahe *et al.*, 2000). An individual faced with a major change outside of work, or a number of minor changes, may react negatively—on cognitive, affective and behavioural levels—to an organisational change. Any stress-inducing issue outside of work can trigger negative responses to change at work, as employees' coping resources are depleted. Employee disposition is a related factor—those with higher resilience are better able to cope with additional demands (Wanberg and Banas, 2000).

Proposition 8: Employees responses to organisational change are moderated by changes and any stress-producing event outside of work.

Variables within the Change Manager(s)

Two or more levels of management may be involved in designing and implementing organisational change and the perceptions of employees of the contributions of different managers will produce different evaluations.

Leadership Ability of Change Manager(s)

The links between leadership and successful organisational change have been documented in many works (e.g. Eisenbach *et al.*, 1999). Two major types of leadership have been associated with change, transformational leadership (Bass, 1999; Yukl, 1999) and charismatic leadership (Conger *et al.*, 2000; Yukl, 1999). These literatures have emphasised the ability of leaders to drive change and motivate followers to higher levels of performance. While there are many other types of leadership successful change managers have to adopt styles that engage followers (Huy, 2001). Participative forms of leadership (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; Chawla and Kelloway, 2004) have long been considered to have considerable impact in overcoming resistance to change and simultaneously affecting perceptions of organisational justice (Thibaut and Walker, 1975).

Propositian 9: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by the leadership ability of the change manager(s).

Emotional Intelligence of Change Manager(s)

Transformational leadership has been associated with emotional intelligence (Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000). Leaders with high EI demonstrate both empathy and integrity (Parry and Proctor-Thomson, 2002) which are key qualities in developing employee trust since leaders are able to influence people on both the cognitive and affective levels (George, 2000; Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000). Leaders need to be particularly adept at discerning the emotional reactions of employees to change and providing the necessary support, especially given the uncertainty and negative emotions that accompany many changes (Kiefer, 2004).

Proposition 10: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of employees to change are moderated by the emotional intelligence of the change manager(s).

Perceived Trustworthiness of the Change Manager(s)

Perceptions of the trustworthiness of the managers will also influence employees' responses to change. Leventhal (1980) and Tyler and Lind (1992) noted trust to be a significant factor in the formation of employee perceptions of procedural justice and that this impacts directly on their choice of behaviour. Brockner *et al.* (1997) demonstrated empirically that employees' trust in managers derives from perceptions of procedural justice and has a significant impact on their acceptance of changes, particularly when the outcomes are unfavourable, a link which was

confirmed by Paterson and Cary (2002) in a study on downsizing. Chawla and Kelloway (2004) found trust to be related to procedural and informational justice during a merger. Parry and Proctor-Thomson (2002) discovered that integrity contributes strongly to transformational leadership ability, while Conger *et al.* (2000) found a similar relationship with charismatic leadership. Kiefer (2004) demonstrated that negative emotions during periods of change lead to reduced trust in leaders.

Proposition 11: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by employees' perceptions of the trustworthiness of the change manager(s).

Variables within the Context of the Organisation

Organisational Culture

The ways in which individuals interpret organisational events, including change events, depend to a large extent on their previous history with the organisation. An organisation where speedy response to change is a major driver will encounter different individual responses to one that is more bureaucratic and less agile. Paradoxically, an organisation that seldom consults staff may find that a unilateral change, even an unpalatable one, is accepted as the norm, whereas an organisation that invites participation as general rule, but fails to do so during a change, may find a surprised and somewhat hostile reception. Perceived systemic injustice (Sheppard *et al.*, 1992; Harlos and Pinder, 2000) will nevertheless lend weight to views that an announced change is unfair.

Where the culture itself is the object of change, there may be more resistance as the "deep structure" (Gersick, 1991) or schemata (Bartunek and Moch, 1987; George and Jones, 2001) are dismantled, and the implications and mechanisms are complex (Porras and Robertson, 1992). There is a strong emotional undertone to organisational culture (Porras and Robertson, 1992) and if this is damaged the consequences can be severe (Huy, 2001).

In an empirical study Kabanoff *et al.* (1995) found that organisations with different value structures depicted and communicated change differently, but the authors did not specifically address individual responses. Turnbull (2002), however, studied the ways individuals responded to an organisation's attempts to deliberately change its culture to one of trust, openness, innovation and loyalty, in workshops laden with emotional appeals. She found that employees did experience both cognitive and affective reactions, but often in unintended ways, with mistrust, anger and embarrassment often eventuating. Employees reported the need to hide their feelings and in many cases pretended to comply with the changes.

Proposition 12: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by organisational culture.

Organisational Change Context

To return to a point made during the introduction of the model, the context of the change underpins many of the responses. The mostly frequently cited example of negative change is downsizing, which has a profound affect on victims (Paterson and Cary, 2002) and a lesser, but noticeably significant, impact on survivors (O'Neill and Lenn, 1995; Armstrong-Stassen, 1998). A merger (even without any redundancies) may create winners and losers, as some people are given greater responsibilities and more status while others may experience the opposite (Kiefer, 2002). Office relocations may also produce perceived winners and losers (Daley and Geyer, 1994). An expansion programme will generally produce positive reactions. Naturally, with any change there is the possibility of mixed responses within individuals. A person who gains promotion from a change, or a bigger department to manage, or who may need to travel more, will consider the extra demands that these changes will bring. Heightened anxiety and a sense of regret may exist alongside the more joyous outcomes.

Proposition 13: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are moderated by the change context.

Conclusion

Change is a potentially affective event (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and the model and propositions advanced above extend the literature on organisational change, and in particular, the impact of cognitive and affective reactions on behaviour. Testing of these propositions by means of quantitative and qualitative research will uncover the complexities of these relationships and the myriad of variables involved, and add to knowledge of how organisational change can be better understood and managed.

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