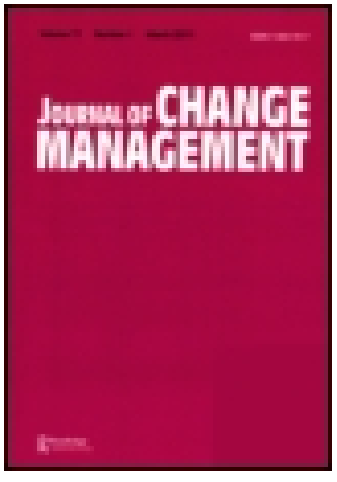

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Organizational Culture, Change and Emotions: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT *Change triggers emotions as employees experience the processes and outcomes of organizational transformation. An organization's affective culture, which shapes the way emotions are experienced and expressed, plays a particularly important part during changes to the culture and other aspects of organizational life. This article contributes to the literature by illustrating the relationships between culture, change and emotions and presents the results of a qualitative study. The study found that when participants' values were congruent with those of the organization, they tended to react to change more positively. Cultural change provoked emotional reactions, often of an intense nature. When emotions were acknowledged and treated with respect, people became more engaged with the change. Attitudes to existing culture also produced emotional responses to aspects of change.*

KEY WORDS: Organizational culture, organizational change, emotions, qualitative research

Introduction

> Change is fundamentally about feelings. Companies that want their workers to contribute with their heads and their hearts have to accept that emotions are central to the new management style. . .the most successful change programs reveal that large organizations connect with their people most directly through values – and that values, ultimately, are about beliefs and feelings (Duck, 1993, p. 113).

Organizational culture is regarded as a set of assumptions, beliefs, values, customs, structures, norms, rules, traditions and artefacts (Schein, 2004). More colloquially, culture is 'how things are done around here' (Martin, 2002, p. 3) and it shapes the behavior of its members in overt and covert ways, including

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when change takes place. It has also been called a system of shared meaning (Pizer and Härtel, 2005) but how widely it is really shared is debatable (Martin, 2002). Sub-cultures, for example, exist in organizations (Allen, 2003; Ryan, 2005; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008) which are often based on categories such as hierarchy, department, professional identity, ethnicity and gender, but may also be conceptualized as differing value systems. For example, Palthe and Kossek (2003) developed a typology of sub-cultures that are employee-centered, professional-centered, task-centered and innovation-centered. Employees' behavior is often colored by their perceptions of, and engagement in, the sub-culture as well as in the broader organizational culture (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008). Sub-cultures may become counter-cultures or anti-cultures (Elsmore, 2001) and according to Armenakis *et al.* (1993, p. 687), 'these cultural memberships may polarize the beliefs, attitudes and intentions of members' and produce conflicting responses to change.

This article focuses on how elements of organizational culture influence the emotional responses to organizational change of employees (including managers). While change has cognitive, affective and behavioral components, the affective aspects are frequently overlooked (Piderit, 2000; Szabla, 2007). Emotions are direct responses to events, issues, relationships and objects that are important to people (Frijda, 1988; Lazarus, 1991), whereas mood is longer lasting, more diffuse and not always linked to something specific (Isen, 2000; Weiss, 2002). Affect is a broad term including emotion, mood and disposition (Barsade and Gibson, 2007). Organizational change has the potential to trigger positive and negative emotions and moods in the employee, which depend on a range of factors. These include the perceived valence of the outcomes, the change processes that are used, the speed, timing and frequency of change, the nature of leadership and the employee's personality and emotional intelligence (Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Jordan, 2005; Kiefer, 2005; Smollan, 2006). The culture of the organization can also play an important role in both generating emotions during change and influencing their expression or suppression. In particular, the affective culture, the taken-for-granted ways in which emotion at work is dealt with, may help or hinder employee adjustment on an individual level.

There are a number of ways in which organizational culture, organizational change and emotions are related. First, organizational change can trigger emotions. Second, organizational culture is imbued with emotion and, therefore, cultural change is especially emotional. A change in culture can be the goal of management but could occur indirectly as a result of strategic, tactical or operational changes. Third, an organization's affective culture influences how these emotions are experienced and expressed. Fourth, there might be specific elements of a culture that an employee likes or dislikes and these attitudes influence emotional responses to various types of change.

A theoretical example illustrates the potential interaction. The new CEO of an organization, which is bureaucratic but has a strong element of concern for staff, decides that to be competitive the culture needs to be more innovative and more customer-focused. Among other changes, the performance management system now highlights individual achievement of goals, which include the new cultural imperatives. Yet many of the employees feel comfortable with the old culture

and find the new regime too competitive, overly oriented towards change for the sake of change, and less caring of the individual employee. They feel anxious and unhappy about the changes that have taken place. Whereas in the past their concerns were respectfully listened to by managers, the new response is to treat negative emotion as a barrier to performance and to indicate to employees that they need to harden up and support the changes. Conversely, some employees find the changes to be exciting and relevant. Positive emotion is noted by the CEO and taken as a sign that change has been embraced.

There is little literature that integrates employees' emotional responses to change with an analysis of their organizations' cultures, and particularly their affective cultures. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap by reporting on the findings of a qualitative study on organizational changes experienced in multiple settings. To summarize, this article is concerned with three related research questions: What emotions are triggered when an organization's culture changes? How does the emotional culture of an organization influence the ways in which emotions are experienced and expressed when any type of change occurs? How do attitudes to existing culture influence affective responses to various types of change? The article, therefore, contributes to the literature by highlighting how organizational culture can be a content and/or context of change (Self *et al.*, 2007) and how emotion can play a key role.

First, the article engages literature on the two- and three-way interactions between organizational culture, change and emotions, and notes that all of them have been subjected to social constructionist treatments. As Schwandt (2003, p. 307) indicates, 'A general assumption of social constructionism is that knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but is in some sense ideological, political and permeated with values.' Second, it presents and analyzes the findings of interviews conducted with employees across a number of organizations and concludes by identifying the limitations of this study and suggesting avenues for further research.

Literature Review

Organizational Culture, Change and Emotions

The term organizational climate is often used instead of culture, or in addition to it, and is the employee perception of the culture and a manifestation of it (Allen, 2003). The debate as to the similarities and differences between them, and the multiple theoretical perspectives on each (Denison, 1996; Payne, 2002; Allen, 2003), lie outside the scope of this article, and to simplify matters the term organizational culture will be used throughout.

While Schein (1990) indicates that there are many elements of an organizational culture, it is substantially about values (Duck, 1993; Kabanoff *et al.*, 1995; Ryan, 2005). These have been termed 'embedded codes' (Branson, 2008, p. 382) – even if they might be contested. Values may evolve or be deliberately determined, be articulated in mission statements and websites, and included in induction and training sessions or even in 'culture handbooks' (Kunda and van Maanen, 1999). In this way they are overt guides to behaviour, but the messages and the

mechanisms may also be more subtle and act as forms of normative control (Kunda, 2006). Cultural elements may also be communicated in management briefings, performance reviews and informal conversations. Communication often contains emotional language, as the following corporate websites indicate:

> The Virgin brand is built upon Richard Branson's core philosophy – if you keep your staff happy then your customers will be happy, and if you keep your customers happy then your shareholders will be happy (Virgin, 2008).
> At The Walt Disney Company, entertainment is about hope, aspiration and positive resolutions (Disney Corporation, 2008).
> We have four core values (or passions) that are the 'glue' connecting Vodafone in every country around the globe. These are Passion for Customers, Passion for Our People, Passion for Results, and Passion for the World Around Us (Vodafone New Zealand, 2008).

When Vodafone New Zealand acquired an internet service provider to enter a new market, its work culture was reported in the press as being 'energized'. According to a senior manager the company's culture was 'youthful, casual and fun' and that 'it was important for workers to have energy and passion' to be competitive (Keown, 2006, p. C4).

Organizational culture has been considered by various theorists to be socially constructed by multiple managerial (and employee) discourses (Strandgaard Pedersen and Dobbin, 2006). The social processes that enact the values 'endow them with meaning' (Rosen, 1991, p. 6), and, as Allen (2003) puts it, organizational actors create, but are also constrained by, organizational meaning. While managerial intentions usually have stronger currency, the ways in which employees resist managerial framing of culture (Bean and Hamilton, 2006), constructively and deliberately modify it, or less consciously shape it by their actions, contribute to its shifting landscape. There is often a divide between espoused and perceived values (Kabanoff *et al.*, 1995) and between various sub-cultures (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998).

Researchers have explored the emotions-culture nexus. Schein (1990, p. 111) indicates that: 'Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration', and he emphasizes that 'such learning is simultaneously a behavioral, cognitive, and an emotional process.' Focusing on the affective process he contends that one of the factors that contributes to the development of culture is the 'emotional intensity of the actual historical experiences' organizational or group members have shared (Schein, 2004, p. 11). According to van Maanen and Kunda (1989, p. 46), 'Any attempt to manage culture is therefore also an attempt to manage emotions.' The role of emotion is emphasized somewhat idealistically by Bratton *et al.* (2005, p. 51), who claim that 'The most critical function of corporate culture is to generate commitment and enthusiasm among followers by making them feel they are part of a 'family' and participants in a worthwhile venture.'

The social constructionist perspective of emotions takes the view that emotions are phenomena that are culturally mediated (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001)

and developed through interaction in social relationships. Cultural factors influence not merely the experience of specific emotions (such as shame, anger or pride) but also influence how appropriate their display is. Commenting on this approach, Callahan and McCollum (2002, p. 14) indicate that 'emotions are created or constructed as part of a common sensemaking process in social structures' and that 'social constructionism knits together the personal and the social.' Social constructionism underlies much of the literature on emotional labor, which focuses on the requirement to express or suppress emotions at work (Mann, 1999; Bolton; 2005; Fineman, 2008). Zembylas (2006) notes that the feeling and display rules that operate in organizations are both contributors to, and outcomes of, organizational culture.

Organizational values are often reflected in the language that is used, and the language of culture in the context of change can be suffused with emotion. Martin (2002) explains how jargon both defines a culture and shapes it. For example, in researching one form of change – mergers and acquisitions – she noted that the informal use of terms such as 'shark', 'ambush', 'stud', 'cupid', 'rape' and 'afterglow' reflect themes of sex and violence and that these 'metaphors tap the emotional aspects of life in particular kinds of organizations and industries, alluding to emotions that may not be socially acceptable to express more directly' (Martin, 2002, p. 80).

Change has also been the subject of social constructionist approaches. The way in which change is framed by various organizational actors (for example, as an exciting opportunity or a response to problems) can stimulate discourses about change (Mills, 2000; Ford *et al.*, 2002; Bean and Hamilton, 2006) that may or may not result in shared understandings. Resistance to change may be seen as culturally acceptable and negotiable – or as unacceptable and as a barrier to be 'dealt with' or 'managed' (Dent and Goldberg, 1999; Ford *et al.*, 2002; van Dijk and van Dick, 2009). The emotions that people experience, express or suppress during organizational change, are shaped by social relationships inside and outside the organization (Bryant and Wolfram Cox, 2006).

If, as Branson (2008, p. 377) claims, 'values alignment is the bedrock of successful organizational change', this process needs to be carefully managed but nevertheless cannot always work. Literature on identity provides a useful insight into the psychological dynamics of cultural and other forms of organizational change. A person's sense of identity is partly determined by his or her values, which can mesh or clash with organizational values (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Pepper and Larson, 2006). As Ryan (2005, p. 432) puts it, culture 'represents the often unwritten sense of identity, feeling part of the organization. It provides a "glue" and understanding in that it can help individual members make sense of events and change activities.' According to Carr (2001, p. 429), 'the processes involved in the relationship between employee and organization are deep-seated, largely unconscious, intimately connected to the development of identity; and have emotional content.' He suggests that change 'dislodges' identity and leads to anxiety and grieving. Van Knippenberg *et al.* (2009) reported from a study of a merger that members of the dominant company felt a much stronger form of organizational identification than the members of the other company. Similarly, Pepper and Larson (2006) found in a takeover that

members of the acquired company resisted the values of the acquiring company, as a result of what they termed 'identity tensions'. Van Dijk and van Dick (2009) found that change can undermine an employee's identity, particularly in terms of social status, while resistance to change undermines a change leader's identity as a person with power. The role of affect is frequently ignored or discounted as irrational (Domagalski, 1999). This is surprising, given that in the context of cultural change the emotional elements, wrapped as they are in values and identity, are particularly salient.

A number of other examples provide evidence of the dissatisfaction and alienation that can be experienced by employees when culture changes. Eight years of structural change at GE, according to Huy (2001, p. 619), 'left remaining employees reeling from cultural shock and its managers exhausted.' Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) found that when values were threatened by change in the tertiary education sector, employees responded with defensiveness, shock and lower levels of trust. Having conducted indepth studies of two privatized organizations, Elsmore (2001) concluded that changing culture on a large scale is a long term endeavor and causes pain and anguish, particularly when the change is legislated in a top-down fashion. Brooks and Harfield (2000) report on a culture change program in a local government authority changing from a civil service mentality to one of 'public management', where the user pays for a service. The cultural change program, known as 'Giving Value – Being Valued', was considered inequitable since the 'Being Valued' component fell short of the effort expended by staff in 'Giving Value', and evoked negative emotions. At Hewlett-Packard, strategy, structure and culture all changed with a new CEO (Forster, 2006). The family-like culture of previous years gave way to one more focussed on the individual and profit-sharing was replaced by individual performance measures. A number of disaffected staff resigned. Schein points out that new leaders, who are often brought in specifically to change the culture, need to deal with the emotional reactions:

> The infusion of outsiders inevitably brings various cultural assumptions into conflict with each other, raising discomfort and anxiety levels. Leaders who use this change strategy therefore have to figure out how to manage the high levels of anxiety and conflict they have wittingly or unwittingly unleashed. (Schein, 2004, p. 309)

Ryan (2005, p. 433) documents negative reactions in a company which moved from a culture that 'always claimed to value people' to one perceived by an employee where 'the shareholders are more important than the employees.' Another company, the communication giant, Cisco, had a culture of innovation but also one that was termed 'brutally competitive'. When results declined it maintained the focus on goals but together, with other changes, also demanded forms of collaboration that subtly altered the culture:

> Everyone hated the new way at first. . .Executives didn't like sharing resources; joint strategy-setting and decision-making was cumbersome. . .'The first two years were very painful' admits [CEO] Chambers. 'Some of the most successful people left. . .–Others were asked to leave' (Kirkland, 2007, p. 38).

These examples illustrate negative emotional responses to cultural change, which have been the focus of much of the literature. Positive reactions have also been documented but are more difficult to uncover. Kusstatscher (2006), for example, suggests that negative emotions may arise in the cultural and operational aspects of mergers and acquisitions but can be mitigated by the generation of positive emotions. Her interviews of employees in four organizations revealed a combination of positive and negative emotions arising from the change process.

Affective Culture

Given that change, especially cultural change, can ignite emotional reactions, the affective culture of the organization is important in signalling to staff how emotions are to be experienced, expressed and regulated (Alvesson, 2002). While the section above has revealed the emotional aspects of culture, and its relevance during change, the following section will directly engage literature on affective culture.

The emotional aspects of the organization's culture have been termed affective culture (Barsade and Gibson, 2007), emotional culture (Zembylas, 2006) and affective climate (Tse *et al.*, 2008). Beyer and Nino (2001) assert that culture both engenders emotions and provides for their expression in socially accepted ways and that culture acts as a 'glue' that binds people. A healthy organizational culture, according to Pizer and Härtel (2005), is one where emotional expressiveness is encouraged and value is placed on the emotional elements of work. Ashkanasy and Daus (2002) provide a set of guidelines for developing emotionally healthy organizations that includes selecting employees for emotional sensitivity, training them in emotional intelligence and the healthy expression of emotion, creating a positive and friendly emotional climate, and if need be, changing the culture. Conversely, organizational culture can be seen as a mechanism for the cynical manipulation of the employees' emotions, which need to be controlled for the benefit of the organization (Fineman, 2001; Zembylas, 2006).

A number of additional and potentially inter-locking constructs are helpful in shedding light on the affective nature of organizational culture: emotional labor, perceived organizational support and organizational emotional intelligence. While research into affective culture has often focussed on emotional labor it has seldom attempted to incorporate the other two constructs. Moreover, the organizational change literature has paid little attention to how organizational culture – and in particular, affective culture – relates to these constructs. Organizations, such as the one reflected in the theoretical scenario in the introduction to this article, could require a new form of customer service that mandates employees to show positive feelings. However the managers may lack the emotional intelligence to detect whether inauthentic expression has harmful consequences for the employees, as previous studies have shown (Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000; Erickson and Ritter, 2001). Consequently, they are not able to offer psychological support.

First, the extensive literature on emotional labor has indicated how the experience, display and suppression of emotions at work has been determined by a host of societal, organizational, professional and individual factors (Hochschild, 1983;

Mann, 1999; Turnbull, 1999; Alvesson, 2002; Bolton, 2005). The affective culture of an organization can result in emotions being 'captured', 'harnessed', 'managed', 'controlled', 'sanitized', 'codified' and 'commodified' by organizations for their own ends, and often at the expense of the employee (Kunda and van Maanen, 1999; Fineman, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008; Sturdy and Fineman, 2001; Zembylas, 2006). Emotions become 'cultural prerogatives' (Fineman, 2008) when some are deemed appropriate for display while others must be contained. Callahan (2002) found in a qualitative study that employees were expected to hide their emotions and that the emergence of newer and healthier norms was being stymied by an unresponsive organizational culture. Expectations of emotional expression and control become cultural norms that are not only imposed and monitored by managers but also can be policed, or at least influenced, by peers (Zembylas, 2006; Haman and Putnam, 2008). Alternatively, organizational culture can embrace emotional experience as natural and its expression as acceptable (within certain boundaries). The determination of companies like Disneyland to control employee emotions (van Maanen and Kunda, 1989) can be contrasted with The Body Shop where emotional expression is considered legitimate (Martin *et al.*, 1998), or at least it was under its original owners. Clarke (2006) has also documented the impact of organizational culture and professional identity in healthcare organizations which encourage reflection on, discussion of, and support for the emotional aspects of work.

Emotional labour can be required to lead and implement change since those entrusted with these tasks need to inject the appropriate type of emotion into selling the change (Fox and Amichai-Hamburger, 2001). Change initiatives can also lead to emotional labor in change managers (those who implement change) and change recipients. Bryant and Wolfram Cox (2006) found a number of their respondents felt the need to hide their emotions about organizational change since their expression was construed as an unwelcome form of resistance. Turnbull (2002) studied the ways individuals responded to an organization's attempts to deliberately change its culture to one of trust, openness, innovation and loyalty, in workshops laden with emotional appeals. She found that managers, the subjects of her study, experienced both cognitive and affective reactions but often in unintended ways, with mistrust, anger and embarrassment often eventuating from awkward situations. They reported the need to hide their feelings and to pretend to comply with the changes.

Second, the concept of perceived organizational support has been applied to a variety of organizational contexts, including change, as Naumann *et al.* (1998) have demonstrated. It can refer to how employees perceive the support of individual managers (Masterson *et al.*, 2000), particularly when they encounter difficulties but is usually more broadly related to perceptions of organizational systems and culture. Support may be of a practical nature but also includes the notion that emotions need to be acknowledged and treated with sensitivity. Eisenberger *et al.* (1986, p. 500) maintain that 'employees in an organization form global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being' and that this leads to greater organizational commitment, views corroborated in empirical studies (Loi *et al.*, 2006; Currie and Dollery, 2006). Supportive organizations provide employee assistance programs

(Alker and McHugh, 2000) and outplacement programs, such as psychological and career counselling (Rudisill and Edwards, 2002), help with constructing curricula vitae, methods of job search and interviewing skills. However, there is little research about the emotional effects of perceived organizational support during periods of change. Yet again this omission is surprising, given that organizational change is often stressful (Moyle and Parkes, 1999; Robinson and Griffiths, 2005) or at least emotionally demanding. Organizations can help employees to adjust by providing suitable levels of tangible and psychological support.

Third, organizational emotional intelligence (EI) is a development of the individual-level construct of EI, the ability of people to understand their own emotions and those of others, and respond appropriately (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Huy (1999) asserts that organizations should develop the capability of responding to emotions and that this helps to facilitate organizational change. Clarke's (2006) qualitative study, referred to earlier, depicts organizations with this emotional capability. In the only empirical quantitative study to date, Menges and Bruch (2009) demonstrated that employees perceived that organizational EI improved performance in a number of ways, including innovative capability, which is a change-related resource. Research into group-level EI has a stronger conceptual and empirical base (Jordan *et al.*, 2002; Druskat and Pescosolido, 2006) but has not been related to change. Neither has group EI been specifically researched as a feature of sub-cultures. Managers high in EI will be able to identify and respond to emotional reactions to change in employees (Jordan, 2005). If an organization trains its managers in EI (Huy, 1999; McEnrue *et al.*, 2009), and in organizational change – an organization-wide capability is developed.

This empirical work aims to provide evidence of how the three constructs of emotional labor, perceived organizational support and organizational EI, add to the understanding of affective culture, and of how they influence employee reactions to everyday events – and, particularly, the experience of change.

Affective Responses to Existing Culture when Change Occurs

Emotional responses to specific elements of the existing culture of an organization can shape responses to a strategic, cultural or operational change. For example, if an employee dislikes the competitive aspect of an organizational culture he/she may be predisposed to feel negatively about the introduction of an individual bonus system. Alternatively, if an employee is pleased with the existing participative culture, there is a likelihood that he/she will feel comfortable in disagreeing with the change. However, this does not guarantee that the actual change will produce a positive emotional response. Studies of person–organization fit show that when individual values are congruent with organizational values they produce conscientiousness, organizational citizenship behaviors (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999), less staff turnover and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Amos and Weathington, 2008). By implication this could extend to positive attitudes to change. Affective commitment to change occurs when employees want to remain in the organization and support its change efforts (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Cunningham, 2006) but there appears to be little research into the relationship between affective commitment to a culture

(Branson, 2008) and affective commitment to a change. The purpose of this qualitative study is to bridge this gap.

To summarize the literature, there is some evidence of the intersection of organizational culture, organizational change and emotions. However, studies to date have only partially examined these relationships.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative/social constructionist approach because it provides a useful way of understanding the three main constructs of organizational culture, emotions and change, all of which have been subjected to social constructionist treatments in the literature. Interviews allow us to examine micro-level experiences and how these have been influenced by discourses about these related concepts. Emic perspectives are commonly used to report on cultural phenomena (Harris, 1976; Morris *et al.*, 1999). They also allow for the reporting of unique experiences of change-related emotions.

Twenty-four people were interviewed in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2006 and 2007. There were 11 women and 13 men, 16 European, two Maori, three Asian and three of Pacific Island heritage. The participants came from a variety of industries, organizations, functional departments and hierarchical levels. They had experienced a wide range of changes including mergers, restructuring, redundancy, relocations, new systems and job redesign. Participants were sourced through management consultants and the researchers had no previous relationship with them. The interview was part of a larger project on emotions and organizational change and one question participants were specifically asked was, *How did the culture of the organization impact on your emotional responses to the change?* A number commented on how the change had affected other employees and some also referred to the influence of organizational culture elsewhere in the interview.

Part of the social construction of knowledge rests on how researchers select and interpret interviewee comments. A table of the 24 participants was drawn up and key issues and quotes from the transcripts that dealt with organizational culture were noted. The researchers particularly looked for the emotional ramifications of changes to the culture, the influence of the affective culture, and how positive and negative views of the existing culture impacted on their emotional reactions to any of the changes they were discussing. The researchers also examined whether emotional support had been provided by leaders and managers of change, and whether this was evidence of organizational emotional intelligence. Indications of the relevance of emotional labor as a cultural facet of the change process were also noted. The presentation and analysis of the findings is therefore a reconstruction (Schwandt, 1998) of the dynamics of culture, emotions and organizational change.

Findings

For some participants organizational culture was one of the contents or targets of change, for others it was merely context, and its salience varied considerably.

Comments were made about the types of culture, how they changed and what the emotional consequences were for the interviewees and their colleagues. Several participants specifically commented on the place of emotion in their organizational cultures and how the changes had influenced their own affective experiences.

Cultural Change and Emotions

Participants experienced both positive and negative emotional reactions to changes in organizational culture but the latter tended to dominate. P was very scathing about the government ministry that took over her public-sector organization. She referred to a 'cultural takeover' where her organization's culture 'died' and which had 'a huge demoralizing effect on the team.' She commented that whereas previously:

> We were able to take calculated risks. . .That stuff didn't survive and wouldn't survive in the Ministry. Bureaucracies can't help themselves, they impose processes that completely kill any degree of risk taking. . .We certainly felt under-valued and demoralized. . .There was a real culture of stamping on any of the sort of features of our culture in the past. It was. . .big brother stomping on little brother. We used to be able to give people some delegation around managing contracts and signing off funding. . .They took that away and so that had a huge affect on people's ability to be quite passionate about their roles.

A change in values often negatively undermines people's sense of identity. This was particularly evident in managers who lost status. A few months after her company was acquired, H was replaced as general manager by a man appointed by the new owners. The predominantly male management team quickly introduced a very different type of culture, which, together with the diminution of her role, resulted in anxiety, anger and frustration, and led her to negotiate an exit. One change in culture was the practice of new managers emailing her from the next door offices; another was a stronger focus on sales and profits and less on people. Gender issues also surfaced:

> It was all about Friday night drinks. . .and you could share a drink with the boys on a Friday. . .the office girls would join in, and I would occasionally come in. . .but the girls were then excluded from the rest of the evening's proceedings. . .I would never be invited. . .they would usually go to the rugby, or go to the races or something like that.

A, who was a senior manager, commented that his organization had moved 'from a participative culture to a directive culture' and that he 'felt disenfranchized. . .therefore that had a major impact on my sense of belonging to the organization.' He also spoke of having 'a sense of grief' and feeling 'disenchanted' as a result of the change. On a more positive note, C was transferred to a new company that had bought his division. He appreciated moving from what he termed a 'gloomy atmosphere' to an organization that was 'more like a family business'.

Different stakeholders will view the same cultural change through different lenses. R was brought in as a senior human resources manager to effect a number of structural, operational and cultural changes in a professional services firm that she described as archaic, conservative and traditional. Whereas the previous culture was one of status, R noted that in the new era, 'We were trying to build a culture of integrating and sharing and working as a team', an aim that was strongly supported by the chief executive. She found that many staff, including those who had been partners, struggled to adapt to the new practices, and the new culture that underpinned them, particularly for those who believed that they had lost status, identity, authority, benefits and pay. Others thrived in the new regime.

When values change, as R found, people often resist the change, at least initially. Another senior manager, G, acknowledged that whereas previously the company had provided a culture of support, it became necessary to supplement it with a performance culture. He believed that this had been well managed because of the strong human relations element in the existing culture. W was the head of human resources of a company that took over another. The employees of the latter, he claimed, had been 'deeply scarred' by their previous owners. When changes were made, some of which reflected a change in values, existing levels of animosity and suspicion proved to be a significant challenge. Even though W believed that the culture of the acquiring company was considerably more positive, he thought that it would take a long time for the changes to take root in the new division.

For a number of participants the way in which managers responded to their emotions was a key feature of how they reacted to the change. The next section, therefore, reports on participant comments on the influence of the affective cultures of their organizations.

Affective Culture

The need to control emotions is a key element of the construct of emotional labor and was a challenge a number of participants had to face. While some of the drivers were personal, others lay in the organizational culture. For a few of the participants emotion management was considered part of the role of the 'professional' image of the manager and some indicated that their organizational culture played a part. W felt that emotional expression was a facet of senior management interaction but he admitted that he was careful not reveal his emotions to lower level staff. A, a male manager in an engineering company, claimed that 'people in this profession are notorious for not getting in touch with their emotions' and that those in his organization were no different. He also advanced the view that his organization had 'a very strong professional managerial culture' and this influenced the way he controlled his emotions when the culture became less participative. Two female managers, H and L, observed that in male-dominated environments they had to be particularly careful in controlling their emotions. L found it hard to deal with sexist attitudes, including her boss's remark 'may the best man win' (when referring to two women who were made to compete for one position in a structural change). She believed that his

comment was typical of a firm dominated by men and observed that the culture of the organization was:

> very male, engineering male, technical, not emotional on the outside. . .a very stiff upper lip environment. . .As a woman operating in a senior role. . .I don't think along those gender lines. . .but I was expected to toe that line always, and it was confusing too because. . .sometimes they expected you to be girly and other times they didn't, but you couldn't really tell when was the right time.

When she cried on one occasion, she was told she was a 'bit soft' and she vowed not to let it happen again because of the macho culture. She did, however, observe that she had worked for the company for over 13 years and that over time sexist attitudes and the emotionally neutral type of culture had changed markedly. Another female employee, D, 'wanted to sit there and howl' when advised of her redundancy, but laughingly remarked in the interview that she was 'English, stiff upper lip, you try not to show your emotions.'

Perceived organizational support was evident in the comments of some participants but noticeably absent in others. A number recalled that their direct supervisors, and sometimes those more senior, were aware of their emotional reactions and provided psychological support. This afforded them a degree of comfort. Some interviewees who were leaders and managers of change were proud that their organizations had provided support to staff during difficult periods of change. Those who managed redundancies said they had put in considerable effort to give tangible help, such as help with writing curricula vitae and approaching neighboring firms to hire their staff, and psychological support, both personally and through employee assistance programs. G spoke of the company's development and articulation of values where people are important: 'Our frame of reference was if that's happening to me what would I want to happen?' The way the firm managed the redundancies was consistent with these values. In his words, organizational culture was 'the glue that made it doable'.

Several participants reported that negative cultures were characterized by the absence of support, which led to a host of deleterious consequences. D was surprised to find that her organization, which she had previously found to have a very supportive culture, suddenly found it acceptable to make her redundant with immediate effect, and with seemingly little understanding of the pain and embarrassment that this would cause her. B found no understanding of the way in which she was 'drowning', little concern for people shown by those at senior management level (but more at lower managerial levels), lack of trust and instances of injustice.

Organizational emotional intelligence was not easy to uncover, but the remarks of L and A are indicative of cultures where authentic emotional expression was frowned on. The impact of the perceived EI of the participants' managers or more senior staff generated emotion in some of the participants but the interviews did not reveal the extent to which this reflected organizational EI as a facet of culture.

The final part of the findings reveal that a number of participants confirmed that the way in which change was managed reflected other aspects of the existing culture that they liked or disliked.

Affective Responses to Existing Culture

Participant comments reflected both positive and negative perceptions of the existing culture. E, a senior human resources manager, believed that his organization had a very positive culture, where there was open communication and constructive feedback, and where staff members could 'challenge' management by expressing their opinions. This was helpful in the context of change because management were open about their intentions and employees could be equally frank. N, a general manager, reported that when his company decided to make people redundant it was 'very conscious of doing things right'. The approach they used was consistent with the philosophy that the organization must manage for its own benefit *and* that of the staff. The goal in redundancies was that 'the individual walks out of this organization and says I was treated with respect and dignity. . .and can look back on that as a positive experience, not a negative experience.'

Some participants had ambivalent views on their organizations' cultures. As a senior manager, M did not approve of the secrecy that pervaded a number of the discussions around change but, liked the way in which managers took responsibility for dealing directly with employees on change-related issues:

> I was telling my direct reports they would not have jobs and that sort of thing and that was part of the culture of the business, that you should front up to them and tell them yourself, rather than getting the HR director to do it.

On the negative side X, a first level employee, believed that in his organization, 'You have to humbly accept what is dished out to you' and if you voiced your dissatisfaction with changes, 'you became a target, and a target is always hit upon.' J said that his organization had a culture of 'bowing down' to customers to reduce prices, regardless of the financial cost to the company and the emotional cost to the employees. When an operational change took place in an effort to retain the business of a major client, he resented how this impacted on him and his staff, since they had to compromise quality standards and spend long hours on working out ways to cut prices.

B commented that one department of a large organization had a 'horribly dysfunctional' culture, but this seemed to mirror her views of the organization as a whole. She had negative emotional responses to the culture of her organization, which manifested itself in various ways, including autocratically-led changes and lack of concern for staff:

> The culture was kind of aggressive and nasty and I didn't like it. Mostly because I was turning into that myself and I didn't like it. . ..I hadn't been comfortable with the culture since I'd been working there. I didn't like the culture at all. That was why I was leaving, really. It was because of the culture.

Other than B, only L referred to sub-cultures. As a human resources manager, she spoke of the divide between her departmental culture from the dominant engineering culture:

> The culture was such that if you weren't an engineer then you were an overhead, therefore you cost them money, therefore you take up as little time as possible, but you'd better achieve because they are paying you.

This also became a factor when change was being designed. Over time, when the culture changed to a more inclusive one her level of comfort increased markedly.

Discussion

A number of themes were identified that signal the prevalence of the emotional ramifications of cultural change, and of the influence of an organization's affective culture on other types of change. The study has also demonstrated the interrelatedness of several of the constructs used in this study. For example, negative emotional reactions were reported when participants thought that the processes and outcomes of change were unfair, where organizational support was not provided and when they felt unsafe in voicing their dissatisfaction with a change. The study therefore confirms the view of many theorists that it is important to acknowledge the role culture plays in facilitating or impeding organizational change, and reinforces the message that emotion accompanies many aspects of change and must be handled sensitively.

Cultural Change

It was evident that some values of an organization can play a constructive role in facilitating change in other values, such as G's remark that his company's culture of concern for staff was the 'glue' that made adding a performance element to the culture possible. Glue is the same metaphor used by Ryan (2005) and Beyer and Nino (2001) and is also found in the section on values in one corporate website (Vodafone New Zealand, 2008). Getting staff to buy into a new culture through values alignment might be the key to successful change, as Branson (2008) indicates, but is not easy to achieve. A number of participants in the current study did not like the new values that were imposed on them and resisted the change on affective and other levels. This resistance was partly due to their identities being 'dislodged' (Carr, 1999), particularly when their organizations were taken over by others. Previous studies of mergers and acquisitions have shown how an individual's construction of his or her own identity is interconnected with a corporate identity and, when change occurs in the latter, it can fragment the former (Pepper and Larson, 2006; van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2002; van Dijk and van Dick, 2009). Some of the affective resistance was due to new cultures that appeared to be less participative than those previously experienced. Exclusion from decision-making has been seen as a significant barrier to organizational change by previous researchers (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; Lines, 2004). This may have been especially damaging to the identities of managers, such as A and P, who had participated in decisions before; the partners in R's professional services firm; and H, who had previously enjoyed considerable authority as general manager. Identity can also be viewed as a group-based phenomenon and van Dijk and van Dick (2009, p. 146) suggest that 'employees who identify

with a salient social group that is negatively impacted by the change process are resisting a loss of status for that ingroup as a whole.'

Affective Culture

An overall analysis of participants' comments revealed many types of affective culture. It was evident that those leading change tended to view their organizations as having a positive affective culture, but those managing change or simply being recipients of it, had more varied perceptions. Three theoretical constructs were engaged as being reflective of the affective culture of an organization and were found in varying degrees to be relevant to the participants' experience of change. Controlling one's emotions, a prominent feature of emotional labour, was seen as necessary for a number of participants. For those who were recipients, it was considered to be a survival mechanism and some of the comments were similar to those in the studies conducted by Turnbull (2002) and Bryant and Wolfram Cox (2006). The affective culture of an organization can thus exert subtle or more direct pressure on employees to conform to norms. Female participants, in particular, felt it unbecoming to cry in front of male bosses or colleagues. Researchers have commented on how organizational norms of emotion management have been constructed by men to marginalize women (Putnam and Mumby, 1992; Guy and Newman, 2004).

Several participants in the current study, tasked with implementing change, reported the need to hide their own emotions from their subordinates because this was 'professional'. Researchers have pointed out that professional identity is a social construction in that managers are expected to act in approved ways (Fournier, 1999; Fineman, 2003; Roberts, 2005). What is often unsaid in organizations is the need to control 'inappropriate' emotions.

Perceived organizational support has been theorized to create a warm emotional climate (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) and, in the current study, participants who experienced support felt some comfort. People who are struggling with either the outcomes or the processes of change need their feelings to be validated rather than ignored, and resent being told to harden up. According to Jordan (2005), managers who are high in EI are able to leverage this understanding of their subordinates and facilitate adaptation to change, and this was appreciated by the participants in the current study. Where organizations are able to cultivate these insights and abilities in a significant number of managers they can lay claim to providing adequate organization-wide support and EI.

Affective Reactions to Existing Culture

Culture, according to Bratton *et al.* (2005) is supposed to generate positive emotions in employees. Participants in the current study had positive and negative perceptions of their organizational cultures and congruent emotional reactions. As Schein (1990) points out, perceptions of a culture influence emotional responses and behavior. These played a role in how participants made sense of changes. However, organizational culture is a multi-faceted concept and some values and practices may engage an employee while others may have an opposite or

neutral impact. Previous research has shown that when employees' values are in harmony with those of the organization, commitment and job satisfaction increase (Amos and Weathington, 2008) and when they are not, staff turnover increases (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999).

Limitation and Avenues for Further Research

In the present research, individuals' perceptions of how culture affected their emotions during change events were investigated. This study, therefore, uses ideographic perceptions of organizational culture of subjects influenced by change. However, given that the focus of this study has been on emotions in relation to change events, this approach is arguably justified.

Methodological debates about researching organizational culture are as heated as they are in other areas of organizational behavior (Rosen, 1991; Martin, 2002). The wider project covered many causes of emotional responses to change and therefore did not delve into culture in as much depth as a more narrowly targeted study would. Quantitative studies within organizations and across national boundaries may give a much more detailed picture of organizational culture, and its affective elements, and of the influences of nationality, ethnicity and gender. Ethnographic accounts could provide a deep and rich vein of material that is peculiar to an organization, such as those provided by van Maanen and Kunda (1989) Martin *et al.* (1998) and Elsmore (2001). Further research may have the capacity to more completely capture the many variables at play when considering emotional reactions to change events, such as emotional labor, perceived organizational support, organizational EI, sub-cultural issues, professional norms and gender factors. In addition, the roles of leaders in creating, sustaining and changing culture, and the degree to which they infuse culture with emotion requires deeper exploration.

A further consideration is that participants in this study were all from New Zealand organizations. The influence of wider national and ethnic factors on the culture of the organizations they commented on may have played a part in their reactions, and these might differ from those in other countries. According to Vandenberghe (1999, p. 197), 'any corporate culture partly reflects the values of the country in which the organization is located.' Consequently, studies in other countries, and cross-country comparisons, are recommended.

One of the implications of this study for practitioners is that organizational culture must be taken into account as a potentially relevant factor in the ways in which people respond to change. Since culture has emotive elements and change is frequently emotional, it is important for managers and consultants to be aware of the culture of the organization and what the consequences are when it changes. Surveys of change readiness, such as those advocated by Holt *et al.* (2007), could be broadened to include aspects of organizational culture, affective culture, perceived organizational support and EI. These elements also need to be analyzed at the level of work groups and other sub-cultures (Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008; Tse *et al.*, 2008). As Martin (2002) herself notes, people seldom agree on more than a few aspects of culture and the rest are beset by paradox, inconsistency, contradiction and ambiguity. Training people in EI,

which should produce higher levels of organizational emotional capability (Huy, 1999), has been recommended by a number of researchers (Druskat and Wolf, 2001; Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002; Jordan, 2005) and courses have been offered by many providers. Empirical studies on their effectiveness are in their infancy (see Ciarrochi and Mayer, 2007; McEnrue *et al.*, 2009) and also need to be done in the context of organizational culture and change.

Conclusion

Organizational change has the capacity to alter the culture, whether deliberately or not, and thereby influence people's emotional responses. Conversely, the culture affects the way in which staff respond to the change on an emotional level. Arguments have been advanced by researchers that organizational culture, change and emotions are socially constructed. Many have criticized the cynical way in which all these elements have been deliberately manipulated to control people and harness them to the organizational machine (Sturdy and Fineman, 2001; Zembylas, 2006). Yet if employee engagement is to be authentic, organizations need to craft cultures sufficiently strong to embrace change without altering their fundamental ethos and to develop an acceptance that emotions are a natural part of organizational culture and organizational change.

This study has contributed to the literature by integrating affective culture with other elements of an organization's culture, and by presenting ideographic accounts that reveal how participants in change believe the affective aspects of organizational culture shaped their emotional reactions. Dramatic changes faced by organizations in the economic crisis over the past two years have strained and altered organizational cultures and put an emotional burden on staff. The lessons from this study should be of benefit to managers struggling to maintain, adjust or blend organizational cultures and deal with the emotional outcomes for staff.

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