

CHAPTER TWO

READINESS FOR CHANGE

Introduction

Organisations today face a major challenge in managing change effectively. When an organisation fails to change in necessary ways, the costs of failure are often high. In a dynamic environment, organisations must have the capacity to adapt quickly in order to survive (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik & Welbourne 1999). In most cases the sheer speed and complexity of the change process may severely test the capabilities of an organisation's managers and employees. The rate of change in a merger specifically provokes this challenge for employees and managers, as mergers are used by executives as a 'quick' method of expansion and consolidation of new markets (Lau & Woodman, 1995). Hanchpern, Morgan and Griego (1998) suggest that "unless members prepare themselves emotionally and are ready for the change, they will be overwhelmed by the sheer speed with which the change occurs" (p. 339). There are many factors that contribute to the effectiveness and success of change interventions. However, Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) propose that the most critical factor is 'readiness for change'.

Readiness for change is reflected in organisational members' beliefs, attitudes and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organisation's capacity to successfully make those changes (Penland, 1997). Although some researchers have discussed the importance of readiness, it has seldom been recognised as distinct from resistance. Readiness has been conceptualised as the cognitive precursor to

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Readiness for change is reflected in organisational members' beliefs, attitudes and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organisation's capacity to successfully make those changes (Penland, 1997). Although some researchers have discussed the importance of readiness, it has seldom been recognised as distinct from resistance. Readiness has been conceptualised as the cognitive precursor to

the behaviour of resistance (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). Specifically, creating readiness has been most often explained in conjunction with prescriptions for reducing resistance (Eby et al., 2000). For example, Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1979) discuss several strategies in dealing with resistance (e.g. education, communication, participation, involvement, facilitation and negotiation). Such prescriptions are effective in reducing resistance to the extent that they first create readiness. In essence, readiness for change may act to preempt the likelihood of resistance to change, increasing the potential for change efforts to be more effective.

While readiness for change is an intuitively appealing construct, "little empirical research has focused on this phenomenon" (Eby et al., 2000, p. 421). Hanchpern, Morgan and Griego (1998) advocate that the readiness concept complements previous contributions made by Lawrence (1954) and Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) and others regarding resistance to change. These theorists propose that resistance should be taken note of in designing the efficacy content of the readiness construct. Hanchpern (1998) is one of the few researchers that assessed employee readiness for change interventions. In order to examine employee readiness Hanchpern (1998) developed a scale encompassing several behaviours that relate to aspects of organisational development. These behaviours are namely 'participating in the change'; 'promoting aspects of the change'; and 'resistance to change'. According to Hanchpern (1998), people who score high on participating and promoting tend to score high on overall readiness for change. In contrast, the more people feel resistant the less likely they are ready for the change. Hanchpern's (1998) inclusion of a resistance variable in the measure of readiness for change, reinforces the conceptual link between resistance and readiness (in Hanchpern, Morgan & Griego, 1998). In lieu of the limited research focusing on the readiness

phenomenon and in accordance with the strong conceptual link between the resistance and readiness concepts, the current study will extrapolate from the theoretical underpinnings of the resistance construct, in an attempt to enrich the discussion and provide a clear understanding of readiness for change.

Resistance to Change

Malinconico (1983) contends that resistance is a legitimate part of change which must not be viewed as an ancillary problem or a distraction from the real problem at hand. Rather it is an intrinsic part of the process at hand. According to King and Anderson (1995) this response to change is so common that it is frequently referred to as a ubiquitous facet of planned change processes. More importantly, the resistance of change recipients can fundamentally determine and reshape the outcome of the intended change. "Resistance to change by those affected is often the single most formidable obstacle to its successful realisation (Judson, 1991, p. 26). The influence of such an employee reaction on the course and nature of a change process is reflected in the high failure rate of change, which may amount to exorbitant organisational expenses, including decreased organisational commitment, a lowered probability of achieving future corporate goals, a squandering of money and resources and immense difficulty in the rectification of the failed change effort (Kreitner & Kinicki, 1995). Consequently organisational changes have come to be associated with unproductive behaviour rather than increased profitability. Thus, it can be submitted that if the experience of change is to be fully understood, then resistance to change cannot be ignored. Moreover, a considerable amount of perspective advice as to how changes could be better managed and the impact of the events, its short- and long-term effects on the workforce cannot be neglected.

Conceptualisation and Manifestations of Resistance to Change

The study of resistance has its roots within the psychoanalytic movement introduced by Freud. Resistance was viewed by Freud as being central to unveiling the secret of neurosis, and evaluating resistance was therefore seen as a key part of the psychoanalytic technique. Freud's psychoanalytic theory defines resistance as a defence mechanism or a strategy of the ego to defend itself against the conflict between forbidden drives and moral codes which causes neurotic and moral anxiety (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). The term resistance consequently passed into a more general use referring no longer to purely intrapsychic forces but also forces within a social system, "all forces which contribute to stability in personality or in social systems" (Coghlan, 1993, p. 10). Resistance within this conception is viewed as any reaction to real or potential change in the status quo which serves as an attempt to maintain the status quo. Blake (1992) extends on this conceptualisation and views change as a goal directed behaviour and in most cases as directed toward the maintenance (to as great an extent as possible) of the status quo within an organisation or organisational sub-unit. The term 'resistance to change' may not accurately be captured as a single unidimensional behaviour. Rather it is a general class of actions, often accompanied by anger, anxiety, fear or frustration, designed to deny, delay or discredit, repress or even dismantle the implementation of a change initiative (Newstroom & Davis, 1997; Ndale, 1998).

The range of resistant behaviours is conceived along two continua: '*overt-covert*' and '*overt*' resistance, which manifests at an organisational level, and refers to obvious, observable opposition or disagreement with a change effort (King & Anderson, 1995). Judson (1991) identifies overt forms of resistance as protests, committing 'errors', spoilage and deliberate sabotage. Conversely, covert resistance at an individual level

provides no viable conflict, or discord yet undermines the change proposal (King & Anderson, 1995). These subtle or covert forms of resistance involve behaviours as apathy (loss of interest in the job), working to rule (doing only what is ordered) as well as regressive behaviour (doing as little as possible) and personal withdrawal (increasing time off the job and away from work) (Judson, 1991). Between these two extremes, resistance may manifest itself in the following forms: reduced organisational commitment, increased hostility to those initiating the change, increased absenteeism, non-compliance, sabotage of production systems, reinforcement of group norms and group pressures resulting in reduced performance and intergroup conflict, as well as an increased propensity to unionisation and trade union activity (Moerdyk & Fone, 1988; Dugmore, 1989; Chang, 1994). Resistance to change can thus be seen as coping behaviours individuals use when they perceive change as a threat to them or their interests. Depending on how change is viewed by the individual (i.e. expectancies regarding the change, and whether the organisational climate is conducive to change) as well as the individuals' perceptions of his/her ability to deal with the change (sense of coherence), s/he may choose to resist or accept the change (O'Connor, 1993). The extent to which the change is resisted or accepted will essentially be determined by the antecedents of resistance to change. Literature in the field of resistance yields a number of potential antecedents of resistance to change.

Antecedents of Resistance to Change

A variety of antecedents to resistance to change have been identified which are presented in accordance with their core level of analysis, these being the individual and organisation.

Individuals' Antecedents of Resistance

At an individual level, the thought and action processes carried out by employees during periods of change are determined by the several factors embedded in the following two theories, namely the self-interest theories and personality theories.

Self-interest theories

These theories posit that individual sources of resistance to change are rooted in basic human characteristics, these being needs and aspirations (Van Fleet, 1991). These theories further postulate that people have vested interests in the status quo and that any changes which threaten these interests will be resisted. Within this general category, four types of theories are identified and are discussed briefly below.

The first of these theories is *expectancy*. Theorists of this paradigm suggest the importance of expectations regarding outcomes of change in determining individual and group reactions cannot be underestimated and can be summarised in the truism 'perception is reality' (Judson, 1991). This essentially means that people do not react based upon an objective reality, but upon perceived reality. This includes their expectations as to the outcomes of particular change. According to O'Connor (1993) expectations relating to change are formed through the interaction of fundamental generalised predisposition towards change and historical experience of the particular organisation and its management. Regarding the predispositional aspect, this theorist argues that people who adapt best to change have a higher level of personal resilience than others and although they face no less a challenge when confronting a crisis than others, they tend to regain equilibrium much faster. In terms of the organisation's history, Judson (1991) contends that events in the organisation such as its policies,

practices and customs, the actions of its past and present management, the extent to which the management has proved itself trustworthy, will influence individual attitudes and expectations about the change.

The second theory is the *'inertio/homeostasis'* theory which proposes that any interferences with the traditional patterns of work will generally be resisted. This is due to the fact that habits and routines must subsequently be unlearned, and new ones acquired (Moerdyk & Fone, 1988). Resistance within this framework is perceived as a positive self-defence mechanism. An underlying assumption of the inertio/homeostasis theory is that the more one is accustomed to a procedure, the less likely one will be to accept a related change (King & Anderson, 1995).

The theory of *valence* is the third theory, and relates mainly to the beliefs about the need for a change. According to Lorsch (1986) these beliefs are powerful cognitive determinants of resistance or acceptance of change. The lack of belief in the need for change or the differing perceptions of the urgency of the situation are the most important antecedents of resistance to change. Beliefs about the change play an important role in forming resistance especially when the individual fears the implications of accepting a change (O'Connor, 1993). Implications of a loss of acknowledgement of past beliefs or decisions made, can culminate in the change holding negative implications for employees.

The fourth type of theory of self-interest consists of the *fear and insecurity* theories. These theories attribute resistance to the uncertainty and unforeseeable future which accompany a change process. These fears and insecurities encompass possible loss of

earning and status, and the fear of failure in the new environment (Mack, Nelson & Quick, 1998). According to Marks (1994) there are very real and prominent feelings of job loss during organisational change. Research shows that job insecurity and threat of job loss produce strong feelings of anger in that the company employees have trusted has changed the rules of the game, as a result employee morale and productivity decrease and they become resistant in the process (McCabe, 1996). Role ambiguity is a prominent influence on employee resistance during change in that ambiguity is stressful and adds to the uncertainty of the situation, increases job insecurity and reduces the extent to which workers have control of their jobs (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986).

The self-interest theories clearly reflect that organisational changes are potentially threatening events with profound uncertainties, which ultimately reduce employee sense of security and control and perpetuate employee resistance. These theories also show that an employee's response to change is heavily reliant on his/her perception of the proposed change and its effects on his/her needs and aspirations. What can thus be extrapolated from those theories is that, owing to differing needs, beliefs, expectations and values, reactions to change may range from total rejection and resistance to total acceptance and readiness for the change process. Literature focusing on the antecedents of resistance at an individual level also explores the relationship between psychological disposition and resistant behaviour.

Personality theories

Organisational researchers have recognised the wide spectrum of consequences that psychological dispositions have on organisational behaviours. Researchers propose that this relationship needs to be explored within the phenomenon of resistance to change, as

resistance has a strong effective component (Fine, 1986). There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that resistance is closely related to dispositional differences among people and thus one cannot neglect that employee resistance during change can be determined by the predispositions of individuals experiencing the change (Judson, 1991). Frone, Russell and Cooper (1995) propose that employees' reactions to organisational change are influenced specifically by their susceptibility to the stressors involved and their resilience and adaptability to the changes. The literature on readiness for change similarly extends on the relationship between psychological dispositions and readiness for change. According to Eby et al. (2000) individuals differ in their overall comfort level during times of change which is due to dispositional differences. They are also likely to differ in their adaptability and receptiveness to change efforts, and will thus differ in readiness and acceptance of change processes. Theorists of this paradigm propose that certain personality traits determine employee resistance and readiness for change. Many of these dispositions have been studied with noteworthy findings. These include the variables of self efficacy and sense of coherence (SOC). The latter has specific relevance to this study and it can also be noted that both these dispositional orientations fall within the salutogenic paradigm.

According to Bandura (1986) beliefs about self-efficacy are beliefs relating to the individual's confidence in their own ability to negotiate rapids of change successfully. Bandura and Cervone (1986) found that beliefs about self-efficacy determine what challenges people choose to undertake, how much effort they choose to expound in the endeavour, and how long they tend to persevere in the face of difficulty. O'Connor (1993) suggests that lack of belief that the goal is attainable acts as an antecedent of resistance to change. According to Eby et al. (2000) an individual who believes in

him/herself and perceives him/herself as having the capacity to achieve and adapt easily to change will be more receptive to organisational change. The same assumption can be made with reference to the sense of coherence construct in the present study. In viewing SOC as a global orientation that reflects the extent to which one has a pervasive and dynamic feeling of confidence that one has the resources to meet the demands posed by environment and that these demands are worthy of investment (Antonovsky, 1987) a similar association with resistance and readiness for change can be made for SOC as was for self-efficacy. According to Lau and Woodman (1995) individuals who perceive themselves as having the resources to meet the challenges posed by the change intervention will feel in control during the changing situation and will thus have positive beliefs about the change in general and consequently reflect greater acceptance and readiness for change.

Clearly researchers have shown that employee resistance or acceptance of change can be determined by enduring individual characteristics. Evidently, employee personality characteristics play a central role in determining whether employees can deal with, reduce and tolerate the threat and uncertainty of change which strongly influences their resistance or readiness for the change intervention. The theory posits that organisational forces are also responsible for resistant behaviours and need to be explored.

Organisational Antecedents of Resistance

Ashforth and Lee (1990) propose that the organisational system responds much like individuals in the face of change, striving to defend against anxiety and maintain the status quo. Thus, it is important to consider the unique characteristics in the organisation which may mitigate or contribute to employee resistance during changes.

Malinconico (1983) identifies *interpersonal relationships* as a potential influence on resistance. The interpersonal aspect of change is the way those affected by change will alter their established relationships in the organisation. It is important to note that what people usually resist is not technical change but social change, the change in their social relationships that generally accompanies change. Judson (1991) suggests that the nature of interpersonal relationships within the organisation, particularly the level of trust and loyalty have a significant impact on the extent to which the staff is willing to cooperate in the change process.

The *loss of organisational identity* in the face of a changing environment has also been identified as an impetus to resistance. The loss of identity could result due to a change in the established set of assumptions, values and attitudes shared by organisation members (Gagliardi, 1986). A related phenomenon is that of organisational climate which may or may not be supportive of the change or innovation. According to Eby et al. (2000) an employee's acceptance of the change process may be indicative of the organisation's ability to make those changes. Previous research on particular types of climate perceptions suggest that organisational characteristics must be consistent with the nature of the climate that the organisation is attempting to create (Hanchpern, Morgan & Griego, 1998). For example, if the organisation is attempting to create change, the value of change and importance of change must manifest itself throughout the organisation, specifically in the attitudes of employees, relationships between individuals, characteristics of the job, availability and quality of resources and the context in which the organisation operates. If the value of change is integrated within the dimensions of the work context, employees will have belief and confidence in the organisation's ability to make those changes successfully and thus portray acceptance and readiness for the

intervention. Similarly, McNabb and Sepic (1995) suggest that a measure of organisational climate can be used to determine whether the climate in the organisation is favourable for change (i.e. in terms of its norms, values, feelings of people in the organisation, level of organisational support, openness within the organisation, autonomy and quality of relationships) which will determine employee readiness for change.

Certain factors relating directly to the nature of the change and the way in which the change process is managed have been shown to increase the likelihood of resistance. According to Judson (1991), change must be motivated and readiness for change created typically through *staff participation* in the planning of the change. Wolmarans (1995) contends that a great deal of tension invariably arises in major organisational change efforts, which is a direct result of dysfunction between those directing and implementing the change and those who are powerless and passive recipients. The extent to which those affected are enabled to participate in the planning and implementation of change is an important factor in determining readiness for change (Eby et al., 2000). Sagie, Elizur and Koslowsky (1990) attribute this to the notions of participation and empowerment. Drawing on the results of their study, these theorists found that acceptance of change was higher among subjects who participated in the change process than for those who did not participate. It has thus been suggested that employees join in diagnostic efforts, leading to agreement concerning the problems which the status quo represents and the required importance for change, in order to prevent resistant behaviours (Organ & Bateman, 1986). Some resistance phenomena can also be traced to the lack of communication regarding the impending change. Klein (1996) found that effective communication is vital in the announcement of organisational change and that the timing

and content of information regarding change is of particular importance. Conner and Lake (1988) postulate that the change targets may resist simply because they do not understand the need for change, the substance and details of the change and its consequences. Due to such vagueness relating to future actions, the change becomes incorrectly interpreted and distorted leading to emotional speculations and resulting in resistance.

The above examination essentially reflects that the energy, inspiration and support necessary to reduce resistance to change stems from within organisations. Furthermore it is evident that while a substantial body of literature exists on resistance to change, a central aspect of the individuals experience of change, specifically employee readiness for change, has been ignored (Eby et al., 2000). In an attempt to expand on the phenomenon of employee readiness in a change process, Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) propose a model that can be used by change agents to influence employee readiness for organisational change. It is important to note that, in developing this framework, these theorists extrapolate from the theoretical underpinnings of the resistance construct, hence reinforcing the conceptual link between resistance and readiness for change.

A Readiness Model

In contributing to the limited research relating to readiness for change Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) outline a theory based model of readiness for change but, do not empirically examine specific variables that may influence employee readiness for change. Furthermore, in developing this model these theorists drew extensively on resistance conceptualisations. Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) propose that

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creating readiness involves proactive attempts by a change agent to influence the beliefs, attitudes, intentions and ultimately the behaviour of change targets. The dynamics concerned, that can assist in promoting readiness for and reducing resistance to change need to draw on individual level cognitive change and collective behaviour which can be conceptualised in the following model.

The readiness model reflects that the primary mechanism for creating readiness for change among members of an organisation is the *message* regarding change. In general, the readiness message should incorporate two issues:

- a) The need for change, that is the discrepancy between the desired end state and the present state. The discrepancy aspect of the message communicates information about the need for change and should be consistent with contextual factors such as increased competition, changes in governmental relations or depressed economic conditions (Clark, Cavanaugh, Brown & Sambamurphy, 1997).
- b) The collective and individual efficacy, which is the perceived ability to change by parties affected by the change effort. This criterion reflects that in order to minimise a counterproductive reaction of employees, a change agent should build the target's confidence that it has the capability to correct the discrepancy (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1995).

Interpersonal and social dynamics are also incorporated into the model. According to Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993), change agents must understand the distinction between individual and collective readiness as well as what influences the collective interpretation of the readiness message. Interventions to create readiness for

change need to mobilise collective support by building and shaping awareness among organisational members regarding the existence of sources of and solutions to the organisation's problems. Through the dynamics of social information processing, an organisation's collective readiness will constantly be influenced by the readiness of individuals comprising it. According to these theorists system members look to one another for clues regarding the meaning of events and circumstances facing the organisation. Any readiness building activities must take this social exchange into account in facilitating employee readiness. The theory, however, argues that social dynamics operate in readiness interventions; however one cannot ignore individual differences in that the individuals may react differently to the same message (Eby et al., 2000).

Two *influence strategies* are then proposed to increase employee readiness for change. The first is pervasive communication. This is primarily a source of explicit information regarding discrepancy and efficacy. This form of communication is employed to send symbolic information regarding the commitment to prioritisation of and urgency for the change effort. It includes two forms of communication, namely oral pervasive which consists of speeches either live or recorded and written, consisting of documents such as annual reports for the organisation. The second influence strategy is known as active participation. In this way the message is self-discovered as employees are given the opportunity to learn about the change through their own activities thereby the readiness message is sent directly (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993).

The model finally makes reference to *change agent attributes* and a *readiness assessment* in influencing readiness for change. Regarding the change agent attributes,

the model proposes that influence strategies are dependent upon the change agent influencing them. The model also proposes the use of an assessment of the systems readiness. Assessments of the perceived discrepancy and efficacy of the target would be performed in developing the state of readiness (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993).

It can be deduced that the above readiness model suggests the importance of building readiness within the context facing the organisation. The framework presented makes a case for identifying where the change is needed and then designing readiness programmes to influence employees' beliefs, attitudes and intentions so that changes can be accepted and implemented successfully. It also advocates for maintaining readiness throughout the large-scale change by encouraging active creation of readiness. Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder's (1993) model is the only available framework which directly outlines the variables that influence readiness for change. Evidently, the importance of readiness for change in planned change interventions, for example, mergers, has been overlooked, and one can only conclude that the likely consequence of this is that organisations will not produce the intended changes as their members are not ready. Thus, there is a need for further research and refinement of readiness in planned change interventions.

The link between resistance and readiness has also been outlined. Essentially, it was illustrated that resistance outlines the various barriers to acceptance or readiness for change. Thus, in an attempt to determine and promote readiness for change interventions one needs to acknowledge the symptoms of resistance. However, in reality it is submitted that the change itself is frequently only the symbol of what is being opposed, this implies that resistance to change is not the fundamental problem to be solved. This

is because any resistance is usually a symptom of the more inherent problems underlying the particular situation (Judson, 1991). Thus, for effective and successful change, it is imperative to look beyond the symptom (i.e. resistance) to its more basic causes. This can essentially be achieved by focusing on how employees make sense of the change process, how ready they perceive the organisation is to adapt to the pending change, and more importantly to use employee resistance to assist in the identification of specific problem areas where the change is likely to cause difficulties (Mack, Nelson & Quick, 1998). Employees' reactions to a change process and their individually held assumptions about the organisation's readiness for change will ultimately affect the way they make sense of the change and are accepting and ready for the process (Penland, 1997). Since human beings have a characteristic fear of uncertainty, resistance to change is common (Eby et al., 2000). While resistance is a natural response, it must be focused on to prepare employees for the change process and mobilise action and renewal (McNabb & Sepic, 1995). Thus, employee resistance to organisational change can be used as an important factor in understanding employee readiness for change which can essentially facilitate or undermine the change process.

Within the above discussion on readiness for change, the concepts of sense of coherence and organisational climate were introduced in their operationalised forms, in the present study. These are respectively sense of coherence and readiness for change: organisational climate and readiness for change. These constructs are presented as important theoretical and conceptual approaches to understanding the processes underlying people's attitude to change. A careful reading into the above discussion leads one to conclude that theoretical approaches to readiness for change emphasise that both disposition (SOC) and certain organisational facets (organisational climate) can

determine employee responses to a change intervention. The following discussion extends on these processes and specifically deals with these concepts interrelatedness within the readiness for change framework.