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Employee readiness for change within an organisational merger :|bindividual and contextual correlates

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CHAPTER THREE

SENSE OF COHERENCE

Introduction

When confronted with life's tensions and challenges, some individuals maintain a relatively stable, strong psychological and physical well-being, whereas others become depressed, anxious and hostile, sometimes even emotionally and physically ill (Kravetz, Drory & Florion, 1993). During the last 30 years theoretical and empirical efforts have been made to examine psychological and social factors that might account for these individual differences in coping with life's tensions and stressors (Judge et al., 1999). These attempts are the core of a relatively recent model of the relation between personality and psychological well-being and physical health. This model uses the term salutogenesis to underlie its concern with the factors that promote well-being and health (McSherry & Holm, 1994).

Aaron Antonovsky (1979), a medical sociologist at the Ben Gurion University in Israel, is the clearest proponent of the salutogenic paradigm. The salutogenic model is developed and published in Antonovsky's (1979) first book, *Health, Stress and Coping*. In this book Antonovsky (1979) advocates a move away from the paradigm of pathogenic thinking. This paradigm is subsumed within the medical model of psychological phenomena emphasising the abnormal. This system of thinking presupposes a dichotomous classification of people as either healthy or diseased. Furthermore, this orientation is directed generally at finding out why people fall ill and why they develop particular disease entities (Strümpfer, 1990). Whereas the pathogenic model is entrenched in the notion of disease, the salutogenic model reflects the emphasis

of health. It endeavours to promote positive health by understanding those factors that enable health to flourish (Kelly, 1989). It specifically focuses on the normalities of even abnormal persons, locating and developing personal and social resources and adaptive tendencies so that the individual can be assisted in making more effective use of them (Antonovsky, 1979, in Cooper & Payn, 1991). Strümpfer (1990) notes that the salutogenic paradigm poses a totally different question from the pathogenic orientation in that it is concerned with why people are situated at a specific focus on a health ease/disease continuum and whether they are stationary on this continuum. Clearly, Antonovsky (1979) perpetuated a new line of thinking in health psychology by suggesting a shift in focus from causes ill health to the examination of factors which either promote health or act as resistance to breakdowns.

Strümpfer (1995) extends Antonovsky's (1979) conception of salutogenesis. This theorist suggests that the meaning of health within the salutogenic paradigm becomes overextended for its primary explanatory purpose when it is used as a metaphor for general well-being. Strümpfer (1995) argues that in coining the term salutogenesis Antonovsky (1979) alludes to the sources of strength in general "which goes beyond the concerns of health as usually construed, to include the strength to deal with general concerns such as finances, security conditions and growing old" (in Ortlepp & Friedman, in press, p. 7). Strümpfer (1995) therefore proposes the term 'fortigenesis' as it is more holistic than salutogenesis in that this term emphasises the origins of strength and not merely health.

Antonovsky's (1979) theory was extended when he linked the prevalence of illness with the omnipresence of stressors. Antonovsky (1979) expresses the opinion that even

people in comfortable, benign, sheltered environments are fairly continuously exposed to fairly serious stressors. Antonovsky (1979) concludes "Stressors are omnipresent in human existence, in fact, the human condition is stressful" (p. 109). Despite the myriad of stressors, many people survive well; even with a high stress load, people's health outcomes are unpredictable. This forms the basis of Antonovsky's (1987) second book *Unravelling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well.* The mystery the salutogenic orientation seeks to unravel in this book is epitomised in the following questions: "How anyone stays alive" (p. 14); "Whence the strength" (p. 7). Confronting stressors results in a state of tension with which one must deal; whether the outcome will be pathological, neutral or salutary depends on the adequacy of tension management (Antonovsky, 1987). This line of thinking leads to a focus on what Antonovsky (1987) labelled 'generalised resistance resources'.

In attempting to answer the question of stress management, Antonovsky (1979) introduced the concept of 'generalised resistance resources' (GRRs). Antonovsky (1979) elaborately defines GRRs as follows:

> "A GRR is a physical, biochemical, artificial material - cognitive, emotional, valuation – attitudinal, interpersonal – relational or microsociocultural characteristic of an individual, primary group, subculture or society that is effective in avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors" (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 103)

This definition exemplifies the prominent role GRRs play in facilitating, avoiding or combating a wide variety of stressors (Strümpfer, Danana, Gouws & Viviers, 1998).

Examples of GRRs are knowledge, strength, money, physical fitness, cultural and political stability, coping strategies, farsightedness, flexibility, friendship and social support (Antonovsky, 1979). By implication, the absence of GRRs limits the resource an individual is able to mobilise in order to deal with the presence of stressors and the consequent tension. Antonovsky (1987) further develops the definition of GRRs stipulating that GRRs help individuals to make "sense out of the countless stressors with which they are constantly bombarded" (in Strümpfer et al., 1998, p. 94). By identifying this process of coping associated with GRR, Antonovsky (1987) gives foreground to the perception process or the process of interpretation in his theory, postulating that coherence can serve as a measure of quality coping. When the individual regularly experiences the availability of GRRs a personality construct develops which Antonovsky (1979) termed 'sense of coherence' .

Antonovsky (1979) sought to explain the relationship between life stresses and health by sense of coherence (SOC) (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1985). SOC is the central resource concept of Antonovsky's (1979, 1987) theory and refers to a global orientation towards one's inner and outer environment that is assumed to be a significant determinant of an individual's location and movement on the health ease/disease continuum (Feltd, 1997). The role of this construct is three-dimensional: Firstly by mobilising the GRRs at the individual's disposal, a strong sense of coherence can prevent the individual from being subject to some stressors. Secondly, it allows individuals to define some stimuli as welcome, which others might perceive as stressors. Thirdly, SOC operates decisively to determine to what extent an individual will move on the health ease/disease continuum (Marais, 1997). According to Geyer (1997) SOC is hypothesised as a stable disposition of personality that serves as a major coping resource for the preservation of health.

Strümpfer, Viviers and Gouws (1998) further contend that SOC is a cognitive and emotional appraisal style, which is associated with affective coping, health enhancing behaviours and better social adjustment.

Antonovsky (1987) considers the salutogenic orientation and SOC to be an important innovation and a necessary reorientation of stress research. It has attracted a lot of research efforts and interest by defining a contrasting perspective to the pathogenic approaches dominating stress research (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1985). What can be deduced from the above is that the salutogenic model reflects the emphasis on health, rather than on illness. It endeavours to promote positive health by understanding those factors that enable health to flourish.

Antonovsky (1987) identifies three implications of the salutogenic orientation. Firstly, thinking salutogenically it will be necessary to do away with the dichotomy of people being either diseased or healthy, in favour of what Antonovsky (1987) has come to call the health ease/disease continuum with individuals falling somewhere between the two theoretical poles of total terminal illness and total wellness (Strümpfer, 1990). Fritz (1989) infers that there is no single position towards which the living organism consistently returns. Instead he suggests the movement between two positions, the poles of total well-being and terminal illness. Thus, the fundamental approach to stress requires an understanding of both positions which can provide a more holistic approach to health. Secondly, the salutogenic model rejects the commonly held assumption that stressors are inherently bad. It does however, favour the possibility that stressors may have salutary consequences (Strümpfer 1990). This theorist extends on this notion suggesting that stressors must be neutral in their health consequences. The consequences

depend on the person's response to the stressor. Stress culminates in a condition of tension which, if handled poorly, paves the way for disease. However, if managed well, the stressor remains neutral or may even become health enhancing. The third implication of the salutogenic orientation is the emphasis on studying the deviant case (Antonovsky, 1987). This implication reflects that the salutogenic approach focuses on people who are subject to the same conditions (e.g. smokers who do not get lung cancer) and aims to determine the reasons for this (Fritz, 1989).

Acceptance of the salutogenic view does not imply rejection or abandonment of the pathogenic paradigm. There are benefits to the pathogenic approach and it is exceedingly important that research directed at the discovery of the effects of stressors should continue. However, it cannot be denied that the new paradigm is strongly in the ascent, in that it not only advocates the prevention of illness but it also reflects a concern for the maintenance and enhancement of wellness. Furthermore, in contextualising this approach in South Africa, Strümpfer (1995) reflects on the powerful implications salutogenesis has for South Africa. This theorist contends that, on the one hand salutogenesis both provides explanations of and cautions against the reciprocal work personality effects, which results from the still largely racially determined hierarchical structure of South African society. On the other hand, salutogenesis studies can encourage programmes for amelioration and proactive development of the workplace. This could be facilitated by abandoning the usual assumption that radical differences in psychological functioning originate in child development only. Psychologists would therefore have to continuously expose adults to conductive job conditions or personality development both on and off the job.

Salutogenic Constructs

Antonovsky (1991) acknowledges that there are many generalised personality orientations. These include self-efficacy, locus of control and hardiness, which have been studied in relation to successful coping and salutogenic outcomes (Cooper & Payne, 1991). These personality constructs resemble Antonovsky's (1987) ideas, as they are also researched in the field of stress and coping and thus can also be understood as buffering contributions to health within the salutogenic paradigm. Drawing on Antonovsky (1991), Marais (1997, p. 47) argues that what the different constructs have in common is that they focus on how individuals characteristically handle stressors and still remain healthy. The constructs focus on factors such as the ability to control and to resolve a stressful situation successfully. They also include a generalised set of beliefs about oneself and about the world and share the thesis that scoring high on the personality orientations facilitates successful coping and contributes to health. The following discussion will examine each construct in turn. It will also allude to several studies that examined these dispositional characteristics within organisational changes thus demonstrating the central role that the constructs play, not only in determining employee stress during organisational changes, but also in examining employee resilience and readiness for a change process.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is presented in Bandura's (1977) social learning and social cognition theories. According to Bandura and Cervone (1986, p. 391), self-efficacy is defined as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is not concerned with the skills one has, but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses".

Those individuals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy in a particular situation will devote their attention and effort to the demands of the situation, and when faced with obstacles and difficult situations, these individuals will try harder and persist longer (Lee & Bokko, 1994). Bandura and Cervone (1983) suggest that the influence of efficacy expectations on behaviour works in three ways: (a) through the behaviours one chooses; (b) through one's effort, expenditure and persistence; and (c) through one's state of physiological arousal. Warr (1994) refers to this dispositional factor as 'competence' and proposes that good mental health becomes apparent when a competent person reflects s/he has adequate psychological resources and problem solving skills to deal with pressure. McDonald and Siegall (1992) found that employees with low efficacy levels portray job withdrawal during the change and also reflect lower levels of job satisfaction, job commitment and high levels of employee stress (in Costa, McRae & Zondermen, 1997).

Locus of Control

Rotter (1966) proposes the concept of locus of control as the perception by the individual of his or her ability to exercise control over the environment. Those characterised by an internal locus of control believe they have control over their environment and their personal stresses, whereas those with an external locus of control view themselves as controlled by factors such as chance and powerful others (in Judge et al., 1999). Warr (1987) refers to this dispositional mechanism as 'autonomy' and proposes that autonomous persons have a tendency to feel and act on the assumption that one is influential rather than helpless in the face of life's difficulties. Researchers suggest that people with internal locus of control are less likely to suffer the ill effects of stressors during organisational change. Nelson, Cooper and Jackson (1995) found that

employees with an internal locus of control showed more signs of positive well-being in their organisations experiencing changes than employees with external locus of control (Gabel & Oster, 1998). Terry and Callan (1997) support this finding in stipulating that individuals with an external locus of control would be more sensitive to the ambiguity and insecurity in the organisation during times of change which could result in employee resistance to the change process and have a negative effect on their well-being.

Hardiness

Geyer (1997) argues that hardiness is probably the salutogenic content best known to psychologists in that it has stimulated a sizable amount of research which uses this construct as a moderator in examining the stress health relationship. Kobasas' (1979) concept of hardiness is formulated upon the theory of existentialism, which supports the image of a man as accepting the challenge of creating a meaningful life in a generally stressful world with the potential of creating opportunities for growth and fulfillment (Sullivan, 1993). Kobasa (1979) proposes that persons who experience high degrees of stress without falling ill have a personality structure differentiating them from persons who become sick under stress. This personality difference is best characterised as hardiness (Strümpfer, 1990). According to Kobasa (1979) hardy persons are considered to possess three general personality characteristics: a) commitment (vs alienation), hardy persons believe in the truth, value what they are and what they are doing and actively involve themselves in many situations in life: b) control (vs powerlessness), hardy persons are said to possess characteristics of control in that they believe they can influence the events of their lives through what they imagine, say and do. The control disposition is expressed as a tendency to feel and act as if one is influential, rather than helpless in the face of varied contingencies of life. This component is partly the same as

internal-external locus of control used in Rotter's theory (Kobasa, Maddi & Pucetti,1982); c) challenge (vs threat), hardy persons contain an expectation that change rather than stability is the norm in life and that change will present them with opportunities and incentives for personal development (Strümpfer, 1990). Warr (1994) extends on the notion of hardiness stipulating that when stress occurs hardy people are not without recourse for resolution. They do not give up control and succumb to the incapacity of illness. They feel positively about change as they view their situations as learning experiences and opportunities to demonstrate skill rather than as threats.

Keen and McBarn (1993) found a positive relationship between hardiness and psychological strain among employees involved in organisational restructuring (in Suh, Ed Diener & Fujita, 1996). Shaninger (1995) found that hardy employees reflect more positive attitudes in their organisations experiencing change, which significantly moderates the psychological strain associated with role ambiguity and uncertainty: they were thus more resilient to the change process (in Mishra, Spreitzer & Mishra, 1998).

The above discussion has introduced three central constructs which, parallel with the SOC construct, could also serve as salutogenic strengths combating stressors. The reason for paying particular attention to the hardiness construct, by providing an intricate account of its multifaceted features, is in lieu of the fact that this theory has the greatest conceptual overlap with SOC, which is a construct specific to this study.

Although Antonovsky's (1979) construct of SOC and Kobasa's (1979) construct of hardiness were inspired by two different theoretical traditions, the connotative and denotative constructs seem to overlap. Antonovsky (1987) discusses a number of points

of confluence between them. This comparison reveals that both constructs represent a positive orientation, which focuses on an individual's internal sources of health, especially in highly stressful situations. Antonovsky (1987) claims that these constructs share the crucial assumption that how one sees the world is a decisive factor in coping. Furthermore, independent research has found SOC and hardiness to be positively related to indices of physical and mental health (Kravetz, Drory & Florion, 1993). According to Strümpfer (1990), unlike the SOC scale, hardiness measures more specifically negative aspects of psychological well-being rather than dispositions which reduce negative effects. It has therefore been argued that the measure of hardiness does not encompass a true salutogenic orientation and is thus more a measure of pathogenic variables. Based on the above criticism, and in view of the fact that Antonovsky (1987) attributes a specific quality to the process of perception and interpretation of stimuli received, labelling it either coherent or not coherent, the SOC construct is more suitable for the current study. As Antonovsky (1987) contends, coherence can serve as a measure of quality coping. Thus, the way in which employees define a stimulus (merger) as either a stressor or non stressor, and the way in which they view and manage their resources and coping techniques, will not only be determinant, of job attitudes during the change, but will also be significant indicators of employee readiness for organisational change.

Exploration of the Sense of Coherence Construct

Antonovsky (1987) views the SOC explicitly and unequivocally as a generalised, long lasting way of viewing the world and one's life in it. Antonovsky (1979) defines the SOC as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring, though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are structured and predictable; that one has the available resources to meet

the demands posed by the stimuli; and that these demands are worthy of investment or challenges. Strümpfer, Gouws and Viviers (1998) contend that the SOC is a coping resource and is presumed to mitigate life stress by affecting the overall quality of one's cognitive and emotional appraisal of the stimuli that impacts on one. According to Antonovsky (1984) one's general level of SOC develops from the time of birth until the age of about 30, after which it remains fairly stable, through which gradual changes may occur as a result of interactions with the environment. SOC is developed through the process of coming to understand one's life experiences, and is thus rooted in the particular sociohistorical and cultural context of an individual life's span (Sullivan 1993).

According to Bowman (1997), many different cultural pathways are instrumental in the development of an individual's SOC. Antonovsky (1979) identifies *cultural historical variables* as being sources of SOC. These pertain to family structure, child rearing cultural patterns, and abrupt cultural transitions and disruptions such as induced or forced removals. Others sources of SOC delineated by Antonovsky (1979) include: *psychological variables*, such as theories of locus of control (Rotter, 1966), as well as psychological variables of ambiguity, serious threats to survival, lack of authoritative information and alarmist rumours (Antonovsky, 1979); and *social structural variables*, such as social class, strengths of social network, and appraisal support and emotional support (Antonovsky, 1979).

In constructing the theory of SOC, Antonovsky (1987) develops a single dimension of the individual's personality, consisting of three interwoven components:

comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. He also expands on the effects of these components in the work context.

Components of SOC

The first component of the SOC is known as *comprehensibility,* the extent to which the person perceives the stimuli both from the internal and external environment as making cognitive sense (Antonovsky 1979). This depends on whether or not the person perceives the information as ordered, consistent, structured and clear, rather than chaotic and disordered. The first component forms the core of the SOC and was a logical extension of what Antonovsky (1979) described as a "solid capacity to judge reality" (p. 127). Sullivan (1993) extends this notion by suggesting that what is meant by comprehensibility is that the person finds a certain logic in the stimuli s/he encounters and that the stimuli will be predictable so that when they come by surprise they will still be explicable. Locating this component within the context of work, Antonovsky (1987) contends that comprehensibility refers to a consistency, which one's work situation allows, whilst fostering a sense of clarity. Through this, one is able to identify one's own role in the organisation as well as the roles of others, which provides a clear picture of how jobs are linked together (in Fritz, 1989).

The second component, *manageability*, expresses the extent to which one perceives that s/he has access to adequate resources to deal with challenges posed by stimuli in the environment (McSherry & Holm, 1994). The available resources of this conception may be under the person's own control or may be under the control of legitimate others who have the power to resolve matters in his/her interest, for example, a spouse, friends, relatives, a trade union, or a political party (Strümpfer, 1990). According to Antonovsky

(1984) when the mere perception that help is available operates, whether it is one's own resources or those of legitimate others, a person will be high on manageability, thus sensing s/he will be able to cope and not grieve endlessly. With reference to experiences in the work place, Antonovsky (1987) argues that an appropriate load balance is decisive in determining the sense of manageability. By this he means that there should not be too much but not too little work to do. In addition, the work situation should be conducive for allowing employee potential to be utilised (in Fritz, 1989).

The third component, *meaningfulness*, is associated with the subjective feeling that life makes sense and that at least some parts of our life are worthy of commitment and engagement. According to Antonovsky (1984), 'meaningfulness' is the emotional counterpart to 'comprehensibility'; thus a person who is high on meaningfulness will feel that life makes sense emotionally. This person will not be overcome by unhappy experiences, but will willingly take up challenges. Antonovsky (1987) maintains that participation is the source of meaningfulness in one's work, as it allows one to feel valued in the enterprise with which one is engaged. Another source of meaningfulness at work is discretionary freedom, or the decision latitude that the worker can exercise in his or her job. This gives the employee the feeling of power in terms of influencing what goes on around him/her (in Fritz, 1989).

In recognising the global orientation of the SOC construct, Antonovsky (1987) stresses that although the three components are conceptually distinguishable from one another, "successful coping depends on the SOC as a whole" (p. 22). As McSherry and Holm (1994) point out, a person with a weak SOC would perceive internal and external stimuli as noise; information would be perceived in inexplicable disorder and chaos; s/he would

experience the events of life as unfortunate things that happen to him/her and victimise him/her unfairly; and s/he would feel that nothing in life mattered. Conversely, a person with high SOC would have a strong belief that the world makes sense (comprehensibility), is probably more likely to view him/herself as being equal to the demands of living (manageability) and would perceive the world as a place with rhyme and reason (meaningfulness) (Marais, 1997). Clearly, research supports Antonovsky's (1987) idea that the SOC scale is a global unidimensional instrument and that a total SOC score is an estimate to the client's approach and view of life. The approach to utilising the SOC measure in the form of a total sense of coherence score is based on Antonovsky's (1993) assertion that the "sense of coherence scale was developed specifically to measure a global orientation and not to measure the components of manageability, meaningfulness and comprehensibility separately" (in Ortlepp & Friedman, in press, p. 8). In view of the fact that some researchers focus on the three sub-scales separately, Antonovsky (1993) in a later publication states that he has recently been presented with enough research evidence to suggest that "all sorts of ideas come up when one looks at subscores, the technical weakness notwithstanding. All I would say at this point is I am now far from sure that my stance was wise" (in Ortlepp & Friedman, in press, p. 9). In view of Antonovsky's (1993) assertion, a total sense of coherence score was used in the present study due to the explanatory nature of this research in exploring the relationship between disposition and readiness for change. In addition the sense of coherence subscores were also included in view of their conceptual applicability in examining the relative contribution of each component to readiness for change.

The Relevance of SOC as a Disposition Construct in Measuring Readiness for Change

An important element of Antonovsky's (1987) model of SOC is the hypothesis that a strong SOC moderates potentially harmful effects of tension and predisposes one toward the health end of the health ease/disease continuum. In fact, Antonovsky (1987) hypothesises "that the strength of the SOC has direct physiological consequences, and through such pathways, affects health status" (p. 154).

Research consistently shows that a person with a strong SOC will be more likely than a person with a low SOC to appraise stimuli as non-stressors, and thus select flexibly the most appropriate coping strategy which will contribute to greater likelihood of preventing disregulation and achieving a more positive health outcome (McSherry & Holm, 1994). The SOC is presumed to mitigate life stress in that it is a coping resource that affects the overall quality of one's cognitive and emotional appraisal of the stimuli that impacts on one (Strümpfer, Gouws & Viviers, 1998). It is therefore argued that strong SOC persons do not only cope with stressful events but will be transformed by struggling with them (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). The use of the SOC construct as a dispositional measure in examining interpersonal differences in vulnerability to occupational stress has been recently researched (Kivimaki, Kalimo & Toppinen, 1998; Feldt, 1997; and Antonovsky, 1991).

Strümpfer et al, (1998) provide a compelling argument for incorporating dispositional theory into explanations of behaviour in organisations. According to these theorists, individuals possess stable traits that significantly influence their affective and behavioural reactions to organisational settings. In measuring personality dispositions

and job satisfaction, these theorists found that among the disposition measures used in their study, the SOC scale was the only one that showed highly significant positive correlations with job satisfaction measures. It was thus concluded that individuals with a strong SOC are more likely to show a readiness and willingness to exploit the resources that they have at their potential disposal and will therefore reveal higher levels of job satisfaction. In a research more relevant to the current study, Marais (1997) utilised the SOC construct as an orientation to change management, specifically, the extent to which individuals cope with change management. In this study SOC was used as a moderating variable in examining the coping abilities of managers with change. The results of the study indicated that there was a moderately strong relationship between the strength of managers sense of coherence and their ability to cope with organisational change. Thus, it seems likely that SOC could also have implications for readiness for change in the current study.

As the literature on organisational change continuously suggests that change is a stressful experience in the work environment as it is characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty and insecurity (Terry & Callan, 1997), a strong SOC is vital in that ultimately it can assist employees in their adjustment and adaptation to the change process (Staw & Ross, 1985). Furthermore, Eby et al, (2000) suggest that an employee who perceives him or herself adapting easily to change may be more receptive to the organisational change efforts, may be more likely to perceive the change as favourable and thus be more accepting and ready for the change process.

Evidently, research suggests that employees' acceptance and readiness for organisational change can be determined by enduring individual characteristics. In recent years almost

all research on job attitudes have been situationally based (Locke, 1976). Situational variables such as organisational culture, climate, supervision etc. have been commonly isolated as determinants of job attitudes (Staw & Ross, 1985) and employee readiness for organisational change (McNabb & Sepic, 1995). Although organisational change researchers often use individual characteristics as a moderating variable, neither organisational change researchers, nor researchers assessing employee readiness for change have given recognition to the fact that employee attitudes and readiness can be directly affected by dispositional variables (Lohler, Noe, Moeller & Fitzgerald, 1983). Furthermore, Funder and Ozer (1983) argue that personality is more a predictor of behaviour in ambiguous situations than in settings where role demands are so strong that behaviour is externally determined regardless of personal dispositions. Taylor, (1999) argues that a dispositional approach to the measure of job attitudes in ambiguous work settings is viable in that these dimensions have some stability over time, they characterise people on certain dimensions and these dimensions are useful in predicting employee behaviours and attitudes across settings.

The hypothesis that individuals may have stable predispositions towards job contexts can be drawn from a number of theoretical formulations. One possibility is that job attitudes may reflect a biologically based trait that predisposes individuals to see positive or negative content in their work lives. Another alternative is that differences in individual temperament, ranging from clinical depression to a very positive disposition could influence the information individuals input, recall and interpret within certain work situations (Staw & Ross, 1985). Strümpfer et al. (1998) argue that a job attitude involves several basic components: specific beliefs about one's job, behaviour tendencies

(intentions) with respect to it, and feelings about it. The last three components are clearly linked to affective scales.

The above evidence presents a compelling argument for incorporating dispositional theory in explaining readiness for change within a merger. The current study therefore involves a measurement of personality characteristics (SOC) based on the assumption that such measures can aid in explaining individual attitudes and readiness for change (Eby et al., 2000). Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) extend on this possibility stipulating that employee readiness for change may reflect a biologically based trait that predisposes individuals to react positively or negatively to a change process.