

Affect-As-Information in the Process of Individual's Change Readiness Development

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Abstract. Change lies at the heart of innovation and progress. This paper explores the concept of employee change readiness, that has been identified as one of the primary determining factors of an organizational change intervention's success (e.g. Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell, 2007; Armenakis, and Harris, 2009). Change readiness is a popular concept in organizational change literature, but little is known about what is the role of affect in individuals' change readiness. As organizations still struggle with achieving employee change readiness, despite vast and non-controversial literature on the topic, the affective dimension might be the missing piece of the puzzle.

The affective element has not emerged as a definitional element of the majority of change readiness definitions, its operationalization, and thus also from empirical studies. Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis's (2013) review argues this is one of the major limitations of change readiness research. Recently, change management literature started to recognize the importance of affect, and the body of research devoted to understanding what emotions arise when organizational change occurs, and how they impact the change process (e.g. George, and Jones, 2001; Huy, Corley, and Kraatz, 2014; Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, and Do, 2018) is on the rise. However, the antecedents that influence what emotions are present in the change process still remain under-researched.

Our contribution lies in explaining how affect influences one's change readiness, how it comes about in the change process, and what are its main sources in the change process. Our aim was to answer the research question *What is the role of affect in the process of an individual's change readiness development?* Our motivation was to address one of many of Rafferty and colleagues' (2013) directions for future research and clarify at what point of the change process has the affective component a stronger influence on forming change readiness compared to the cognitive component, and what are the reasons behind that. We draw on feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012) to better understand the role of affect in the process of change readiness development.

This is a qualitative study using in-depth interviews. The sample consisted of 19 respondents working in 7 large organizations in 5 different industries. 7 different change types were discussed with a broad spectre of participants (intrapreneurs, implementors, and change receivers) which allowed us to gain rich information of the focal phenomenon from different perspectives. The focus of our study are organization-initiated changes imposed on employees, that usually encounter the most resistance.

Our study finds that managing emotions through better communication with change recipients (e.g. see Liu, and Perrew, 2005) is only one piece of the puzzle. To build affective change readiness our study implies organizations should put special focus on managing employees' cognitive resources, creating the team spirit among employees, and minimizing uncertainty, paying attention to how things are done.

This knowledge is crucial for change agents to be able to influence employees affect toward a change initiative, and to understand the timing and the actions needed to direct affective change readiness toward successful change implementation.

Keywords: change readiness, feelings-as-information theory, qualitative study

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