

## PROMOTING CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACHES TO EMOTIONS DURING MAJOR CHANGE

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### Abstract

Many change models rightly assume that effective leadership and the ability to gain commitment of employees are critical factors which may lead to successful change outcomes. An important consideration in the change process is the importance of employee responses, particularly emotions. Until recently, the change literature largely ignored the role of emotions. This paper addresses organizational change as it affects employees from an emotions and justice perspective. Firstly, it draws attention to the role of emotions during organizational change, emphasizing emotional processes, antecedents and consequences. For example, the perception of fairness during change is a powerful determinant of employee emotions. Individuals who perceive they are treated unfairly are likely to experience negative emotions, while those who perceive they are being treated fairly are likely to experience positive emotions. Secondly, the paper asserts that organizations denigrate unwanted emotional responses and few genuinely seek to understand them. More particularly, it asserts that managers believe that emotions are irrational, and rather than dealing constructively with emotions as part of their change role, managers have the capacity to avoid, diffuse or control employee emotions. We provide guidelines as to how organizations can manage emotions during change for healthy individual and organizational level outcomes. This suggests greater vigilance by managers in their understanding of emotions, and the need to ensure positive emotions are generated to broaden and build individuals' resilience and to assist individuals to constructively respond to negative emotions.

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### INTRODUCTION

Most academics and practitioners would agree that the key challenge in leading and managing change is the human dimension. The extant change literature acknowledges the people factor through the examination of responses to change, the most notable of these being resistance. For decades, resistance was perceived by management as a negative phenomenon, a barrier to change often manifesting itself through counterproductive behaviors on the part of employees (King & Anderson, 1995; Merron, 1993; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Although there are various factors that contribute to failed change, one of the key reasons people resist change is due to the inability of leaders to convince employees to support change and to commit the energy and effort necessary to implement it (Coetsee, 1999).

Over the years, research has shown that the lack of successful change implementation was largely the result of employee resistance to change, and, to a lesser extent, poor leadership and communication (Waldersee & Griffiths, 1997). As a consequence, there are various suggested approaches in the literature which urge managers to engage in two-way communication, to encourage employee participation, to acknowledge emotions and empathize with their employees (Bridges, 1985; Kotter, 1979). However, despite these longheld views, there is little evidence to suggest that organizations actually encourage emotional expression. In all probability, the opposite is true.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1995:97) assert that despite workplaces being “saturated with emotion”, emotions are generally disregarded as the antithesis of rationality. Arising in part as a defence against the dysfunctions of irrationality, the term “emotions” has come to have a pejorative meaning in the business world, with rationality emerging as the dominant administrative paradigm underpinning organizational life (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). As early as 1951, the work of Mills (1951, cited in Styhre, Ingelgard, Beausang, Castenfors, Mulec & Roth, 2002: 86) asserted that white-collar workers should be encouraged to control their feelings in accordance with socially accepted norms of behaviour and to act “professionally”.

More than half a century on, managers today consider emotions as uncomfortable, irrational outbursts which are both inappropriate in the workplace, but more importantly, may stand in the way of a potentially effective change intervention. As a consequence, they may either consciously or unconsciously adopt counterproductive behaviors by finding ways to avoid, diffuse or suppress emotional expression. One of the more destructive outcomes of this approach by managers was identified by Morrison and Milliken (2000) as organizational silence, a potential obstacle to successful change initiatives because it fails to generate and capitalize on multiple perspectives and opinions. A more enlightened approach would be to understand the power of emotions, the conditions that generate emotions, the attitudes and behaviors that arise from them, and the need to adopt productive management responses.

Organizations continuously generate situations that prompt some form of emotional response from employees, so why are emotions especially important to the management of change? Organizational change provides numerous challenges and opportunities for those leading new initiatives and those affected by them. As Bridges (2004) asserts, organizational change is situational and outcomes driven. It involves alterations to working relationships, the adoption of new technologies, changes to behaviour, and so forth. However, it is the internal, psychological transition of employees that is likely to lead to successful implementation of change. Antonacopoulou and Gabriel (2001:446) argue that change offers individuals a diverse range of experiences and meanings:

“Change can be a threat and an opportunity, a cause of mourning and celebration, surprising and predictable, controlled and uncontrolled. It can bring growth and healing; it can also bring decay

and death. It can amount to development and maturation or to the sudden end of all development and maturation. It can be cyclical and reversible or one-way and irreversible. It can be superficial and spectacular, like the dictates of fashion or it can be slow, far-reaching, yet invisible.”

For example, in the case of a reorganization, employees laid off and grieving for their losses, are more likely to experience strong, negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, pessimism, social isolation and despair (Leanna & Feldman, 1992, cited in Mossholder, Settoon, Armenakis & Harris, 2000). Organizational change, therefore, evokes a wide range of human emotions which are “powerful sources of meaning and direction, supporting or inhibiting individuals and organizations in their attempts to re-define reality and find their place in it” (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001: 435). More importantly, these expressed or concealed emotions may influence employee attitudes toward on-going organizational activities.

The purpose of this paper is to assist organizations in exploring and understanding the human side of change. The paper commences with a brief overview of the nature and characteristics of emotions, with particular reference to emotional processes, antecedents and consequences in the context of organizational change. A further consideration for managers is not only the need for greater awareness of employee emotional responses, but some of the more significant triggers which generate them. For example, research reveals that unfair treatment of employees during change is linked to negative emotions, while fair treatment is linked to positive emotions. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which organizations and change managers typically address employee emotions, with an emphasis on counterproductive emotions management which seeks to avoid, control or diffuse emotional expression. The paper concludes by offering productive alternatives to the management of employee emotions, with a focus on linking employee emotions during change to their perceptions of distributive, procedural, informational and interpersonal justice.

## **EMOTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

Contemporary research into emotions has implications for organizational change. If managers wish to encourage a more positive outlook toward organizational change, they need to be cognizant of the types of conditions which influence employee emotions and which ultimately give rise to how individuals think and behave. Often it is not the change itself which leads to negative affect and subsequent behaviors of withdrawal, footdragging, aggressive reactions, resignation, sabotage, etc. It is *how* change, and these days, how continuous and large-scale changes are managed. By virtue of their positions, managers may lack the contextual insight, experience or empathy to fully appreciate the employees’ perspective in relation to change.

Given the increasing demands and challenges associated with continuous change implementation and the emotional toll that change can take on employees, managers need to be more vigilant and astute in terms of their choice of a change management approach. Therefore, it is proposed that a more constructive and enduring approach to managing change is to take an anticipatory view of change through the management of employee emotions, by attending to the relationship between employee perceptions of justice and emotional outcomes. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to point out that not all emotional responses to change are directly linked to justice issues (Kirkman, Shapiro, Novelli and Brett, 1996). For example, referring to a case involving self-managing teams, Kiefer (2005:876) asserts that “approximately 35 per cent of the concerns about the change did not relate to justice issues”. Similarly, a study by Conlon and Shaprio (2002) concerning a reorganization found that only half related to justice issues. Whilst these findings underscore the importance of fairness during change, they also highlight the complex processes leading to emotions. For this reason, it is important that practitioners understand the role of emotions in change, including emotional processes, antecedents and consequences.

## Emotional Processes, Antecedents and Consequences

Managers need to understand emotions because they shape employee attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately influence organizational outcomes (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002:78). Emotions may be defined as “organized psychobiological responses linking physiological, cognitive, and motivational systems” (Huy, 2002, p. 34) and “multicomponent response tendencies that unfold over relatively short time spans” (Fredrickson, 2001:218). Wade and Travis (1996, cited in Bovey & Hede 2001:372) further define emotions as “a state of arousal involving facial and bodily changes, brain activation, subjective feelings, cognitive appraisals which can be either conscious or unconscious, with a tendency toward action”.

A useful framework which integrates various theories of emotion and links them with action is the Circumplex Model of Affect. The circumplex is used widely to measure self-reports of mood, facial expressions, emotional ratings of the environment, as well as anticipated reactions to events and across national cultures (Larsen & Diener, 1992). This model assumes that some emotions are similar to each other but different from other emotions and depicts emotions systematically around a perimeter of a circle (Larsen & Diener, 1992; Watson, Wiese, Vaidya & Tellegen, 1999). It also postulates that emotions will fall between the two axes that are drawn through the circumplex space.

One of the earliest circumplex models was postulated by Watson and Tellegen (1985). This particular model contains four bipolar dimensions: Pleasantness (happy--sad), Positive Affect (excited--sluggish), Engagement (aroused--still) and Negative Affect (distressed--relaxed) (Watson et al., 1999, p. 821). The key to this model was its representation of positive and negative affect which are depicted as independent measures. A later version of the circumplex model developed by Larsen and Diener (1992) has two basic bi-polar dimensions. One dimension represents Pleasant and Unpleasant poles of emotions, while the other reflects intensity of action, that is, High or Low Activation. Pleasantness “summarizes how well one is doing” and is often conceptualized by researchers using similar terms such as good--bad mood, positive--negative, approach--avoidance and so on (Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999, p. 809). Activation refers to a sense of mobilization, energy, tension, or activity through an individual's physiological state. It has also been named differently in the literature – arousal, energy, tension and activity.

An individual's senses may move along a continuum of activation ranging from relaxation to excitement (Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999). Therefore, pleasant/high-activation emotions include enthusiasm, excitement, and unpleasant/high-activation emotions include anger, fear, anxiety, distress, sadness and gloom. Pleasant/low-activation emotions include calm, comfort and relaxation, while unpleasant, low-activation emotions include disappointment, shame, dejection and fatigue (Huy, 2002). Generally, researchers have found that during organizational change, individual responses register “at either extreme of the pleasantness dimension” (Mossholder et al, 2000: 224).

Emotions are generally defined as “short-term affective reactions to specific events (Briner, 1999: 336). From a social constructionist perspective, the appraisal of events such as change, leads an individual to evaluate and respond to those situations (Fineman, 1997; Lazarus, 1991). Therefore, events are perceived as harmful or beneficial depending on the individual's goals and the extent to which these events inhibit goal attainment (Lazarus, 1991). Within the context of organizational change, a significant trigger of emotions are the evaluation of change events and subsequent perceptions of justice or injustice (Stecher & Rosse, 2005; Weiss, Suckow & Cropanzano, 1999).

Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) contributes further to the understanding of emotions during change by proposing that organizational events are proximal causes of affective responses. Basch and Fisher (2000:37) define an affective event as “an incident that stimulates appraisal of and emotional reaction to a transitory or ongoing job-related agent, object or event.” These events include overt behavior in relation to the object, appraisal of that object, the emotional experience and physiological responses. Rather than viewing emotions as relevant only to an

event, however, Briner (1999) refers to ongoing processes which occur within a context. Thus, an individual may be angry as a result of a change decision and its implications, but what may also be significant is the background and situation of the individual, how the event generates meaning and how the individual responds in the present and in the future. In other words, rather than focusing on proximal causes, the focus moves to the interaction between the person and the environment. In this way, the emotional experience is viewed as a number of transactional processes rather than simple cause and effect. This is particularly relevant with regard to organizational change where there is a history of change management and a series of interventions and activities which impact the individual and about which the individual makes judgments about fairness.

Huy (2002) identifies the role of cognition in emotions and emotional episodes in his two-stage appraisal process (Huy, 2002). In the first stage of this two stage appraisal process, employees evaluate the significance of the event in relation to their goals and issues. Fredrickson (2001:218) refers to this process as “an individual’s assessment of the personal meaning of some antecedent event.” As a major organizational change is likely to be highly relevant to all employees, this process can be expected to be undertaken by all employees. If employees appraise the outcome of a change event as positive, pleasant feelings are aroused and if they appraise the outcome negatively, unpleasant feelings are likely to follow. The finding of intense emotions in studies of organizational change, such as mergers, acquisitions, or changes in strategy, structure, personnel, work roles and procedures (Huy, 2002; Kiefer, 2002) shows the active appraisal by employees of change events. For example, when employees state that they are ‘fearful of an impending reorganization’, they appraising an event (reorganization) that triggers the emotion fear. Likewise, when employees state that they are ‘angry about the change procedure’, they are appraising that event as unjust, which triggers the emotion anger.

We contend that, within the context of organizational change, perceptions of justice and injustice are key types of appraisal being undertaken by employees which have important consequences for employee emotions and organizational outcomes (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockne & Bartel, 2007). Evidence for the impact of perceptions of injustice comes from Skarlicki and Folger’s (1997, cited in Fox, Spector and Miles, 2001) recent review of the justice research, which showed outcomes such as anger, resentment, a desire for retaliation, vandalism, sabotage, reduction of OCBs, withdrawal and resistance (cf. Jermier, Knights and Nord, 1994, cited in Fox, Spector and Miles, 2001). A study by Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) supported these findings to suggest that contexts which are perceived as unfair by employees may lead to negative emotions and subsequently to counterproductive work behaviors. In the context of organizational change, where there is already heightened sensitivity, employee perceptions of injustice may lead not only to negative emotions but activities which are extremely damaging to the organization.

Once employees enter the second stage of an appraisal, they evaluate the change demands in terms of their coping resources (Fugate, Kinicki and Scheck, 2002). This has implications in terms of emotion management and the management of change. In a longitudinal study, Huy (2002:33) posited in his *Emotional Balancing Theory* that middle managers facilitated change through emotion management activities. This theory suggests that in order to generate positive support for change projects, managers, as change agents must strive to manage the emotions of recipients of change, as well as their own emotions.

Fredrickson’s (2001:219) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* provides guidance as to why managers need to understand and attend to emotion in order to maintain a healthy and productive organizational environment. The theory suggests that, as a consequence of certain events, emotions and affect act as triggers to individuals to take action or to continue to engage with their environments. More particularly, distinctive types of positive emotions, such as joy, interest, contentment, pride and love, have the ability to “broaden people’s momentary thought-action repertoires (urges to act in a particular way) and build their enduring resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources.” For example, the positive emotion of “interest” broadens an individual’s urge to “explore, take in new information and experiences and expand the self in the process” (Fredrickson, 2001:220). Overall, the theory posits that positive emotions broaden

routine modes of thinking or acting. In other words, individuals who experience positive affect broaden their cognition and demonstrate a preference for a broader range of behavioral options. Analysis of a range of emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride and love appear to widen the possible range of individual thoughts and actions. For example, research suggests that interest broadens an individual's potential for action by "creating the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process" (Fredrickson, 2001:220).

On the other hand, the theory posits that distinctive types of negative emotions stimulate fewer behavioral options in an individual's thought-action repertoire. Fredrickson (2001) uses an example of a life threatening situation which promotes quick and decisive action, such as escape or attack, to illustrate this point. However, in a work situation, the assumption that emotions must necessarily produce action tendencies may be unfounded. Instead, what may occur is that individual emotions yield changes to cognitive activity, rather than physical activity (Fredrickson, 1998). For example, emotional responses may influence cognition to the point where an individual has difficulty focusing on tasks, making decisions or solving problems.

As emotional responses vary from individual to individual, there is an extensive array of possible emotions associated with change. Common negative emotions to change include anxiety, fear, frustration and anger, while positive emotions may include hope and joy (Kiefer, 2002). Some employees embrace change with enthusiasm or joy, while others may be fearful or depressed. However, there are several negative emotions often referred to in the literature which are frequently related to loss – loss of status, loss of social relationships, loss of safety, loss of control, loss of competence, and so forth (Bridges, 1986; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002; Wolfram Cox, 1997). The types of negative emotions which accompany loss include fear, anger, sadness, depression, uncertainty, confusion and anxiety (French, 2001; Kiefer, 2002). Not all employees feel negative emotions intensely, but in many organizations where major change is necessary and may become more frequent, there will be a significant number of individuals who need to work through their negative emotions in order to accept change and move forward. The ability to cope with emotions also varies from individual to individual, so organizational support initiatives may be required.

There are numerous benefits associated with positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). These include longer-term adaptive benefits, as broadening of cognition encourages the accumulation of personal resources which assists an individual to cope in threatening situations. Similarly, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) suggest that positive affect during stressful situations can act as a useful coping mechanism. Positive emotions can also function as efficient "antidotes for the lingering effects of negative emotions" (Fredrickson, 2001:221). More importantly, positive emotions may encourage psychological resilience through positive reframing, the application of a problem-focused approach or finding meaning in adverse events (Fredrickson, 2001).

Thus, recent studies suggest that positive emotions can enhance individual emotional well-being, and may be pertinent during times of stress associated with organizational change. More importantly, it suggests that links between positive emotions, broadened cognition and meaning can accumulate. The links between these components become a reinforcing and positive spiral in which positive emotions and broadened cognition influence one another to produce positive well-being into the future. Fredrickson (2002) further argues that the spiralling effect of positive emotions can be extended beyond the individual to the organization. For example, positive emotions experienced by individuals helping others or being assisted by others, may have a positive influence during major change. This is possible through the process of emotional contagion where individuals respond to others' emotions (Huy, 2002). Over time, it is vital that managers heighten their awareness of critical events that have occurred in the organization, how they were perceived by employees and their potential to influence the current change context. The more engaged, frank, open and supportive managers are in their dealings with employees on these occasions, the greater the likelihood that individuals can cope with the demands of change.

## COUNTERPRODUCTIVE EMOTIONS MANAGEMENT

While the extant change literature supports the notion of two-way and honest, open and supportive communication during change, it appears that few organizations genuinely seek to understand employee emotions (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Instead, they attempt to control, diffuse or avoid emotions and this can be achieved in a variety of ways. The primary means of controlling or avoiding expression of emotions during change may occur through display rules, change roles and obligations, interpersonal influence, and through the use and abuse of power.

### Display Rules

Displays of positive or negative emotion in the workplace have been considered inappropriate. Emotions are seen as unpredictable, a sign of weakness and disruptive to routine, while lack of emotion has been equated to power (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002). As a testament to rationality, activities associated with the subjective are likely to be avoided or controlled, while those associated with rationality are more likely to take precedence. Here, rationality is viewed as reason without emotion, while emotion is equated with irrationality.

Through the reinforcement of behavioural norms, organizations often inculcate the appropriate forms of emotional expression. For instance, emotion “scripts” and “feeling rules”, while associated with emotional labour and service industries, can also be applied more generally to organizational change (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Kramer & Hess, 2002). As Ashforth and Humphrey (1995:107) assert, these scripts “are often learned through socialization within the organization. Through observation and imitation, instruction, trial and error, feedback, and reinforcement and punishment, role occupants are taught to feel and display socially desired emotions”. Thus, recipients of change, frequently adopt an acceptable “face” to demonstrate that they are “on the same bus” with management.

Kramer and Hess (2002) argue that through display rules, organizations dictate the extent to which individuals can openly express emotions. The term *emotional work* is used to explain “the effort human beings make to ensure that their feelings and emotions are in harmony with socially accepted norms” (Styhre, Ingelgard, Beausang, Castenfors, Mulec & Roth, 2002:86). Their study revealed that the most common communication display rule was to express emotions “professionally”. This suggests that irrespective of the nature or strength of the emotion, employees who behaved professionally maintained a neutral or pleasant demeanour. Understanding and complying with these rules can have important implications for employees, and as a consequence, individuals may decide “to express, mask or change felt emotion” (Kramer & Hess, 2002: 68). Masking felt emotion through silence is another form of emotional work (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), the motivation for which may be the possibility of negative repercussions associated with speaking up. This may suit some managers who are reluctant to receive negative feedback from employees in order to avoid feelings of threat, incompetence or vulnerability. Even when they do invite feedback, it is suggested that managers may ignore the information, discredit the source or dismiss the information as inaccurate (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

### Change Roles and Obligations

In order to operate effectively, the expression of emotion in organizations has typically been controlled or avoided, particularly negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and anger. Approaches most often directed at emotions during change efforts include neutralizing, that is, preventing emotions from occurring or escalating (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995) and normalizing, where emotions are diffused or reframed. Emotions may be neutralized or normalized through roles and role obligations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). For instance, executives in the role of change strategists play a significant part in the successful implementation of major change. Invariably, they are concerned with the technical side of change, the external environmental factors which

influence the organization's longer-term sustainability and with the overall direction of the organization. In terms of the change process, they are usually in control of the decisions which frame the commencement and type of change intervention to be adopted (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1993). Recipients, on the other hand, are those individuals who are directly affected by change and its implementation. Caught between strategists and middle-manager implementers, recipients of change generally have little influence over the process, and are often informed after the decision to change has been made, which gives them restricted options in terms of the outcomes.

Kiefer (2002) observes that the organization itself often "fuels" negative emotions, by denying employees a sense of control in decision-making, thereby exacerbating feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. This relates to a management belief that "management knows best about most issues of organizational importance" and that employees must "assume the role of unquestioning followers" (Morrison & Milliken, 2000: 710). The assumption here is that *any* negative response is always inappropriate.

### **Interpersonal Influence**

There is evidence to suggest that by using both positive and negative emotions, managers can elicit desired responses (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002; Sutton, 1991). For example, change strategists as powerholders use emotion to influence less powerful individuals in relation to their attitudes and behaviors, which can be a way of attaining solidarity and behavioral compliance. The change literature generally confines discussion of executive emotion to charisma, passion, and the ability to enthuse employees in relation to the organization's new vision (Kotter, 1995). However, as Gibson and Schroeder (2002) assert, emotion at the executive level is used to influence change in other ways.

Management can diffuse emotional expression through the use of humour or by labelling the perpetrator as a "whinger or petty tyrant" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995:108). They may also discredit a recipient on the basis of his or her personal motivation or, in a similar vein, reframe their own emotions through rationality. For instance, when employees express their concerns regarding change, they are often met with "the force of reason" and "information battering, where employees are confronted with a barrage of slide shows, data analysis and hefty reports" (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Thus, the key role of change strategist/executive is to drive change. Consistent with the resistance literature, any negative expressions of recipient emotion are perceived as counterproductive and, therefore, to be controlled or avoided.

Change strategists invariably have an advantage in implementing major change in that they hold considerable power and authority. Moreover, this power is enhanced when strategists are able to induce appropriate behavior in others. The need to gain cooperation for change may be extended to include a need to satisfy organizational role requirements, to satisfy or enhance the change strategist's need for self-esteem and self-efficacy, or a desire to harm or benefit the target. Different interpersonal influence tactics are adopted to meet these needs (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002). So-called hard tactics include the use of pressure, threat or intimidation; rational tactics include the use of persuasion and data; softer tactics include ingratiation, perhaps even self-deprecating humour and affection. Underpinning these tactics lie positive and negative emotional displays.

Positive emotions can be used as a means of influence. For instance, if a senior executive or change strategist uses positive emotions, the motivation may be to soften the potential for conflict and negative emotions, in the hope that the recipient will also want to retain positive relations. Thus, an emotional contagion tactic is applied. Moreover, if the mood is positive, the recipient may not notice the weakness of the argument for change; positive emotions may also increase the likeability between the executive and recipient which, in turn, may reduce the recipient's potential resistance to influence attempts (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002).

Gibson and Schroeder (2002) also suggest that a manager's perception of power and increasing that power through promotion, information and expertise, often relates to positive emotions. In a change scenario, increasing the executive's power may mean less resistance by the recipient, a consequence of which could be increased positive feelings for the change strategist. On the other hand, a perception that the recipient may hold power leads to fear or anxiety on the part of the executive. A study by Tiedens, Ellsworth and Moskowitz (1998, cited in Gibson & Schroeder, 2002) suggests that there are predictable differences in emotions experienced by powerholders depending on their level of perceived power. Importantly, if a recipient resists the use of power, the executive is likely to feel negative emotions such as anger and frustration. If a recipient complies with the influence attempt, the likelihood is that the powerholder's positive emotional state is retained, the accompanying emotions being pride and self-satisfaction.

A different process is associated with the use of negative strategic influence. Through the use of negative emotions such as anger, the executive intimidates and dominates a recipient, reminding him that he has the wherewithal to inflict pain and discomfort. Studies conducted by Tiedens (2001) suggest that individuals who express anger are more likely to be perceived as occupying high status, high power roles. Another reason for expressing anger is to create negative feelings in the recipient, something which most individuals wish to avoid. The extent of the anger can also suggest to the recipient how far the executive may go in terms of risk taking to influence change.

Consistent with the notion of "rational" organizations and professional behavior, there are executives who deliberately display no emotion. Appearing emotionally neutral can be a useful strategy because emotional outbursts may be perceived by others as a weakness, whereas lack of emotion is perceived to be associated with rationality and more importantly, with power. In terms of influence tactics, Gibson and Schroeder (2002) argue that executives may use a combination of positive, negative and neutral approaches. Moreover, the authors posit that as powerholders perceive an increase in their levels of power relative to the recipient, their choice of emotional display widens. However, this will depend on a number of factors such as the strength of the emotion, the ability of the executive to control emotional displays, and organizational norms. Equally important is the notion that recipients as lower-status members are less free to express negative emotions, and that their emotional responses may not be acknowledged. Finally, it is suggested that by virtue of their power, not only do senior managers have the luxury of a wide range of emotional expression, it is *their* feelings which are more likely to be recognised and attended to by others. As the executives' power increases, there may be less sensitivity toward the feelings and thoughts of recipients.

### **Use and Abuse of Power**

King and Anderson (1995, p. 156) note that "resistance" is viewed by management "at best as disruptive and troublesome and at worst as a coordinated process of radical militancy designed to undermine the very fabric of managerial control". This reflects the considerable tension which arises between those directing change and the recipients who invariably feel their lack of control over the situation with the use of power permitting executives to avoid or control recipient emotions. Threats of reprisal, withholding of rewards or promotion, are sufficient disincentives to challenge management practices. Recipients who have family responsibilities, mortgages, and so forth, may suppress their feelings in order to retain their jobs. So too, will individuals who feel that any form of dissent will have repercussions for their careers. Emotions that may threaten management hierarchy are, therefore, avoided or controlled. Furthermore, hierarchical power allows an executive to distance him or herself from the emotional outcomes of decision-making, particularly in multi-national companies where most of the significant decision-making is made in a different city or country.

The primary means of controlling, diffusing or avoiding expression of emotions during change occurs through display rules, change roles and obligations, interpersonal influence and through the use and abuse of power. Through the reinforcement of behavioural norms, organizations often inculcate the appropriate forms of emotional expression through communication display rules.

Negative emotions can be neutralized or normalized through change roles and role obligations. Unlike change strategists, recipients of change generally have little influence over the change decision or the process and therefore little opportunity to express their opinions or concerns. There is evidence to suggest that managers can use interpersonal influence to elicit desired emotional responses from employees. Finally, hierarchical power allows a manager to distance him or herself from the emotional outcomes associated with change.

## **GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING EMOTIONS DURING CHANGE**

While it would appear that organizations either knowingly or unintentionally aim to neutralize or normalize emotional responses during change, it is important that employees' emotions are acknowledged and that support is provided to constructively deal with negative emotions. Where possible a positive climate for change should be fostered as this is likely to encourage employees to take action and to explore opportunities for development. Sometimes, however, emotions signal problems with the change intervention or the change implementation process. In cases where management decisions and actions relating to change are perceived as unfair, strong emotional responses by employees are to be expected.

### **Justice Perceptions During Major Change**

Justice is generally referred to as a cognitive concept but its effects are both emotional and behavioral (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005). As Weiss, Suckow and Cropanzano (1999:786) comment, "much justice research has assumed, explicitly or implicitly, that emotion is the central mechanism through which a sense of unfairness is translated into work behavior." Research reveals that individuals who perceive that they are treated fairly will experience positive emotions, while those who perceive injustice, will experience negative emotions (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; Weiss, Suckow & Cropanzano, 1999).

Generally, the literature focuses on employees and their fairness evaluation of three types of activity: the outcomes they receive from the organization (distributive justice), formal policies or procedures by which outcomes are allocated (procedural justice) and the interpersonal treatment they receive from supervisors (interactional justice) (Saunders and Thornhill, 2003:325). More recently, Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Part and Ng (2001) have added *interpersonal* and *informational* justice, suggesting that these have different correlates and that measuring them separately allows for further differences. The following section examines these four dimensions of justice.

Distributive justice refers to judgments about the degree to which resources are distributed in a fair way (Daly & Geyer, 1994:624). Perceptions of distributive justice arise whenever there are explicit organizational allocations and outcomes, such as redundancies, restructure, transfers and retraining, as well as the more covert distribution of power, authority, responsibility and support (Cobb, Wooten & Folger, 1995; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003:362). In the context of change, allocations may refer to "what" changes and "winners and losers" in the allocation of resources. In order to facilitate distribution, some form of criteria will have been used by management. Cobb, Folger and Wooten (1995) suggest that equitable distribution is generally based on merit, equality of loss and reward, and individual need. How the criteria is used will influence employee perceptions of fairness, and as a result, their perceptions of the change effort and the organization as a whole (Cobb, Wooten & Folger, 1995).

Emotional responses to justice vary across the justice dimensions (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; Barclay, Skarlicki & Pugh, 2005). Distributive justice is regarded as the most tangible and easily assessed of the relevant justice dimensions. In a study focusing on discrete emotions and justice conducted by Weiss, Suckow and Cropanzano (1999), findings indicated that happiness was a consequence of perceived distributive justice, and anger a consequence of perceived distributive injustice. The fairer the distribution of outcomes, the more likely it is that individuals will feel

positively (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999 cited in Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005). Generally, the perception of unfavourable outcomes has been found to be consistently related to anger and resentment (Stecher & Rosse, 2005).

Fundamental to the issue of distribution is the acceptance by employees of the processes leading to the development of the distribution criteria. Miller (2001) argues that individual concerns regarding procedural justice or injustice are more powerful and independent of effects on outcomes. Perceptions of fairness about the procedures (procedural justice) used to arrive at change decisions are indeed significant (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003:362). Procedural justice is considered to be more important than distributive justice in the context of organizational change because processes have a more enduring quality than the allocation of resources. Korsgaard, Sapienza and Schweiger (2002) contend that individuals make sense of change decisions based on their perceptions of procedural justice. Therefore, an organization's procedures are fair "to the degree that the decision-making processes demonstrate consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality" (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999:37). Individuals are more concerned about procedures leading to the decision when decision outcomes are unfavourable (Korsgaard, Sapienza & Schweiger, 2002). Therefore, negative responses by employees are more likely to occur when they perceive the processes leading to a decision as unjust.

The way individuals are treated (interpersonal justice) is likely to have a significant impact on their perceptions of fairness, not only about the process of implementation, but also "about the moral obligations to treat everyone fairly that underpins this process and thus, their levels of trust" (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Saunders & Thornhill, 2003:364). Treatment by management can be translated as the extent to which employees are treated with dignity, respect, politeness and honesty (Tyler & Bies, 1990). Insults or disrespectful treatment by others are a source of anger, resentment, aggression and moral outrage (de Lara, 2006; Miller, 2001). In terms of interpersonal justice, the literature provides an overview of the range of actions that offend others and arouse feelings of injustice. The sources of disrespectful treatment may include unjustified blame, lack of recognition for performance, violations of promises, failure to admit an error, giving directives in an inappropriate tone and ruthless use of one's power (Miller, 2001). This finding is also supported by Stecher and Rosse (2005) whose research revealed that *both* distributive and interactional justice produced significant main effects on negative emotions. It was found that interactional injustice produced stronger negative responses than those created by distributive injustice. Moreover, adherence to fair procedures did not attenuate the negative emotion emerging from either distributive or interactional justice. This has significant implications for managers in relation to the quality of their interpersonal treatment of employees.

### **Productive Emotions Management**

Generally, emotional responses are judged by management as "good" or "bad". The notion of bad or destructive emotions may arise from an unstated belief which suggests that "unity, agreement and consensus are signs of organizational health, whereas disagreement and dissent should be avoided" (Morrison & Milliken, 2000:710). Even where management professes to encourage dissent, the reality from a recipient's perspective may be quite the opposite. This view is supported by Kotter's (1996, cited in Waddell & Sohal, 1998) observation that managers often believe that a change which has been implemented with minimal resistance must have been a positive change that was well-managed. When these beliefs occur, the authors argue that executives will implicitly act in ways to discourage employee negative feedback.

Rather than considering negative emotional expression as a barrier, the aim should be to gain shared understanding from a pluralistic perspective and to enable individuals to develop awareness of emotional processes in the workplace (Härtel & Zerbe, 2002). It is not sufficient to merely identify that individuals experience emotions in the workplace, but management must also attempt to understand the emotional dynamics at play between change strategists and change

recipients. Nor should they be fearful of emotional expression as there are greater positives than negatives to be gained from it.

If managers wish to encourage a more positive outlook toward organizational change, they need to be aware of the types of conditions which influence employee emotions and which ultimately give rise to how individuals think and behave. Instead of espousing the acceptance of emotional responses, managers should genuinely acknowledge emotions and empathise with their employees and create positive climates for change (Bridges, 1985; Kotter, 1979). Positive emotions broaden routine modes of thinking or acting. Individuals who experience positive affect broaden their cognition and demonstrate a preference for a broader range of behavioral options.

Justice perceptions are also important triggers in relation to emotional responses. The fairer the distribution of outcomes, the more likely it is that individuals will feel positively (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999 cited in Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005). Procedural justice is considered to be more important than distributive justice in the context of organizational change because processes have a more enduring quality than the allocation of resources. Individuals make sense of change decisions based on their perceptions of procedural justice and they are more concerned about procedures leading to the decision when decision outcomes are unfavourable (Korsgaard, Sapienza & Schweiger, 2002). Therefore, positive responses by employees are more likely to occur when employees perceive the processes leading to a decision as just. In terms of interpersonal justice, the literature provides an overview of the range of actions that offend others and arouse feelings of injustice. Managers should focus on treating employees with respect, politeness, dignity and honesty (Tyler & Bies, 1990).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the preceding discussion, it could be argued that organizational health and effectiveness might be improved by finding ways of acknowledging rather than suppressing emotions. Expressing reservations means that employees are identifying potential problems with the intervention. Conflict arising from shared expression may be accompanied by energy and motivation, a momentum to move. Expressing different views may also encourage the search for creative methods and outcomes (Waddell & Sohal, 1998:546).

Organizations generally deal with emotions in counterproductive ways. Communication display rules dictate appropriate forms of emotional expression. Professional communication displays, that is, non-offensive or pleasant forms of communication are encouraged. In terms of influence tactics, managers may use a combination of positive, negative and neutral approaches. For example, they can use positive emotions, adopting ingratiating tactics and humor; they can neutralize or normalize emotions through change roles obligations that focus on producing change outcomes; or they can use hierarchical power to denigrate or coerce individuals.

The change literature consistently asserts that in order to successfully implement change, it is imperative that leaders gain the commitment and support of employees. Greater vigilance and sensitivity to justice issues on the part of senior executives as change strategists is required, particularly with regard to their credibility as leaders and the creation of a climate of fairness (Novelli, Kirkman & Shapiro, 1995). Although not all emotional responses emanate from perceptions of justice or injustice, recent findings in the justice literature suggest that the importance of employee emotional responses to injustice cannot be underestimated. These responses may ultimately translate into attitudes and behaviors unwelcomed by the organization.

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