Cognitive-emotive change management

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Summary

Research Question: The feasibility of applying cognitive-emotive techniques for change management.

Methods: A theoretical analysis of the feasibility of the concepts of cognitive driven behavioural change for the change management in organizations. A cognitive-emotive change management process is proposed and a practical application for a case study is demonstrated that transfers existing psychological tools into the change management practice.

Results: Cognitive-emotive concepts provide a theoretical foundation for the behavioural changes that are intended by change management in organizations. The cognitive-emotive techniques can be applied to existing organizational change projects. Further empirical support for the effectivity of these techniques for change management is necessary.

Structure of the Article: 1. Introduction; 2. The impact of emotions on change-relevant behaviour; 3. The impact of cognitions on change-relevant behaviour; 4.Cognitive-emotive change management; 5. Application; 6. Conclusions; 7. About the author; 8. Bibliography

Introduction

This article defines change management as a management activity that tries to trigger new work behaviour. Change management is about changing human behaviour and is therefore subject to the principles of behavioural change as defined by psychological theories.

The need of change management has been widely accepted and there is a high demand from leaders to develop their competencies in this area (Forchhammer, 2015). Based on this educational progress also the success rate of large scale organizational change programs should have increased. Unfortunately there are no findings that show that this is true. Surveys indicate that between 39% and 58% of all major change initiatives have not achieved the desired operational goals (IBM, 2008; Towers-Watson, 2013).

A reason for these results might be that the psychological principles of change management are still not fully understood by those that are supposed to act as change managers.

This article will therefore propose a model that can help to analyse and to prepare change management activities. As change management is concerned about the change of existing human behaviour, the psychological preconditions for this behavioural change need to be an integral part of change management concepts.

Human behaviour is triggered by emotions and cognitions. The proposed approach for a cognitive-emotive change management tries to describe how cognitions and emotions need to be altered in order to elicit the new behaviour that is required by the planned organizational changes. The relevant theoretical concepts for this practical approach can be found in the area of cognitive psychology, especially in the concepts of rational-emotive behavioural therapy (Ellis, 1991; Ellis & Harper, 1975).

Despite the fact that the original concept was already developed 40 years ago, applications to a business environment are still scarce (Turner & Barker, 2015). A meta-analysis with 23 studies found that the application of the method can also be effective in a business environment (David & Szamoskozi, 2011). These studies measured the effects of cognitive-emotive therapeutical intervention methods on the reduction of emotional distress in organizations. They did not focus on the application of these intervention methods for change management purposes. Here, only single examples for practical applications can be found in the change management literature (Russell, 1999).

The impact of emotions on change-relevant behaviour

A still widely accepted view in the corporate work is that emotions are irrelevant if not even destructive to the work performance (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001). Looking at management and leadership issues like motivation, performance and organizational changes, rather the opposite can be observed in the organizational reality (Briner, 1999).

This is also based on the insight that private and work related emotions are inseparable, which has been defined as "bounded emotionality" (Putnam & Mumby, 1993).

Neurological studies have shown that emotions do enable humans to react flexibly to changes. They can reorder their personal priorities, decide on actions that help them to thrive and also define long-term goals in situations with missing information or negative behavioural options (Damasio, 1994).

The emotional impact on behaviour might be even stronger than the cognitive one, as can be found in studies about health related behaviour (Lawton, Conner, & McEachan, 2009).

The level of emotional impact influences how intensively the attitudes towards an organizational change are hold, which determines how well those attitudes will be remembered and to what extent they will guide the future actions (Vuori & Virtaharju, 2012).

Negative emotions have a direct impact on the human behaviour. They are short-wired in the brain and do instantly trigger behaviour (Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999).

Organizational changes threaten the self-identity of its members and create anxiety regarding the future tasks and status (Argyris, 1990). These negative emotions can be a major threat to change projects as they will prevent any employee support and engagement (Eriksson, 2010). Anxiety, fear and anger will directly impact the cognitions regarding a change event. They will lead to a higher level of activities against the event in the case of anger, a higher level of avoidance behaviour (the tendency to flee or hide) in case of fear and a lower level of activities in the case of anxiety (defined as "loss-of-control emotion" and with the impact of a loss of self-confidence and self-efficacy) ,compared to a person with neutral emotions (Steigenberger, 2015).

This is supported by the notion that change situations create stress as they are triggering feelings of uncertainty and the anxiety not to be able to cope with the new situations (Callan, 1993). These anxieties are also mostly realistic as change result in a major loss of control for employees (Kanter, 1983). Perceived loss of control triggers strong negative emotions that will be a major obstacle for the planned change (Smollan, 2014).

Obviously these kind of negative emotions are dysfunctional for the implementation of organizational changes (Schein, 1996).

On the other hand it seems that change processes can not be triggered without a certain level of anxiety. Lewin argues that the unfreezing of an existing status quo is based on an "emotional stir-up" (Lewin, 1947, p. 229). This disconfirmation of the status quo can be also artificially triggered to create a sense of ambiguity (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

A resolution to this conflicting role of emotions in change processes is offered by Schein's interpretation of Lewin's model (Schein, 1996). He states that a change process needs to start with a disconfirming data that triggers frustration about the status quo in order to create the insight that the current situation in no longer providing long-term benefits for the individual. This kind of insight is called "survival anxiety". It can be also be described as "emotional action readiness" (Frijda, 1996), which means that emotions define the readiness to initiate a certain action and also to avoid any action (e.g. in the emotional state of being depressed). This concept also includes the assumption, that emotions also assume control over cognitive activity, at least in states of strong emotions (e.g. hate, anxiety or love) (Frijda, 1996, p. 6).

The positive survival anxiety can be inhibited by "learning anxiety", which is the fear of changing the existing self-identity. Therefore it is necessary to create a state of "psychological safety" that will then allow survival anxiety to flourish (Schein, 1996).

This is supported by a study conducted by Huy (2002), which documents that middle managers' efforts to pay attention to employees' emotions contributed to successful change efforts. An organization that has a high commitment to change, but does not attend to the emotions of the organizational members will create "chaos" (Huy, 2002, p. 1).

This shows that emotions are a tool for assuring the commitment and the support of organizational members for change projects (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). Change management activities that are necessary are e.g. directed towards the negative emotions and can be described as "calming processes" (Huy, 2002, p. 59). They include one-to-one sessions to allow a private exchange of concerns including an empathetic rather than judgmental responses to objections towards the planned changes. Small-group meetings for information about the change as well as for receiving task-related as well as emotional feedback should be organized on a regular basis. Also "mourning sessions" (Huy, 2002, p. 52) for the obsolete processes and values might be helpful and will be received as attending to the organizational members' concerns.

This will support the development of psychology safety (Schein, 1996), which can be also be supported by the usage of words with a positive emotional connotation Such terms are "comfortable", "success", "progress" and "relief" (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001, p. 88).

The necessary survival anxiety (Schein, 1996) can be developed by describing the possible negative consequences of a failed change project. In such a description words with a negative emotional connotation can be used. Examples are terms as "danger, "loss" and "risk" (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001, p.87).

The impact of cognitions on change-relevant behaviour

Cognitions drive human behaviour. Human beings are capable of defining goals and to design action plans in order to achieve the set targets. We are also capable of adapting our plans if our actions fail to achieve its objectives based on the existing feedback. (Frese & Zapf, 1994; G. A. Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960).

Theories of reasoned or planned behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), (Ajzen, 1991) have defined key cognitive variables that do trigger human action. The major variables are intentions, subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) and the perception of behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions are the conscious reflection of the motivation of a person regarding her or his decision to put effort into a certain action and are based on attitudes (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Other relevant factors are salient beliefs, past behaviour or habit, self-efficacy, moral norms, self-identity and affective beliefs (Conner & Armitage, 1998).

The employees' attitudes toward change are considered to me one of the most critical factors of successful change (V. D. Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Rafferty et al., 2013).

Organizational members come up with an interpretation of the change events that is most likely not the interpretation that is intended by the change agents, as it is most probably a negative cognition. So the challenge is to initiate a new, guided "sensemaking" that will lead to the positive attitudes that will trigger the new behaviour (Vuori & Virtaharju, 2012).

Lazarus (Lazarus, 1991) argues, that every emotion is based on a cognitive appraisal of an event, e.g. a change. The appraisal can be automatic (unconscious) as well as a deliberate, in one case without volitional control in the other with it. The automatic processes are based on prior learning of the individual and serves us to react instantly, e.g. in situations of immediate danger. This also includes the idea, that once triggered by negative cognitions, the negative emotions will again influence the cognitive process and will lead to the creation of even more negative cognitions.

For organizational changes this means that the negative cognitions that are either based on learned attitudes (e.g. "change does not work" or "change is always negative for me") or on the negative appraisal of the actual planned change trigger negative emotions towards the change (e.g. anxiety or anger). These emotions then create even more negative cognitions about the change.

These basic assumptions of the relationship between cognitions and emotions are also shared by the rational-emotive concepts (Ellis & Harper, 1975).

The rational-emotive therapy (RET) concept of Ellis defines human beings as "goal-seeking animals (Ellis, 1991, p. 142). Events in the life of people are interpreted regarding the goals that they pursue. If the interpretation of an event is positive, positive beliefs are triggered, which lead to positive emotional consequences, e.g. happiness is experienced and the event will be approached and/or repeated. If the event is interpreted as negative, negative beliefs are initiated and negative consequences are experienced, e.g. dissatisfaction will be felt and the event will be avoided. Mental problems do occur, if the interpretation of events is irrationally negative, e.g. in the case of a depression (Ellis, 1991).

Part of the negative cognitions towards a change can be seen as irrational ideas (Ellis & Harper, 1975) (Bovey, Hede, Bovey, & Hede, 2005). Irrational beliefs that have been identified as the strongest correlation with change resistance are avoiding life's difficulties, not controlling one's destiny, being inert and passive and blaming (Bovey et al., 2005). Participants in a study based on change management workshops based their negative attitudes towards the change on the fundamental beliefs that life should be fair and comfortable, which means that the change should not have happened in the first place and that its impact was awful and not bearable, which can be classified as self-defeating beliefs (Russell, 1999).

To correct these beliefs, a cognitive-emotive approach to challenge the irrational beliefs about the organizational change based on the concepts of RET (Ellis & Harper, 1975) is recommended (Bovey et al., 2005; Russell, 1999; Turner & Barker, 2015). The approach tries to replace the irrational beliefs with more rational ones. This can be done by a cognitive disputation of the irrational beliefs based on scientific questioning and the challenging of their "musts" and "demands", which can be enriched by emotional and behavioural disputing, e.g. making people imagine adequate emotions or let them behave in appropriate ways (Ellis, 1991). There are four basic disputing styles (logical, empirical, practical and rational alternative) and four rhetoric styles (didactic, socratic, metaphorical and humorous), which can be combined (Kopec, Beal, & Digiuseppe, 1994).

Schein, based on the model of Lewin (Lewin, 1947), defines the necessary cognitive process for changing the attitudes towards a change as "cognitive redefinition" that include semantic redefinitions, cognitive broadening and the definition of new standards of judgement (Schein, 1996).

Another approach to change negative emotions has been proposed by Greenberg (Greenberg, 1996). Negative emotions can be altered in a three-step-process. The first step is to accept that the negative emotions are created by

the individual and not by the event itself. The emotions are based on a personal interpretation ("It is I who I am feeling this..."). The second step is the insight that the individual owns the emotions and that it is not something impersonal ("It is I who am the agent of the feeling"). The third step is final revelation that it is possible to control and alter the emotion ("It is I who can do something about this…).

In change situations the positive belief that the change is necessary is crucial. The individual needs to realize that it has the capability to implement the change and that the impact of the change will be positive (Rafferty et al., 2013). Besides the individual's belief in his competencies for change, also the belief in the capacity of the organization to undertake the changes is important (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993).

Armenakis et al. (1999) have defined elements that are necessary in order to define effective messages that will create such rational positive cognitions. These messages should include the following five elements: discrepancy; self-efficacy; personal valence; principal support and appropriateness.

A barrier to using this kind of cognitive change is the fact that it is a demanding process that will be perceived as difficult and unpleasant and has a high cost of an individual's energy (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013).

Cognitive-emotive change management

The change management concept that is described here is linked to the concept of the rational-emotive therapy, especially the ABC analysis (Ellis, 1991) and the related disputational styles (Kopec et al., 1994). The concept has been adapted to the requirements of change projects and is seen as part of an overall change management process. The difference to existing RET based change management approaches (Russell, 1999; Turner & Barker, 2015) is that it is defined as a tool for the leaders of an organization for analysing and actively managing changes rather than a method that is directly applied to the employees by specially trained facilitators.

Based on practical observations, it is assumed that the majority of change projects is still driven by a top-down-approach in which the changes are defined by the management of an organization and not by an inclusive, dialogic change approach, that would significantly reduce change resistance (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). The model also focuses on planned changes (Burnes, 1996) and describes how to manage these changes.

Another decision point before using the proposed approach is an assessment of the risks of change resistance compared to the effort of an active change management. There might be also changes, where active change management has no real value, as they will be also accepted based on the fact that they are unavoidable, e.g. in the case of technical-structural changes in which a unilateral

approach seems to be as effective as a participative one (Robert Waldersee & Griffiths, 2004).

But planned, top-down change still exists and therefore also the need for active change management. Such a change management process needs to address the existing change resistances and has the task to reduce these resistances and to build acceptance and commitment towards the change among the employees who are asked to make the changes.

Three different ways to handle can be defined. The best approach to make organizational changes successful is to include the members of the organization into the decision making process regarding the planned change. This would ideally start with the overall decision about the change, but is also effective regarding the details of the change and its implementation. Using an inclusive approach triggers the intrinsic motivation of the members of the organization, as they experience autonomy and purpose. The change will be transformed to a personal goal of each involved employee.

If this approach is not feasible or has been ignored, the necessary for a structured change management approach depends on the kind of change that has been planned. Empirical research (R Waldersee & Griffiths, 1996) shows that in the case of technical-structural changes (e.g. processes and IT systems/work tools) an unilateral approach is more effective than a approach that tries to change the attitudes towards the change before its implementation. Therefore a forced change, which expects the employees to show the new work behaviour will lead to a successful implementation as the attitude will adapt positively after experiencing the changes. If the planned changes need a kind of behaviour that is not driven by technology and processes, but are mostly based on attitudes (e.g. dealing with other people in certain ways), then cognitive-emotive change management is necessary. The cognitions and emotions of the employees need to be changed first in order to enable the new work behaviour (Figure 1).

The gap between the planned behaviour and the behaviour that is shown as a consequence of the negative cognitions and emotions towards the change, is the need for change management activities (Figure 2). This behavioural gap is based on a cognitive gap, which is the difference between the negative interpretation of the change and the positive cognitions that would be needed to motivate the employees to implement the planned behaviour.

The negative cognitions can be based on a conscious assessment of the outcomes of the organizational changes that are rated as being disadvantageous. They can be also based on general negative attitudes towards organizational changes that are either based on personal experiences or based on the corporate memory that has been shared by the long-standing members of the organization. Another source can be individual irrational beliefs that are applied to the change situation. If e.g. an individual holds the assumption that life should prevent any hardships or that it is always the victim in life, the challenge

to adapt to a new organizational role will be experienced as personal threat.
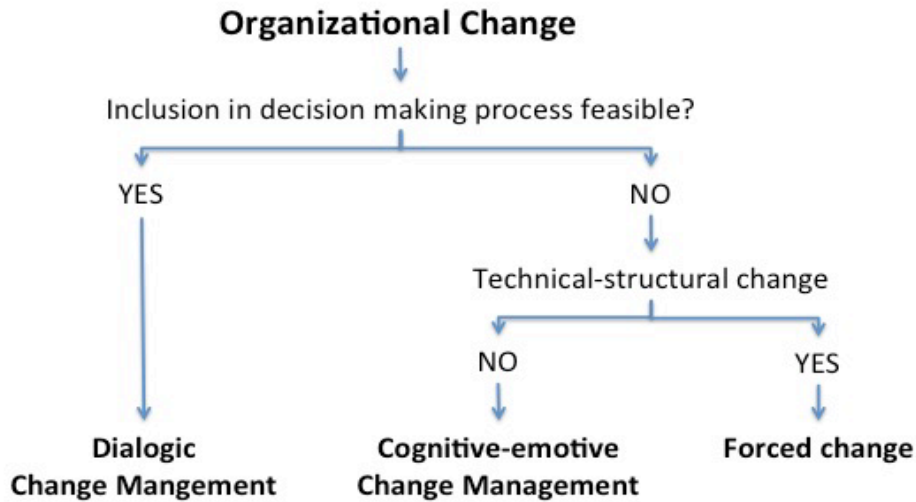

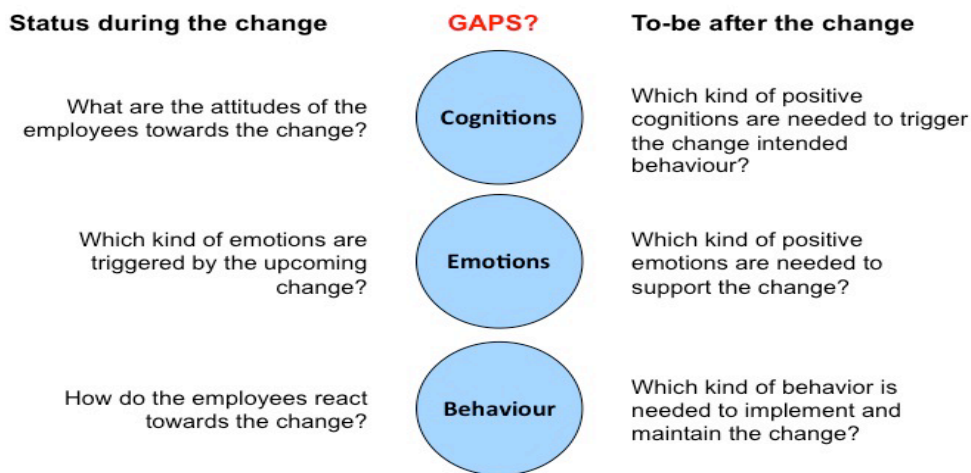Figure 1:

Change management decision tree

Figure 2:

Change gaps

As the negative cognitions also trigger negative emotions about the change, there is also an emotional gap between these negative emotions and the positive emotions that are needed to support the planned behaviour.

Once the existence of these gaps have been realised, the logic of the ABC schemata from Ellis (Ellis, 1991) should be applied. However one difference between a ratio-emotive intervention and an organizational change project is the definition of the target behaviour. In a planned change it is not subject to an individual definition but pre-defined by the management.

Still, these organizational changes can be clearly identified as activating events according to Ellis (Ellis, 1991). These events are negatively interpreted, as they do not support the individual goals of the single stakeholder of the organization who is impacted by the changes. The

employee's brain has no vision of how they should act, only the habit of existing work behaviours.

Negative cognitions are developed, which then also trigger negative emotions regarding the change. The behavioural consequence is change resistance, e.g. by maintaining the former work behaviour and not implementing the changes.

These five elements, the organizational changes that have impact on the stakeholder of the organization, the negative cognitions about the change, the negative emotions that are triggered by these cognitions and the current change resisting behaviour are part of a cognitive-emotive change analysis (Figure 3).
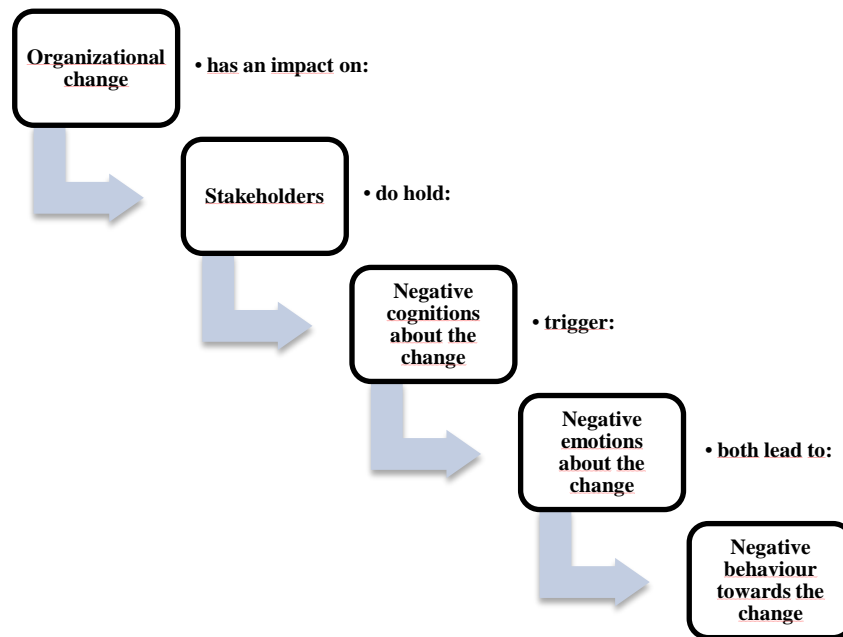

Figure 3:

Cognitive-emotive change analysis

The difference to a traditional change analysis is the detailed definition of the negative cognitions and emotions, which are the reason for the change resistance and need to be altered in order to replace the change resisting behaviour by one which supports the implementation and the maintenance of the organizational change.

Each ABC change analysis is specific for a defined stakeholder group. The impact of a change is triggering the negative cognitions and emotions as well as the change resistance, which are therefore different for each stakeholder group. The focus of the analysis should be those stakeholders, who are crucial for the implementation of the change and which will either prevent the change or will slow it down significantly by their resistance. The whole analysis is driven by the planned changes.

Following the logic of the ratio-emotive approach it is necessary to dispute the negative cognitions before trying to develop new, positive beliefs about the change (DiGiuseppe, 1991). This is breaking with the typical change management activities, which try to focus directly on sending positive messages about the change. This practice can be assumed as not being fully effective, because the existence of negative cognitions is a barrier against the acceptance of positive arguments about a change.

Looking at the different disputational and rhetoric strategies and styles that are recommended to be used in RET to change dysfunctional cognitions (DiGiuseppe, 1991; Kopec et al., 1994), all can be applied for working against change resistance. This application is the fourth step of the proposed change management approach. It is based on the existing matrix of disputational strategies and styles (Kopec et al., 1994) (*Figure 4*).

A logical disputation tries to argue that the belief of a person about an event can not be logical derived from the event itself. In a change situation this can be e.g. applied to the belief that the change is not necessary. This might be a correct interpretation for an individual, but does not apply to the whole organization.

An empirical disputation tries to show that the existing data does not support the existing beliefs of an individual. For a change situation this might be e.g. applicable if the individual outcomes are interpreted as negative, even though the real impact will be different. Also general attitudes towards change (e.g. "change projects never work") can be challenged by pointing out the specifics of a particular project. This is also true for the generic irrational beliefs that are applied to the change situation. If a

person believes that there should be no hardships in a corporate career, it can be easily argued that this not true for most people working in organizations.

DISPUTING STRATEGY

RHETORICAL STYLE	Logical	Empirical	Functional	Rational Alternative
Didactic	D-L*	D-E	D-F	R-Ra
Socratic	S-L**	S-E	S-F	S-Ra
Metaphor	M-L	M-E	M-F	M-Ra
Humor	H-L	H-E	H-F	H-Ra

*D-L is a logical dispute, presented in a didactic manner.
**S-L is a logical dispute, presented in a socratic manner.

Figure 4:

Depiction of all possible combinations of disputing strategies by rhetorical styles

The functional disputational strategy focuses on the negative outcomes of the dysfunctional cognitions. It will be shown that the current beliefs of the individual do result in various negative outcomes for herself/himself. In change projects such an argument can be the same like in therapeutical situations: The negative assessment of the change does trigger anxiety and anger, which leads to a lower level of well-being for the individual. The psychological effects of the change might be even bigger than the real impact on his work and status in the organization. This state of unhappiness or the current change resistance have also no impact on the change in most change situations. The rejection might just slow down the pace of the implementation, but the change will never the less come.

These disputational strategies are limited if a negative assessment of the planned changes must be seen as a realistic interpretation by the stakeholders of the change. In such a case, the rational arguments can be hardly disputed by logical and empirical strategies.

The functional strategy can be still applied, as completely negative cognitions toward the change are still partly dysfunctional, as they do not make the change go away. Here it still makes sense, that even though the reality is already tough, the continuous negative appraisal leads to even more emotional costs for the individual. Therefore it is suggested that trying to identify the positive aspects in a mostly negative change will help to cope with the situation.

Once we have established a situation in which the negative cognitions towards the change are at least weakened, we can move forward and try also to present positive, alternative beliefs that should replace the negative ones. This has been defined as fourth disputational strategy and is described as rational alternative in the model (DiGiuseppe, 1991).

In a change context it can be seen as separate step, as the sending of positive messages about the change is a major part of all change management related communication activities. For this step it is also possible to integrate the

suggestions for redefining change related cognitions by Armenakis (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Based on his definition the positive messages about the change should include arguments about the discrepancy between the current situation and the necessary future state (i.e., change we need); the fact that the changes can be implemented based on the self-efficacy of the stakeholders (i.e., yes, we can); the personal value for the individual (i.e., this makes sense for me); the support by the top-management (i.e., we will be supported); and the appropriateness for the planned changes (i.e., this works for us).

If we can anchor the positive messages as change related cognitions, we can also expect that the former negative emotions will be replaced by positive ones. We will then have a cognitive set-up that of positive cognitions and positive emotions that will trigger the work behaviour that was intended by the organizational change, which is the ultimate goal of change management

All four strategies can be applied for change management using different styles as depicted in the model from Kopec et al. (Kopec et al., 1994).

The didactical style means that the audience will be directly informed or taught about why the negative cognitions are dysfunctional, without trying to get the holder of the irrational beliefs to derive these insights on his own.

To build these insights is tried in the socratic style or by using metaphors or humour. Asking questions like in the socratic style seems to work best in one-to-one encounters like coaching sessions. Using metaphors and humour bares the risk that at least part of the audience might not be reached by the selected approach. This shows that it might be necessary to develop different approaches for different stakeholder groups to make the disputational styles work.

Application

The following case study, based on a real case, will be used to illustrate the application of the proposed change management approach. An organization is facing a period of rapid growth due to a general positive economic climate and specific market conditions. This led to hiring additional staff in the customer service area. The department that was led by a single head grew significantly up to size of around 40 members. In order to reduce the large leadership span to a realistic ratio a re-organization was planned. The goal was to create four different teams, each headed by a separate team lead. This organizational change was strongly rejected by the staff members, who wanted to maintain the current organization.

The cognitive-emotive change analysis starts with a definition of the cognitions, emotions and the behaviour that is necessary to successfully implement the planned changes (Figure 5).

The team members need to understand that the leader-follower ration is much too high and they need to get the insight that a team lead can be more supportive which would help them in their daily work. Furthermore, they need to believe that the team leads will be selected based on their leadership competency. These cognitions would result in positive emotions like acceptance, optimism and trust. Positive cognitions and emotions would then trigger a behaviour that would support the planned change.

Changes	Stakeholder	To-be cognitions	To-Be emotions	To-be behaviour
A department gets a new organisational layer – each member will get a team lead in addition to the department head	Customer service reps	The new structure is necessary as the leader-follower ratio is too high.	Acceptance	Support of the new structure in discussions and support of the future team leads.
		A team lead will be able to support me more.	Optimism	
		The new team leads will be competent leaders.	Confidence, trust	

Figure 5:

Cognitive-emotive change analysis Part I: To-be situation

Changes	Stakeholder	As-is Cognitions	As-is Emotions	As-is behaviour
A department gets a new organisational layer – each member will get a team lead in addition to the department head	Customer service reps	Loss of personal autonomy by higher level of control	Distress and anger	Open resistance to the organizational changes in discussions. Rejecting the newly appointed team leads.
		Department members are downgraded in their status – lack of personal acknowledgement	Frustration	
		New supervisor won't be competent leaders.	Insecurity	

Figure 6:

Cognitive-emotive change analysis Part II: As-is situation

The existing cognitions and emotions as well the actual behaviour towards the change are analysed in the second part of the cognitive-emotive change analysis (Figure 6). The introduction of a new hierarchical level was interpreted as an increase of supervisory control and therefore a reduction of the personal autonomy that existed in the former organizational structure due to the high leadership span. To install such an additional layer was also perceived as a degrading, because the new team leads were seen as a barrier to a direct communication with the department.

This went along with the idea, that the department head would not longer acknowledge the single employee due to a lower future status in the organization. Another major cognitive objection was the scepticism that the team lead roles would not be held by persons with a high level of leadership competencies.

The expected external control led to negative emotions like anger and distress. The perceived degradation triggered mostly frustration as it was perceived as a lack of personal acknowledgement by the department head and the management in general. The negative image of the future team leads led to a feeling of insecurity. These negative cognitions and emotions are transferred into a corresponding behaviour. The planned organizational change is openly criticized and rejected by the department members.

	Negative cognition: „I will lose autonomy"				
	Logical arguments	**Empirical support**	**Impact of the change resistance**	**Positive cognitions**	**CM activity**
MESSAGES	The tasks of the new supervisors are to support their followers, not to control them, which is not productive.	Your current department head created autonomy. The new team leads will adapt to his role model.	The final decision about this change was already made by the management. Resistance will only make you unhappy.	The new supervisor is available and can offer information and support whenever needed. [3]	Personal letter, workshop and individual interactions
QUESTIONS	How will a good leader behave?	What are the benefits of a team lead? [1]	What will be the impact of your resistance – on the change/on the new supervisor/on you?	My new supervisor will be a good leader. [2]	Workshop and individual interactions
IMAGES	To be treated by the chief physician is no advantage – he is barely available and has no routine with the daily procedures. [1]	Hospitals could offer a much better service if there would be more doctors. [1]	Insisting to be treated by the chief physician will lengthen your suffering and does not guarantee a cure.[1]	It is better to have a team lead that can offer instant support than a department head that is never available! [3]	Workshop and individual interactions
HUMOUR	To have a supportive leader is clearly an advantage: Follower: "Boss, may I leave two hours earlier, my spouse wants to go to a football game with me." Boss: "No chance!" Follower: "Thank you so much! I knew that I could rely on your support!"			The support by my future leader will be beneficial for me! [4]	Workshop and individual interactions

Elements of a positive change message: [1]„Change we need", [2]„Yes we can", [3]„This makes senses" und [4]„This works for us

Figure 7:

Cognitive-emotive change analysis Part II: As-is situation

Figure 7 outlines the cognitive-emotive change planning approach, which is based on disputational strategies and styles. They can be applied to alter the negative cognitions regarding the expected higher level of external control and the reduced individual autonomy.

There are some changes of terms compared to the original model of Kopec et al. (DiGiuseppe, 1991; Kopec et al., 1994). They are due to the application in a real change management case with the objective that the table can be filled out by the involved managers without the help of an external consultant.

The first three columns of the table are focussing on the three disputational strategies: logical, empirical and functional. The functional strategy has been described as "Impact of the change resistance" to make the definition easier to grasp. The fourth column is focussing on the rational alternative, which are defined as "Positive messages". These messages have been shaped according to the different types of positive change messages as defined in the model of Armenakis (Armenakis et al., 1993). Like in this case study, it is not always feasible to use all different elements of the model.

The rows are used to align the four disputational styles with the strategies. The didactical approach in the first row was renamed into "messages". The socratic style in the second row was translated into the term "questions" while the methaphoric style has been described as "images".

The table needs to be read line by line, means that every row describes a different approach to alter the negative cognition of too much external control. The first three cells describe the contradicting arguments, while the fourth contains the positive cognition that should replace the existing negative one.

The model of the disputational strategies (DiGiuseppe, 1991; Kopec et al., 1994) was designed for a usage in therapeutical face-to-face encounters. These kinds of individual interactions are also highly effective in a change management context, but are not feasible if a large group of stakeholders need to be addressed. The challenge is to identify change management activities that can be used to communicate the disputational content that has been defined.

Therefore the fifth column describes the change management activities that can be used for such purpose. In the given case study the defined measures were a personal letter from the top management to every single member of the department as well as a series of workshops that were designed to communicate the different steps of the change implementation to the employees. In addition to these formal activities, the disputational arguments were also used in the informal interactions between the management and single department members.

The didactical style ("messages") can be especially used for all communication types that are provided by the organization to its members (e.g. in letters, presentations, articles), while the socratic ("questions"), metaphoric

("images") and humoristic style seem to be more feasible for interactive forms of communication.

The described example has been applied to a real change case in cooperation with the responsible line manager, which has provided the input for the matrix and has confirmed its content as feasible for his specific situation. The disputational arguments and positive messages were then used for the defined letter to the employees and as part of a presentation that has been delivered in a workshop.

Conclusions

This article proposed the application of cognitive-emotive concepts to the practice of change management in organizations. The existing ABC model that has been developed for and applied in cognitive psychotherapy has been transferred to the area of change management. This is based on the insight, that members of organizations hold irrational beliefs toward organizational changes and that these negative cognitions need to be changed in a structured approach to overcome the natural resistance to change. The approach to change these negative cognitions by focussing on the communication of positive change messages only, is seen as ineffective. Instead a disputation of the negative cognitions is necessary in order to bring them to a conscious level so they can be disrupted and won't block the necessary cognitive openness to process and accept positive messages.

The feasibility of the theoretical model has been shown based on a case study that demonstrates how the approach can be applied in practical change management situations.

Still, the model should be supported by more empirical evidence. An empirical study could compare different groups of employees that are affected by the same organizational change. One group should be treated by traditional change management communication that is based on the provision of positive messages about the change while the other should be confronted with disputational strategies first. To deepen the understanding further, also the different disputational styles could be compared regarding their effectivity for diminishing irrational beliefs about an organizational change.

About the author

Christoph Desjardins has been professor for Human Resources Management and Consulting at the University of Applied Sciences in Kempten, Germany since 2003.

After studying Economics at Constance, he graduated with a degree in Work & Organizational Psychology (Diplom-Psychologe) from Münster University.

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From 1994 to 2003, Christoph worked as a HRM and Change Management consultant and manager for the consulting company Accenture. During this time he also obtained his Ph.D. degree from the Johann-Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt.

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