

THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS AN EXPLORATION OF THE LINKS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL CHANGE ORIENTATION AND LEARNING BEHAVIOUR OF INDIVIDUALS. OUR EXPLORATIVE ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT CHANGE ORIENTATION AND LEARNING BEHAVIOUR ARE LINKED WITH EACH OTHER BASED ON TWO DICHOTOMIES: A PROSPECTIVE VERSUS A REFLECTIVE ORIENTATION, AND A PERFORMANCE VERSUS A LEARNING FOCUS.

Linkages between individual characteristics relating to change and learning

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In a business context where continuous learning and development are the hallmarks, it is necessary to detect the characteristics of ways of learning and thinking about development and change. We know that organisations can differ with respect to the orientations towards change and development. Weick and Westley (1996) relate different forms of organisational development to different forms of organising. De Caluwé and Vermaak (2002) relate different concepts for change with different forms of organising and managing. Both studies state that organisations have different cultures and forms of organising and that therefore, the orientations towards changing and learning are different too.

Individuals also differ in their orientation towards change and learning. Van der Sluis (2003) and Cunningham and his colleagues (2002) argued that research into these individual differences is important in an era where continuous change and learning are the hallmarks of economic life.

Against this background our main research question can be formulated as follows: 'How is the individual change orientation related to the individual learning orientation?' If we detect relationships between these individual orientations, then we might take a step towards relating organisational learning and organ-

isational change. The underlying assumption behind this reasoning is that we believe that individual learning is the starting point for organisational learning and eventually sustainable competitive advantage. In a similar vein, individual change orientation lies behind organisational change and ultimately the sustainable competitive advantage of the company. So, the survival of an organisation (in the long term) depends on the change and learning orientation of the employees of the organisations. Therefore, these notions are worthwhile considering for an in-depth look at individual thinking about change and learning behaviour. Knowledge derived from this study will improve the tuning in individual and organisational change and learning processes which is important to the success of organisational change and development programs.

This research will increase the understanding and success of efforts to improve organisational change and development programs. This argument together with our interest in differences and congruencies between individual change orientation and learning behaviour form the starting point of this research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The ways in which an individual's values and orientation affect behaviour has long been a focus for study across the social sciences (Amis, Slack and Hinings, 2002: 436). According to these authors, understanding the impact of values on social settings has become a pursuit of social psychologists and organisation-

al behaviourists. Psychologists like Prochaska et al. (1992), Kets de Vries (1996), Metselaar (1997), Armenakis et al. (2002) and Cunningham et al. (2002) conceptualized processes of change from an individual perspective. One of the subjects in this line of research is the willingness or readiness for change (Metselaar, 1997; Cunningham et al., 2002). Research into the readiness for change suggests that a demonstrable need for change, a sense of one's ability to successfully accomplish change (self-efficacy) and an opportunity to participate in the change process contribute to readiness for organisational change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 2000). When imposed, change represents occupational, logistical and psychological risks to employees and if not linked to a perceived need for quality improvements, the success of these changes may be compromised (Armenakis et al., 2000; B.A. Spector, 1989).

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN CHANGE AND LEARNING

Not everyone has the same capacity or ability to learn from experience (Burke, 1989) and people differ in their approach to learning (Van der Sluis, 1999; Poell, Van der Krogt, and Wildemeersch, 1999) as well as in their approach to change (Boonstra, 2004; Caluwé and Vermaak, 2002; Beer and Nohria, 2000). Both the way in which individuals learn and the extent to which they learn are a matter of importance. An individual's way of learning, that is the learning behaviour, will affect the kind and extent of learning in any particular situation. Similarly, the individual way of thinking about change, that is the change orientation, will affect approaches to change and therefore, the development in and of the organisation.

Moreover, between these two variables similarities and interconnections seem to exist. Research suggests that both the change orientation and the learning behaviour influence occupational achievement (Spreitzer et al., 1997; Colarelli et al., 1987; Hoeksema, 1995; McCauley et al., 1994) and organisational development (Cummings and Worley, 2005, French and Bell, 1999).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our conceptual framework is built around two main research variables: change orientation and learning behaviour. Each variable will be described and defined below.

Change Orientation

Change orientation can be described by the idea of thinking about change in five different concepts. These are labelled by a colour (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004).

Change from a Power Perspective: the Colour Yellow. The colour yellow is connected with the symbol of power. This perspective relates to organisational change processes in which interests, conflicts and power play an important role. This way of looking at realising change assumes that people will change when you take into account their (own) interest or when you can compel them to accept certain ideas (Pettigrew, 1975:205). It resembles the power-coercive strategy of Chin and Benne (1976:39) and it is often found in change processes where different persons or parties are involved (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003). De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003) describe the yellow perspective on change as a negotiation exercise aimed at

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achieving feasible solutions based on win-win and consensus. Examples of yellow interventions are: confrontation meetings, strategic alliances and inter-group conflict resolution (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Change from a Blueprint Perspective: the Colour Blue. The colour blue is connected to change processes in which there is a clear blueprint approach and a coherent detailed plan for implementing it. It refers to change processes which are based on rational design followed by implementation of change. One of the main assumptions in this perspective is that people or things will change if a clearly specified result is laid down beforehand. All steps are planned down to the last detail and the specified result, as well as the path to be taken, is kept well under control.

This kind of thinking about change resembles Chin and Benne's (1976:24) empirical-rational strategy and is based on the assumption that people are rational creatures. De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003) describe the perspective on change as managing, planning and controlling the process towards a clear result. A blue way of changing organisations is aimed at the realisation of the one and only best solution. Some examples of blue interventions are Business Process Redesign, Total Quality Management, project management and auditing (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Change from a HRM Perspective: the Colour Red. The colour red is linked with human blood. This label is used for change processes in which the person is seduced and change is made attractive. Change from this perspective stimulates and motivates people for change and makes change attractive to them. It is assumed that people will do something or change if they get something in return (the "Barter" principle). This is similar to what Zaltman and Duncan (1997) call the Barter strategy. Red examples of interventions are: competency management;

People will only do something or change something if they get something in return (the "Barter" principle).

use of HRM instruments; match between the individual and the organisation; social activities (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Change from a Learning Perspective: the Colour Green. The colour green is used for change processes in which the development of people and their learning abilities are central. The colour green symbolizes the notion of natural and continuous growth. In this way of looking at realising change, the main assumption is that people change when they learn. This way of thinking is similar to what Chin and Benne (1976:31) describe as the normative-re-educative strategies, aimed at unlearning certain behaviours and experimenting with new behaviours. When you organise and orchestrate learning on a collective level, organisations as a whole will learn (Hendry, 1996). De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003) suggest that the green perspective on change consists of giving feedback, facilitating learning and the creation of a safe environment in which people have the opportunity to experiment with new behaviour. Examples of green interventions are: gaming, coaching and action-learning (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Change from a Self-organisation perspective: the Colour White. The white colour is connected with open space, into which people can bring their own wishes and desires and can create processes of self-organisation. Change is seen as a perpetuum mobile and as an autonomous self-driving that comes from people's own energy and sense-making. It refers to 'emergent' processes (Orlikowski in Weick, 2000) in which certain patterns are interpreted in a different way or in which different labels

and realities are created (Weick and Quinn, 1999:380). Different participants exchange meanings and give sense by way of direct participation, common ground and dialogue (Sminia & Van Nistelrooij, 2006). According to De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003), a white perspective on change is based on removing blocks, close observing, giving meaning to what is happening, allowing external uncertainty and relying on internal certainty. Examples of white interventions are: self-steering processes, search conferences, open space and Appreciative Inquiry (Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995).

Learning Behaviour

It is widely suggested that not all people learn equally well from the same kind of experiences at work (Spreitzer et al., 1997) or learn the same from similar experiences (Van der Sluis, 2000). As such, organisational learning and development is likely to be affected by the different ways of learning of organisation members.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of research into learning behaviour in organisational contexts (Sadler-Smith, 1998). Only three relevant studies exist with respect to learning in organisational settings including Hoeksema (1995), Megginson (1996), and Van der Sluis (2000). In these studies, learning behaviour is considered within an organisational context and is defined as 'a series of behaviours which enables people to structure and motivate their own work behaviour by setting goals, practising new and desired behaviours, keeping track of progress, and rewarding themselves for goal achievement'. In short, a learning behaviour is 'an approach to learning tasks' (Van Parreren, 1989). The essence of this notion is that the learning behaviour represents a distinctive and habitual manner of acquiring knowledge, skills or attitudes through experience.

Hoeksema et al. (1997) distinguished two different learning behaviours: meaning-oriented learning behaviour and instruction-oriented learning behaviour. The former refers to a search for the deeper meaning of experiences on the job and the latter to a focus on instructions to meet one's obligations and to answer expectations. Megginson (1996) also defined two kinds of learning behaviour amongst managers. He found that managers learn exclusively either in a planned or in an emergent way. He defined planned learning as a deliberation/forethought approach and emergent learning as an unpremeditated exploration of work experiences. Van der Sluis (2000) related these four learning behaviours to each other. She showed that two dimensions could distinguish the learning behaviour

of managers. One dimension includes the two extremes 'learning' and 'performance'. The other dimension includes the two extremes 'retrospective learning' and 'prospective learning' (Van der Sluis, 2000). These notions were empirically demonstrated by factor analyses of survey data collected from European managers (Van der Sluis, 2001). This can be depicted by a two-by-two matrix as shown in the figure below.

Changing and learning: some conceptual relations

In the Organisational Development literature, learning and changing are seen as similar concepts. In general, a process of Organisational Development starts with an analysis by all parties concerned of problems and possible solutions. Changes are realised gradually and the members of the organisation are highly involved. Learning by individuals, by groups and by the entire organisation is a key concept in the methods and procedures which are applied.

In the change literature there is another view on Development. OD as a process is approached there as a more programmatic planned change. The approach is based on stepwise, 'episodic' changes (see Weick and Quinn, 1999). This approach assumes the ability to predict and control developments.

In both literature streams a distinction is made between first, second and third order learning (see Boonstra, 2004) although in the change literature, little attention is given to increasing the learning capacity within the organisation (second order learning).

First order learning or single-loop learning focuses on changing rules, practices and competencies. It is a passive internalisation of an existing culture in which the learner copies correct behaviour which is readily available in an organisational context. Learning is knowledge acquisition and the application of rules of action based on an acquired store of knowledge and experience. It is related to the grammar of behaviourism and the cognitive school of thought and based on explicit knowledge and connected to embrained and encoded knowledge (see Lam, 2004).

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Second order learning is related to Model II type of learning. It is embodied knowledge which focuses on practical and individual types of knowledge which is developed through experience and reflection (Lam, 2004). Learning is associated with purposeful action and it involves replacing current values and insights with new ones. The learning process is basically individual but it takes place in a social context and affects social organisation through the exchange of new insights. Individuals learn to explore different perspectives on problems and issues

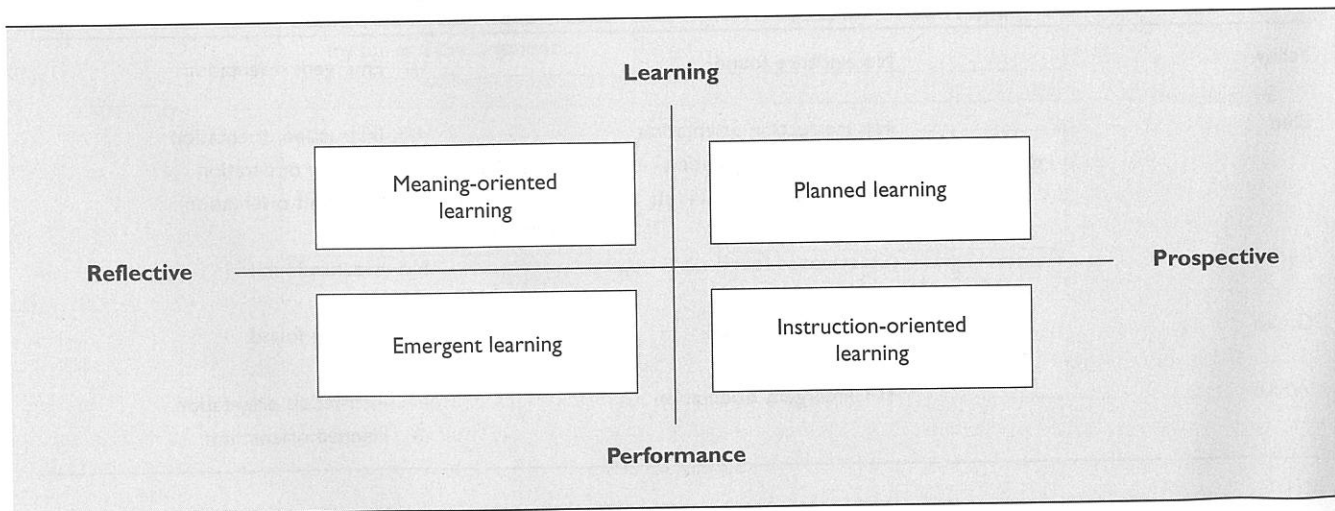


Figure 1. Learning Behaviour Matrix (Van der Sluis, 2000)

Learning order	Change and development approaches	Change orientation 'colour typology'
First order learning	Episodic	Yellow / Blue
Second order learning	Organisational development	Red / Green
Third order learning	Continuous change	White

Table 1: conceptual linkages between learning orders and change orientations.

and to link their exploration to the development of the organisation, their relationships with others and the reflection on their insights and assumptions.

In third order learning, learners question the validity of activities, relationships and meanings posed by context and interactions. During the very process of organising, changing and learning, contexts and principles are questioned, deconstructed and reconstructed. Existing cognitive maps and competencies are destroyed and new competencies, activities, relations and meanings emerge in a process of acting, reflecting and relating. Knowing and learning exist as engaging with others in a context of organising and changing.

This third order learning is conceptually connected to the notion of Continuous Changing (see Beer & Nohria, 2000). It is connected to learning as a collective process. Changing and learning on the level of principles mean that people reorder relationships and activities and deconstruct and reconstruct meanings together (Wierdsma, 2004). Learning is seen as a change in routines, responses, repertoires and basic assumptions about social realities and interrelations. A range of skills, rules, insights, principles and knowledge is altered in an interactive process of relating, acting, reflecting, interpreting and sense-making.

In trying to gain a rough overview of theories on changing and learning, we see a conceptual fit between their underlying

Change orientation	Linked with Learning behaviour	
	This study	Kasten (2004)
Yellow	No evidence found	-/- Emergent orientation
Blue	+/+ Instruction orientation	+/+ Instruction orientation
	-/- Meaning orientation	-/- Meaning orientation
	-/- Emergent orientation	-/- Emergent orientation
Red	No evidence found	No evidence found
Green	No evidence found	No evidence found
White	+/+ Emergent orientation	-/- Instruction orientation
		-/- Planned orientation

Table 2. Results of current and previous study on links between changing and learning

assumptions, belief systems and thought worlds: episodic changing and first order learning; organisation development and second order learning and continuous changing and third order learning. We also see that the yellow and blue approach of changing corresponds with the episodic approach, red and green with the organisation development approach and continuous changing with white thinking.

METHOD

Change orientation. We measured the orientation to change through the so-called points test. This is a test with ten (incomplete) statements. Each statement is then followed by five alternatives for completing the statement. These five alternatives reflect each of the five concepts. Respondents must give eight points to one, two or even five alternatives. They give between zero and eight points for one alternative. This test has been compared to a test based on a scale and case analysis method. In the parallel test comparison, more than 80% of the respondents had the same score (which is an indicator for reliability). In the comparison between test and case, the “points test” scored best on content validity (see: Martens Dias, 2001).

Learning Behaviour. We measured learning behaviour using both the scale of Hoeksema (1995) and the scale of Megginson

(1996). This resulted in a measurement of 17 items: 8 of Hoeksema’s scale to be answered on a 5-point scale from 1 (‘never or only rarely true for me’) to 5 (‘always or almost always true for me’); and 9 items of Megginson’s scale to be answered on a 7-point scale from 1 (‘never true’) to 7 (‘always true’). This measurement was validated by Van der Sluis (2001) based on factor analysis and reliability analyses for each factor.

Aligning the organisational purposes of a change process with the change and learning orientations of the employees could be a key success factor for an organisational change process. The present study proposes that antecedent conditions, including individual characteristics such as change orientation and learning behaviour, influence organisational change processes. Based on our analysis, we presumed in this study that aligning change and learning orientations of employees with the type of organisational change process will increase the success of the organisation change process.

We first analysed based on studying literature about change and learning orientation. Subsequently, this link was explored by carrying out a pilot study among graduate students of a Dutch university and Dutch managers affiliated to a wide range of national and international Dutch companies.

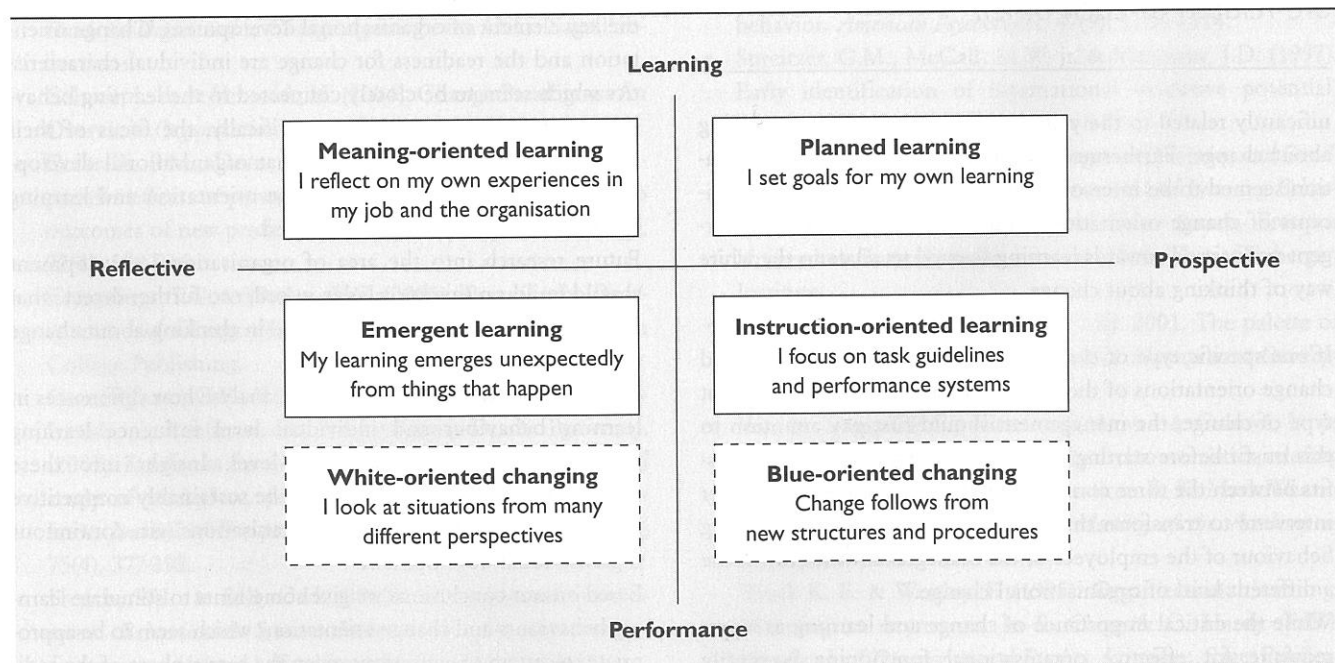


Figure 2. Learning Behaviour Matrix with elements of change orientation

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study reflect the main part of the outcomes of a previous study by Kasten (2004). These results are summarized together in table 2.

Based on these results, we suggest that the type of change and learning are interconnected with each other. Moreover, it seems to be plausible that blue and white-oriented changing can be depicted with the same axes as the learning behaviour matrix (Figure 1). So the following connections seem to exist, illustrated by examples of thinking of and orientation towards change and learning.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of both studies strongly suggest that change orientation and learning behaviour are closely related to each other. There seems to be evidence for similarities between focus points in change orientation and learning behaviour. More specifically, a learning orientation towards instructions was sig-

Change orientations and learning orientations both with a prospective focus are related to each other.

nificantly related to the yellow and blue concepts of thinking about change. Furthermore, a planned and meaning orientation seemed to be interconnected with the red and green concepts of change orientation. And finally, a short term, emergent orientation towards learning seemed to relate to the white way of thinking about change.

If one specific type of change is needed, and the learning and change orientations of the individuals are not in line with that type of change, the management should first pay attention to this misfit before starting the change program. In case of misfits between the three concepts, the management should either intervene to transform the change orientation or the learning behaviour of the employees or the management should choose a different kind of organisational change.

While the critical importance of change and learning as a prerequisite for effective organisational functioning is readily accepted, there appears to be a dearth of analyses on how organ-

isational learning and development can best be understood and how the process can be initiated and managed (Heraty, 2004). The results of this study may for example be helpful in understanding the need for learning and the readiness for change of individuals and in particular of employees. Furthermore, these results lead to the following links which could be analyzed in further research.

- Change orientations and learning orientations both with a prospective focus are related to each other.
- Change orientation and learning orientation both with a reflective focus are related to each other.

Based on the complex interaction between individual behaviour and organisational environments as discussed in the introduction, we could expect that change orientation and learning behaviour of an individual will be affected by changes in the organisational context. Therefore, we suggest that the following hypotheses are worthwhile analysing:

- Individual change orientation is context dependent over time.
- Individual learning behaviour is context dependent over time.

As already mentioned in our introduction, we view learning as the key element of organisational development. Change orientation and the readiness for change are individual characteristics which seem to be closely connected to the learning behaviour of individuals and more specifically, the focus of their learning. This seems to indicate that organisational development is driven by individual change orientation and learning behaviour which are mutually related.

Future research into the area of organisational development should build on this knowledge in order to further detect what interventions could lead to a change in thinking about change and learning behaviour.

Furthermore, future research should analyse how differences in learning behaviour and individual level influence learning processes on the organisational level. Insight into these dynamics will help organisations to be sustainably competitive by creating dynamic learning organisations via continuous organisational development.

Based on our conclusions we give some hints to stimulate learning behaviours and change orientations which seem to be appropriate in certain organisations given the career phase of the individual.

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