


# Organisational wellness: Human reaction to change

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Received: 11 Apr. 2016

Accepted: 08 Nov. 2016

Published: 28 June 2018

**How to cite this article:**Blom, T., 2018, 'Organisational wellness: Human reaction to change', *South African Journal of Business Management* 49(1), a2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v49i1.2>**Copyright:**© 2018. The Authors.  
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Organisational change has become inevitable. Although modernity is characterised by change, humans struggle with change as the future becomes increasingly unpredictable. The extended disorder that has become the norm can cause a sense of loss as well as anxiety for individuals, organisations and society.

Unrelieved stress becomes perpetual and will undeniably influence organisational change efforts negatively. Thus, the impact of fear, anxiety and stress at an individual and organisational level is accentuated.

This study followed a qualitative research approach and adopted a grounded theory methodology. Negative emotions dominated the research data which further indicated that individuals find it difficult to engage with change in a meaningful manner as fear, anxiety and stress dominate.

Thus, human reactions to change are discussed, as the organisational challenge seems to be how to find workable methods to reduce fear, anxiety and stress. Else it may become persistent, intense, chronic or recurring. Real-life stresses may then further hamper individual functioning.

The researcher conceptualises the anti-leader and anti-manager. These concepts depict the negative characteristics of leadership and management which invariably increase individuals' fear, anxiety and stress levels. Emotions elicited by the anti-leader or anti-manager could potentially split, divide and fragment a workforce.

## Introduction

Change occurs on multiple concurrent paths for both the individual and the organisation. No or little respite may result in distrust, uncertainty and the reality of organisational change fatigue (Lewis, Romanaggi & Chapple 2010). Yesterday's practices and assumptions no longer work; therefore, the purpose of organisational change is to adapt to the environment, improve performance and change employees' behavioural patterns (Leana & Barry 2000). Change is the new normality, yet change implementation remains risky with low success rates as organisations struggle with effective change implementation (Armenakis & Harris 2009).

## The individual and change

### Stress defined

Stress and anxiety are close companions that often trigger each other. Stress comes from a feeling that certain circumstances should not be happening. Anxiety stems from the feeling that something should be happening, which is not. In both stress and anxiety, our inner experience is that we want to be somewhere other than where we are (Berceli 2012).

Various definitions of stress exist and differ, depending on whether stress is being defined by psychologists, medical practitioners or management staff. In psychology, stress is a feeling of strain and pressure (Sapolsky 2004). In this context, pressure is the real or perceived, serious demands imposed on one person by another individual or group (Psychology Dictionary n.d.). At a conference at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, Kusnecov and Rabin (1992) define stress as 'a state of disharmony or threatened homeostasis' where a stressor is a 'threat, real or perceived, that tends to disturb homeostasis'. All stressors share the commonality of representing the absence of something that the organism perceives necessary for survival (Maté 2010). From a management perspective, the pressure for quality, the pace of work and work demands have increased dramatically (Swanepoel et al. 2003), resulting in 'the pressure cooker of work' (Jaire et al. 1989:92).

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However, perhaps the most apt definition comes from the founding father of stress research, Selye, who introduces the concept of stress, both medically and scientifically (Selye 1956). He (Selye 1964) coins the term 'stress' to describe a set of physical and psychological responses to adverse conditions or influences. Selye (1964) applies the engineering term 'stress' (a force which causes deformation in bodies) to describe the stereotypical response of an organism to a wide range of stimuli. Selye (1964) further notes that stress affects and involves virtually every tissue in the body and he recognises that stress includes both a neurological and a physiological reaction. This concept of neurophysiology distinguished psychology (content of thoughts in the brain) from neurology (the way the brain processes that content) (Selye 1956). He (1987:17) defines stress as '... the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it' and differentiates between eustress or good stress and distress. Distress occurs when demands placed on the body exceed its capacity to expend energy in maintaining homeostasis.

### Anxiety defined

'Anxiety is the most powerful and pervasive of all emotions' (Pearce 2003:52) that easily dominates all brain processes, distorts experience and sharply interferes with the mind or brain. Our brains cannot tolerate anxiety. Anxiety is also the great enemy of intelligence and development and is peculiarly contagious (Pearce 2003). Anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness and apprehension about a situation, typically one with an uncertain outcome (Lazarus 1991).

Fear and anxiety are related concepts, both reflecting the high end of the arousal continuum. However, fear is a response to a specific threat, while anxiety is vague and relatively unfocused (Lazarus 1991). Anxiety is a product of the human biological response to stressful experiences in society (Cohen 2004; LeDoux 1996). Fear is a form of arousal which prepares us to fight back rather than give up, driving us towards group unity (Morris et al. 1976).

### Stress and the organisation

The security we seek and inherently know was provided by early groups does not exist in the culture of the groups that support our survival today. This causes confusion and sows further seeds of mistrust while planting questions of trustworthiness (Grady & Grady 2011).

Organisational ecologists (Hannan & Freeman 1989) have long argued that organisational change and transformation are rarely completely positive experiences, especially when the core features and core identities of the organisation are subject to change. They (Hannan & Freeman 1989) argue that there are substantial obstacles to fundamental structural changes in organisations because changes can fuel undesirable effects on employees such as increased uncertainty, fear, frustration and occupational stress.

Research regarding the degree to which individuals perceive that they are stressed by organisational change was revealing.

During the anticipation stage of organisational change, high levels of uncertainty are prevalent (Isabella 1990), which increases stress perceptions (Schabracq & Cooper 1998). Numerous research reports revealed that employees who experience large-scale change report higher levels of stress, more anxiety and increased uncertainty (Jones et al. 2008). Thus, change has been viewed as a threat to organisational identity (Hannan et al. 2006).

### Stress and leadership

Stresses relating to modern-day living are increasing exponentially. The large-scale changes experienced in every dimension of life may cause fear, panic or opportunity; the modern age also offers a unique period in human history where creative and concern-based leaders can function and make a difference in the personal and professional lives of individuals (Darling & Heller 2011). Times of change require meaningful responses, quality and versatile leadership, sensitivity and creativity as well as thoughts and feelings to address the adjustments needed by individuals affected in the organisational arena (Thornton 2009).

Global competition and tough economic challenges have converged to increase the pressures on leaders and employees in order to find new solutions and achieve greater productivity. For many organisations, adaptive resilience and enhanced productivity have become imperative for survival (O'Connor et al. 2013). Research also articulates the deleterious consequences of stress (Dickerson & Kennedy 2004; Ray 2004). Because stress arouses the limbic system (LeDoux 2002), an optimal understanding of stress and its impact on the workforce and productivity is imperative (Vijayraghavan et al. 2007).

In defining work-related stress, research observed that leaders and followers are subjected to extreme conflicts, ambiguity and ineffective conflict management. Stress was understood to create a non-specific response in the leader, which meant that certain emotional, physical and cognitive responses occurred unconsciously (Selye 1980). Fifteen years later, Goleman (1995) emphasises the importance of emotion and emotional stability in effective leadership, suggesting that emotion, more than intellectual ability, drives a leader's thinking in decision-making and interpersonal relationships. Goleman (1995; 2006) terms this 'emotional intelligence'. More recent research indicated that emotional suppression is felt by others (Ochsner 2013), underscoring four important factors, namely self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and moral decision-making (McDonald 2013).

Byrne (2006) emphasises that there is a fundamental basis for successful stress management in today's changing environments, and it is found in the nature of the attitudes and commensurate thoughts and feelings generated by leaders. Darling and Heller (2011) confirm this, stating that stress management should be a constant companion in the

thoughts and feelings of responsible organisational leaders (Darling & Heller 2011).

In an era of such large-scale change, successful organisational change lies in the leader's focus on people and their meaningful concerns in the context of change. Although leaders might experience personal feelings of stress and insecurity (Goldsmith & Reiter 2007), they need a deep understanding of people, how they feel, think and what concerns them. In potentially stressful situations, the leader's self-perception must be affected by a genuine concern for and service to others (Darling & Heller 2011).

## Data collection

### Research methodology

A qualitative research approach was followed and a grounded theory methodology adopted. The purpose of this study was to create emerging theory through the collected data, themes and constructs, and concepts were discovered in the collected data. Observations and interviews initially covered a broad range of concepts, which were narrowed down as themes and concepts emerged. A literature review was conducted to inform the interview questions. The researcher used open, axial and selective coding combined with constant data comparison.

### Population and sampling

Theoretical sampling was used to collect, code and analyse the data in order to decide where to sample next in accordance with emerging codes and categories. Theoretical sampling was used to inform the saturation of categories, which was understood to mean that additional information no longer provided new insights into the subject matter. Sample participants were selected for relevance to the breadth of the issue and not how well they represent the target population. Sampling stopped once the body of knowledge no longer expanded.

### Data collection methods

Data were collected through a case study, eight in-depth interviews, four focus group sessions, solicited data, field notes and observations. The case study comprised three different organisational change initiatives. Eight interviews comprised the sample size for in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were led with senior leaders in various industries. Four focus group sessions, averaging seven employees per session, comprised a further sample. Employees within the manufacturing industry in South Africa, within Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology departments participated in the focus group sessions.

The research steps and methodology employed in this study are summarised in Table 1. Table 1 further outlines the data collection phases, sample groups and objectives while providing examples of research questions.

TABLE 1: Description of research steps and methodology.

Research step	Purpose of research step	Data collect method	Data analysis	Industry	Ensuring quality data	Research question examples
Solicited data	Provides research context	Case study	Content analysis	Motor Manufacturing	Multi-model method of data collection;	Are you aware of change models? If, so which are influential?
Three senior (regional) leaders	To understand the role of leadership and the concept of organisational change from a strategy perspective	In-depth interviews	Content analysis, descriptive statistics, coding of themes (grounded theory)	Technology, Hospitality and Leadership training	Multiple sources of data gathering; Data triangulation;	What are the forces driving change? What types of change have you been exposed to? How does your organisation prepare for change? Critical success factors? Do you effectively translate the business vision into a change vision? How important is leadership in the change process? How do employees perceive change?
Two ex-CEOs (important shareholders)	-	-	-	Chemical (Rubber and Fertiliser)	Recognised the multifaceted, multidimensionality relating to the topic;	Have you been part of change? Was the change explained? How did the change make you feel? Was help available? Did you fully participate? Did the change have a schedule? What was the role of leadership? Which are critical success factors? Which factors are detrimental to change?
Two CEOs	-	-	-	Chemical (Food Ingredients and Alcohol)	Controlling definitions were used throughout;	-
One divisional head	-	-	-	Chemical (Fertiliser)	Constant comparison of incidents to concepts;	-
Senior managers	To understand the impact of organisational change initiatives on individuals and leaders	Focus groups	Content analysis, descriptive statistics, coding of themes (grounded theory)	Manufacturing	Constantly fitted and refitted categories.	-
Middle managers	To explore the impact of organisational change on middle management and understand their role in implementation	-	-	Manufacturing	-	-
Minutes, project work	To contextualise the impact of organisational change	Solicited data	Content analysis	Manufacturing	-	-
Personal notes	To contextualise the impact of organisational change	Field notes	-	Across all above industries	-	-
Behavioural and non-behavioural	To understand engagement and change reactions	Observations	-	-	-	-

## Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted through theoretical coding, theoretical memoranda and theoretical sorting. Interview questions were refined throughout the process to ensure that data analysis started to build a tentative theory. Theoretical coding conceptualised the underlying pattern of a set of empirical indicators in the data. The key ideas became a guide for further collection and data analysis. In addition, this study employed open, axial and selective coding.

During open coding, the data were broken into discrete parts and compared for similarities and dissimilarities. Open coding was utilised to categorise segments of data with a short name, summarising and accounting for each data piece. Each word, line or segment was named. Thereafter, focused selection commenced where the most frequent or significant codes were sorted, synthesised, integrated and organised. Through this process of naming and categorising phenomena, the researcher's own assumptions about the phenomena were questioned and explored.

Through axial coding, the data were assembled in new ways after open coding. A coding paradigm was developed, which (1) identified a central phenomenon, (2) explored causal conditions, (3) identified the context and intervening conditions, (4) specified strategies, and (5) delineated the consequences. Axial coding was used to sort, synthesise and organise sets of data and then reassembled the data in new ways using axial coding. Using questions such as when, where, why, who, how, what and with what helped the researcher to convert the text into concepts. The process of axial coding promoted the emergence of a conceptual framework to contain these newly developed concepts.

Selective coding was employed to combine categories and their interrelationships to form interlinked connections relating to organisational change and leadership. Through selective coding, data were integrated through the reduction of raw data into different concepts, which were linked through relational statements to explain the phenomena of organisational change and leadership. During selective coding, categories were enhanced which needed deeper refinement. The result of this process of data collection and analysis was probably a substantive-level theory relevant to the topic of organisational change and leadership.

## Findings

### Case study data

Numerous similarities emerged from the three organisational change initiatives discussed in the case study. Stress, anxiety and fear dominated as change was perceived from a fear perspective, inevitably leading to resistance. Individuals appeared to have a deep need to understand the rationale for change. A lack of understanding increased stress and anxiety.

Recurring themes was the importance of participation, communication, feedback and discussions and leadership.

Further themes included the lack of organisational competency to handle change and understand the impact of stress on the individual.

Prevalent was the lack of change management skills and the non-existent integration between change management, leadership and management. Throughout the different change initiatives, the inability of the organisation and leadership to address the increased stress levels arising from the change initiative was evident.

The importance of participation and inclusivity during periods of organisational change was repeated. Radical changes had a huge impact on individuals and they generally reacted with resistance. Emotions such as stress, anxiety and fear were very real.

Challenges surface when a pure project approach is followed. In all three change initiatives, a project approach failed to acknowledge the impact of change on employees.

The different change initiatives mentioned in this case study failed to realise their full benefits, despite well-developed and planned technical solutions. It would seem that cost and time overruns remain unless organisations include individual participation, inclusivity and behavioural change as well as effective stress reduction methods concurrently.

Table 2 indicates an example of the application of the above-mentioned coding paradigm. Even though the nature of the three change initiatives was completely different, fundamental similarities were evident. These are displayed in Table 2.

### In-depth interviews

The data consistently revealed a lack of methodology when organisations undertake change. Many leaders acknowledged that they are not influenced by any model and acknowledged that they did not know any model names. One leader stated 'there is no model I believe in', another admitted to being model agnostic, yet another stated that 'change models don't resonate'. In all instances, change was undertaken using little or no methodology: 'Organisations don't use any methodology'. In addition, it was obvious that change happens regardless of whether a model is followed, as constant change in organisations remains a reality. Given this reality, one leader said 'change management needs a model', while another begged for 'improved methods'.

**TABLE 2:** Case study themes example.

Themes	Change 1	Change 2	Change 2
Participation and inclusivity	⊗	⊗	⊗
Communication, feedback, discussion	⊗	⊗	⊗
Leadership	⊗	⊗	⊗
Organisational competency to handle change	⊗	⊗	⊗
Management	⊗	⊗	⊗
Stress, anxiety and fear	⊗	⊗	⊗
Resistance	⊗	⊗	⊗

⊗, Unsuccessful

⊗, Neutral (neither successful nor unsuccessful)



Despite the above, leaders recognised that 'good models must include the people' and that 'inclusivity is vital'. All respondents agreed that the design of the new organisation, where the new organisation represents a post-change state, should come from the people. The new organisation should be designed by the people with management participating in a supervisory capacity only. Incorrect handling of change will result in painful and unpredictable change.

The implication of wrong decisions, wrong beliefs, empowering the wrong people and the implementation of non-workable solutions were shared concerns. Detrimental leadership characteristics were identified as having a short-term view, making wrong decisions, empowering the wrong individuals, creating uncertainty, not leading, splitting teams and not presenting a unified front.

All the respondents raised a management concern. 'Middle management is a big obstacle to change'. 'Middle management obstruct change'. The traditional management functions of planning, preparation and control are hugely lacking during normal operations, even more so when the organisation is in turmoil. Such management is identified by a lack of planning, lack of preparation, lack of control, not spending time on change or on employees, lack of awareness of employee stress and a short-term view. Furthermore, the data indicated that such a management philosophy generally embarks upon change for the wrong reasons, namely egos and own benefit as 'profits are more important than people'.

One leader commented that business operates on very short-term cycles and therefore instant gratification precludes a long-term vision. According to this leader, business therefore needs immediate gratification. Although respondents agreed on the inevitability of change, many respondents agreed that instant gratification is an increasing problem, which is amplified by the rapid advances in technology and profit fixation.

Trust and sacrifice were presented as vital leadership characteristics as the importance of trust was repeatedly highlighted. It was generally accepted that management must show that they trust their employees. Similarly, leadership must be trusted. All respondents agreed that poor communication jeopardises trust but also that there can be no change without trust.

Paradoxically, the data were unequivocal in stating that a leader cannot assign trust onto himself or herself and that sacrifice implies giving something up. All respondents agreed that leaders have to discard their egos in order to be successful. Power games and ego should be replaced by empathy, ethical behaviour and honest, open conversations. Poor treatment of employees was noted as one of the main reasons for change failure. 'Leaders must acknowledge efforts from individuals'.

Leadership entails ownership, tenure and leading by example. All the respondents agreed that leadership is not management. Leadership emerged as a non-negotiable factor for successful change.

One respondent concluded that change is chaotic and organisations that are not strong in change planning, will likely have a low success rate. Because organisations are not strong in planning, thoughts about future actions, needs, expectations and anticipations should be on the agenda more frequently.

As per the coding paradigm, the detailed collected data were further broken down into positive, neutral and negative categories. The big 'four-letter-word' of business was revealed as TIME. However, communication, leadership, trust and ethics also featured prominently in every discussion.

The data generally indicated that individuals and teams struggle to keep up with and make sense of the pace of change and the related stress which results. A short-term view, survival, instant gratification and organisational misalignment will result in change failure.

The data also revealed that organisations are unable to deal with the stress responses of individuals engaged in the change process. 'South African organisations don't have an understanding of stress'. 'The management of stress is hugely lacking in South African organisations'. Furthermore, the 'impact of stress is immeasurable'. Respondents agreed that for as long as emotions such as fear, guilt, mistrust, rejection, false expectations, scepticism and feelings of exclusions are predominant and prevalent, individuals cannot optimally participate in the change effort.

Some respondents agreed that many organisations have become large and impersonal and as a result, no longer understand its employees. According to the collected data, leaders lose their intuitive ability to communicate, engage and speak to their followers as a result of increased workload and time pressures. This results in disconnect between leader and follower.

'Uncertainty creates fear', which is perpetuated through different messages. When organisations embark upon change, fear becomes the standard. All the respondents acknowledged that it becomes irrelevant whether fear is rational or irrational.

The respondents concurred on the importance of acknowledging the heightened stress levels of employees. 'Change results in unavoidable stress'. They further agreed that their organisation was unable to effectively cope with these stress levels, while not having effective methods in place to reduce stress levels. The respondents stated that regular stress checks and a keen awareness of individual stress are required because of the modern, fast-paced business environment. Unmanaged or uncontrolled stress renders the individual unable to engage in the required change initiative.

### Focus group sessions

The main themes that emerged from the focus group sessions were leadership tasks, leadership characteristics,

senior management, change types, change frequency, the lack of methodology and translated strategy and personal emotions.

Respondents reported increased feelings of fear, anxiety and stress and even trauma while involved in some form of organisational change. 'Fear. Nobody knew I was struggling'. Respondents stated that there was no help available, that they felt stressed because of the uncertainty and that lots of confusion was experienced as people did not understand the assignment of roles and responsibilities. One respondent stated: 'I don't want to come to work when people expect answers from me and I have none'. Respondents in all focus groups admitted that change was difficult and resulted in anxiety. Many respondents stated that they were unable to function as a result of the required changes. Other respondents admitted to the highly stressful impact of structural changes.

The respondents admitted to being resistant to the change process. The loss of autonomy, uncertainty, a lack of understanding, poor past experiences, a high change frequency and scepticism were advanced as the primary reasons for resistance. Also, 'poor communication worsened my resistance'. One respondent stated that she 'felt helpless because nobody explained the change'. This respondent continued to state that there are always changes happening. The social engineering of change was often unethical as perceived by respondents.

All the emotions that were shared in relation to organisational change were negative. The main emotions were stress, resistance, anxiety and feeling despondent and unequipped. Instability, confusion, no autonomy, unsuitable training, disempowerment, non-involvement and the difficulty of change were also mentioned. Expressing fear, unhappiness, scepticism, uncertainty, conflict, damage and prayer were reiterated.

Owing to the fact that the leaders were not calm, available and failed to display presence and sensitivity, the data related to emotions revealed an insecure attachment. Many respondents complained that their leadership is reactive and does not explain the rationale behind the required change. A further complaint was that leadership does not show the direction and 'can't afford half an hour to spend with his people'. Negative methods such as alcohol and irrationality were used to mitigate overwhelming feelings of negativity and to provide relief from stress. One respondent said 'I prayed a lot'.

The data revealed an utter lack of organisational change knowledge, coupled with the use of hardly any change principles. No change methodology was followed and change was done in a rudimentary fashion with precious little internal knowledge and support. As current change models do not resonate, no theoretical methodology is being followed. No methodology influences change and change generally only becomes a key topic once the situation is already detrimental. Hence, change is generally a mess.

A respondent stated she has 'never seen the bigger picture'. She said one must know where you are, where you want to go and how to get there. However, according to this person the change strategy is never communicated. Poor communication worsens the process.

Strategy does not encompass change and change generally does not form part of strategy. There again, success factors are autonomy, communication, permissible decision-making, change enablement, inclusivity, leadership, ensuring a common understanding by all and empowerment. The reasons for change failure point to reactive and ineffective leadership, inefficient management, the importance of profit above people, no strength in leading change, lack of knowledge, vague explanations, lack of communication and the implementation of solutions that fail to address the real problems.

Leadership was considered important regardless of a stable or changing business landscape. Significant leadership characteristics were identified as ethics, honesty, integrity, respect, trustworthiness, being proactive and authentic and living the organisation's values. Key leadership tasks were indicated as change guidance, reasoning the change, mobilising people's willingness and ability, sharing vision, solving real problems, encouraging people to buy in and explaining the change. Employees expect leadership to communicate, value the importance of employees and convey intentions truthfully.

The data showed management styles to be inconsistent; this could result in negative output. One respondent experienced management as archaic. Another respondent stated that change managers are clueless and ineffective. 'Management can't do change'. Yet another stated that management is unable to do change and change is therefore a mess. 'Management have a short-term view and only looks at the bottom line'. Senior management were not perceived to empower employees, were always changing something and spent a lot of time on damage control. 'Poor managers don't plan or prepare'. 'Poor management creates disaster'. Management were seen to be playing power games, building empires and changing haphazardly without consultation, explanation or support for employees.

Damage control results in consultants being called in to fix the resultant mess. Consultants stay on, becoming long-term advisers. Crisis management depicted the general management style. Management was also accused of not understanding employees, not being transparent and not allowing employees any decision-making power or inclusivity in the change processes.

Employees felt bombarded by a too high frequency of change, which contributed to failure. 'There is too much change'. Employees also felt their feelings and emotions were not taken into consideration which worsened during periods of change. Employees want to and need to understand and engage in the change and expect senior management to be aware of their unique challenges. 'Empowerment is a very important element of change'. 'I was not involved'. 'There was no empowerment'.

## Discussion

### Human reactions to change

The research data revealed that individuals were particularly stressed by organisational change, to such an extent that many participants were unable to function optimally, disconnected from the task at hand or were unable to think of ways to improve their situation. The data reported feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity, indecisiveness, anxiety and stress.

Participants reported increased fear, anxiety and stress levels, uneasiness and feelings of worthlessness. They also mentioned a loss of autonomy and relatedness during periods of organisational change. It seems clear that all the individuals interviewed experienced anxiety during organisational change. The organisational challenge seems to be how to find workable methods to reduce stress and anxiety before it becomes persistent, intense, chronic or recurring, not justified by real-life stresses, problematic and hampering individual functioning.

Human reactions and experiences relating to this change, as well as the perception that poorly planned or executed organisational change initiatives increases stress levels, led the researcher to consolidate these ideas into Figure 1. These ideas resonate with Graves' (1978) insistence on the importance of a multidisciplinary, multidimensional approach to understanding human nature and incorporates the bio-psychosocial systems in humans.

Figure 1 indicates that individuals comprise physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements. When one of these elements is burdened, the others will also be troubled. Only when all these elements receive equal attention or are balanced can there be coherence, optimal functioning and minimal resistance.

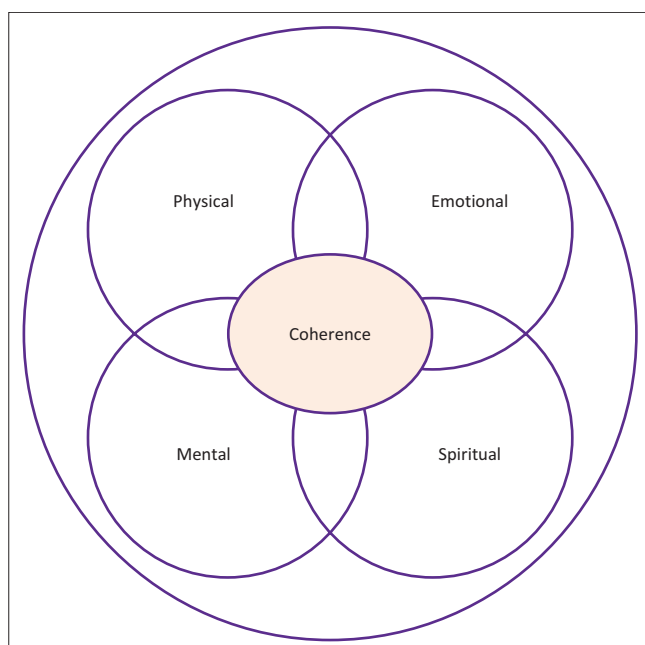


FIGURE 1: Basic elements of the whole person.

### Anti-leader and anti-manager

Given the predominant negative statements and emotions, the research conceptualised the anti-leader and anti-manager. These concepts depict the negative characteristics of leadership and management. The anti-leader and anti-manager invariably increase the individual's stress levels, specifically during times of organisational change.

Given the plethora of leadership literature, it seems prudent to reiterate that the concept of the anti-leader and anti-manager is just that a view, an impression or perhaps the cautious creation of a leadership or management hypothesis as it developed through the emerging theory.

### Leadership versus anti-leadership

Enormous change is required in South Africa and Africa at large, in organisations and teams and at an individual level. This requires leadership commitment towards and awareness of the individual change process. The individual change process entails personality indicators coupled with the reality that fear and survival are prominent emotions during change.

Various interviews exposed the antithesis of leadership. Leadership characteristics such as greed, power and inefficiency featured prominently. Following the logic of Taleb (2010), this led the researcher to develop the concept of the anti-leader or anti-leadership. Because the concept of anti-leadership does not exist in the current literature, the researcher conceptualised it as a new, important key term in the field of organisational change and leadership.

Anti-leadership is the antithesis of leadership. Unethical behaviour, indecisiveness and being egocentric, untrustworthy, non-accountable and disjointed are all prevalent habits of the anti-leader. Selective listening, selective action and communication, greed and corruption further typify the anti-leader. The anti-leader generally has a short-term view, is enticed by instant gratification and disregards the contribution of followers. Ignorance, apathy, ambivalence, arrogance, inefficiency, the inability to address challenges, a lack of integrity and self-knowledge are further traits of the anti-leader. Various respondents indicated that large organisations have been obliterated as a result of such leadership.

The actions of the anti-leader increase individual stress levels. Arrogance, untrustworthy actions and poor communication increase individual fear and uncertainty. Individuals at lower levels of the organisation in particular, may be affected extremely negatively, where they have little to do with these poor decisions.

Emotions elicited by the anti-leader may further result in favouritism, and even factionalism. Such emotions, when provoked, may split, divide and fragment a workforce. Leadership implies the power or ability to lead other people. Thus, if a leader is not leading, he or she cannot be called a leader. Such a person is a follower or an anti-leader.

## Management versus anti-management

Management should encompass basic elements such as planning, organising, directing and control. During various interviews in this study, the antithesis of management was exposed. Once again following the logic of Taleb (2010), this led the researcher to develop the concept of the anti-manager or anti-management. The concept of anti-management does not exist in the current literature, and as such, the researcher conceptualised this as a new, important key term in the field of organisational change and leadership. Anti-management actions relate to non-planning, lack of organising, poor or no direction and ineffective control.

Anti-management is the antithesis of management. Crisis management is the daily practice of the anti-manager, coupled with non-transparency and no recognition of other's efforts. The anti-manager spends time on power games and building empires. Organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain anti-managers who hold power by virtue of their position in the organisational structure as opposed to their managerial ability.

Organisations find it increasingly difficult to sustain anti-managers because of the power they hold by virtue of organisational structure positions. Furthermore, emotions elicited by the anti-manager may further result in favouritism, and even factionalism, with detrimental workforce outcomes.

In an organisational change context, leadership and management are required. While organisational change

should not be attempted without leadership, poor management is equally detrimental. The research findings presented reiterated the impact of negative or missing leadership during change. Fusing the topics of stress, individual stress and leadership and their impact on individuals underscores the vital importance of leadership during times of change.

## Impact of stress

Conformity not only creates stability but also poses a real threat to organisational survival. Organisational change dents conformity, but during organisational change, anxiety becomes stable and permanent. The fear individuals experience during organisational change is often without a reference point, resulting in an increasingly skewed perception of reality. Organisations and leaders alike are able to mitigate such fear, anxiety and stress through increasing towards responses and decreasing away responses.

The researcher developed Figure 2, by applying the research findings on human reactions to change and stress and human niches, combined with literature on the brain. According to Figure 2, a balanced individual is able to produce balanced thoughts. An overload of away responses increases fear, anxiety and stress. Pearce (2003) reminds us that anxiety is contagious. This is displayed through the loop of anxiety, memory, new truth (perception), ambiguity, fear and sadness only to return to anxiety. Organisational change rests on a seesaw, one end held up by a triangle of meaning, predictability and order. Here the individual experiences reduced conflict and increased emotional ability. The other end is held up

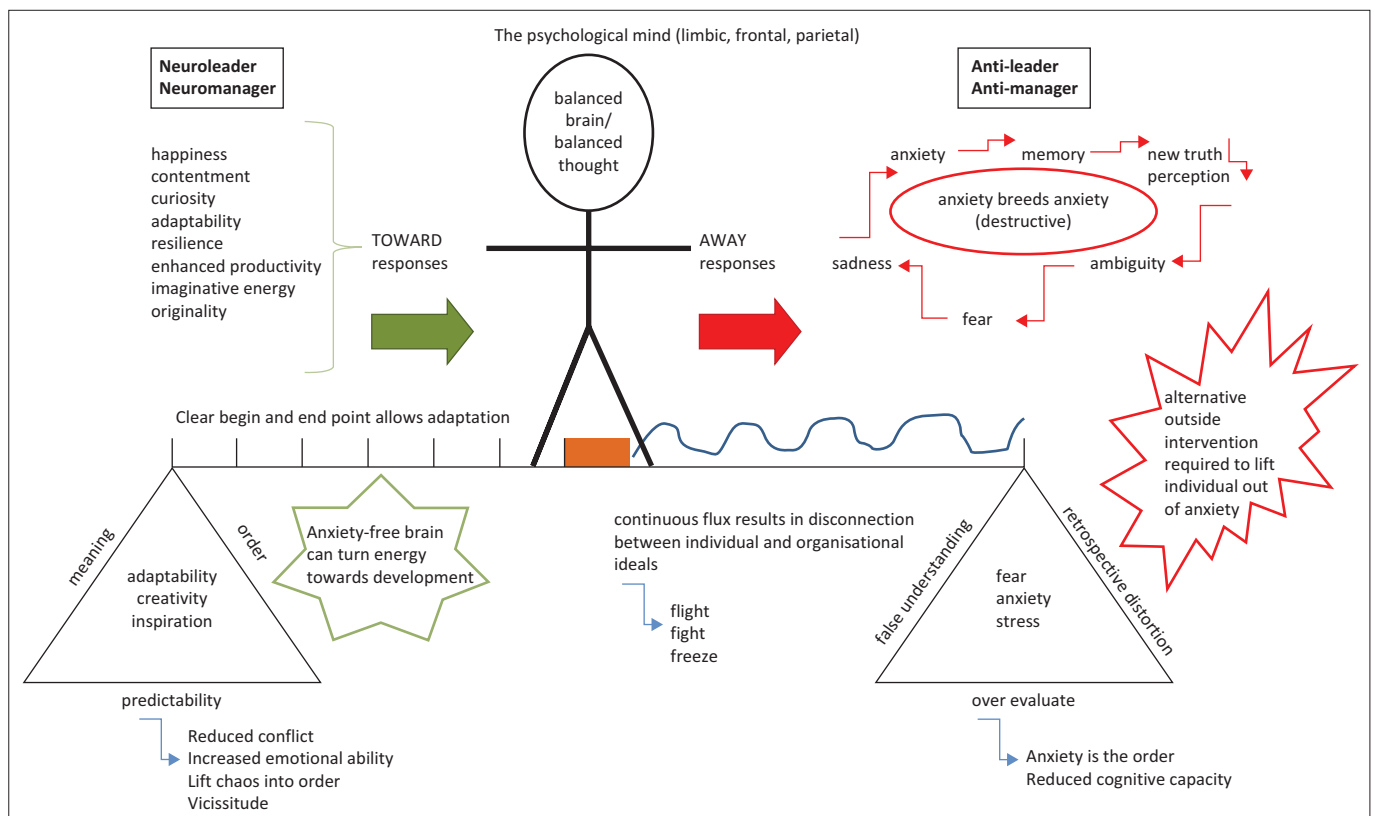


FIGURE 2: Stress and the individual.



by false understanding, retrospective distortion and over-evaluation. Here anxiety is the order. Importantly, the anti-leader and the anti-manager create away responses in the individual.

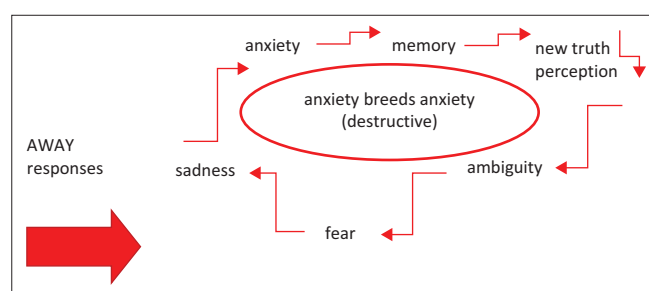
Figure 2 indicates towards responses as adaptability, resilience, enhanced productivity, happiness, contentment, curiosity, imaginative energy and originality. Away responses are destructive – fear, anxiety and stress (Figure 3). Away responses become a bounded loop from which the individual is unable to escape without outside intervention. Providing clear begin and end points can assist towards responses, where continuous flux increase away responses.

However, Figure 2 also indicates that there are seemingly no effective, mainstream interventions which aid individuals to relief stress, anxiety and fear. As such, this figure also depicts the need for alternative interventions to lift the individual out of this destructive cycle.

The impact of stress and the importance of lowering individual stress levels are further indicated in Figure 3. This figure highlights the vicious cycle that results from away responses (as indicated in Figure 2). Under high stress levels, the prefrontal cortex goes offline (Sullivan & Gratton 2002), causing excessive tear on body and mind and functioning in a more primitive and less reasoned way (Harung et al. 2009), making it extremely difficult to change behaviour and create new meaning. Therefore, individuals caught up in high stress levels will in all probability revert back to old, wrong habits as all available capacity and energy is required for survival.

Figure 3 illustrates that an overload of away responses increases anxiety, stress and fear. Change is unpredictable and uncertain, resulting in fear as the primary emotion. Instinct thus kicks in, often resulting in impaired functioning and decision-making which is then utilised as the base from which information is processed. Thoughts therefore become repetitive, falling back to known memories and perceptions. Increased stress results.

Conformity creates stability, but poses a real threat to organisational survival. Organisational change dents conformity, but during organisational change, anxiety may become stable and permanent. The fear individuals experience during organisational change is often without a reference point,



**FIGURE 3:** The individual's away responses as reactions to change.

resulting in an increasingly skewed perception of reality. Figure 3 highlights the destructive cycle of stress and the importance of lowering individual stress levels in meaningful and sustainable ways to enable organisations to achieve successful organisational change.

## Conclusion

### Individual implications

The reality of change and the resultant adaptation that is required beckon organisations to no longer ignore the impact of stress on individual functioning. Change is undoubtedly required at an individual level. However, stressed, fearful and anxious individuals find it difficult to engage with change in a meaningful manner. As indicated in Figure 2, coherence at an individual level can only be achieved when taking into account and integrating individual's mental, spiritual, physical and emotional worlds.

Alternative intervention technologies are needed which allows individual unconscious to come into consciousness; thereafter, changed perceptions and changed thoughts become possible. Emotions play a crucial role in creating meaning. The respondents in this study admitted to feelings of being overwhelmed. Alternative intervention technologies could be applied to provide a refuge from which such feelings could be reintegrated.

### Leadership implications

Individuals, leaders and disequilibrium are the foundation of organisational change fundamentals. Organisational change is chaotic, messy, unpredictable, disordered and disorganised. Resistance, costs, profit, emotions, survival, trust, ethics, involvement, communication, strategy, teams, preparation, planning, forecasting, stress, inclusivity and the changing environment are some of the dynamic elements relating to organisational change.

Given the context of organisational change, leaders should be a portal: providing a means of entrance, a doorway, for the individual to engage with change and reach eventual vicissitude. Leadership during change is pivotal to organisational and individual change. The amount of time leaders spend on change is a direct function of the change outcome. Leadership that allows the individual new ways to share, engage, understand and operate, affording individuals the opportunity to excel, prosper and exhilarate, facilitates the individual change process.

Today's leadership requires that we recognise and harness the power vested in individuals. This requires openness to different worldviews, new suggestions, diverse insights and acceptance of alternative requirements. Transparency in terms of resource allocation, information sharing, knowledge and tools could ensure the required autonomy to complete tasks. New leadership is inclusive of all, shares information and knowledge and creates an environment conducive to change.

Organisations and leaders may mitigate fear, anxiety and stress through increasing towards responses and decreasing away responses. Leaders required in the new organisation have to lead the way to re-engage the conversation between body, mind and soul. Coherence can come about when organisations engage the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental elements of the individual. Individuals need meaning. Creating individual meaning in the change process has the potential to unleash huge energy.

## Future research

Many difficulties emerged related to the appointment of leaders versus managers. Given the importance of leadership for the future sustainability of organisations, future research would be required to establish a workable solution for promotion to leadership levels as opposed to managerial positions.

Closely related to the above is the concept of the anti-leader and the anti-manager. Future research could endeavour to establish the critical, detrimental characteristics of anti-leaders and anti-managers, while establishing approaches and techniques to mitigate their detrimental actions.

## Acknowledgements

This article is from Doctorate in Business Leadership study.

## Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

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