

Organizational Change and Anxiety: A Proposed 5R's Model

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The current study aims at exploring organizational change from a psychological perspective- anxiety. The paper attempts to explain how anxiety and resistance can affect organizational change and also explores ways of facilitating the same amidst anxiety and resistance to change. The literature relevant to organizational and clinical psychological was studied and, critically analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons for individuals' resistance to organizational changes. Based on this review, a proposed theoretical model was proposed for organizational change anxiety. The ultimate objective is, however, to help organizational leaders manage such resistance with less struggle for the overall benefit of their organization. The study concluded with a call for empirical research to test the model.

Keywords: organizational change – anxiety – resistance

1. Introduction

Change is inevitable for any organization. Without change, it is impossible for an organization to retain its dynamic elasticity which is needed to respond to the calls of its surrounding environment. This is particularly relevant in these modern times when old structures and knowledge are fast making way for innovative techniques and re-education. Nevertheless, fear of such upcoming changes and the inevitable implications it might bring are most likely to have a toll on employee's health and job performance. The difficulty with change as a concept is that (a) it is not easily recognized in the short run; and (b) it is related to other internal and external factors (Kotter, 1996).

Causes for change are diverse in nature. Generally, they can be classified into internal causes, arising from the internal organizational system or external causes as those stemming from the surrounding environment such as the market or the surrounding social sphere (Tweeten, 2000). The main reason to change stems, however, from dissatisfaction within the organization. An organization is never static because it is built up of many different processes and interactions on a smaller scale (Spector, 2008). Any upcoming change, be it positive or negative, is likely to cause anxiety in an individual. When organizations announce the approaching changes, people usually become anxious and doubtful about the future (Tweeten, 2000). Everything that appeared familiar and comfortable is likely to be tossed around and most likely to be replaced by new relationships and knowledge. Amidst the whirlwind of these changes, with old tasks becoming extinct and new skills being demanded, adapting to these changes might demand acquiring new expertise and increasing effort on the part of the individuals. Thus, it is quite natural for individuals within an organization to resist these changes until they get themselves prepared to share the

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new vision and also come to terms with the fact that such changes are inevitable, with at least a minority initiating these changes to begin with. Much has been written in organizational psychology about organizational change and implications it has for the organization. Nevertheless, little research has been done on examining the accompanying feelings of anxiety and fear that organizational changes trigger. Though many researchers have mentioned it in their reports, only limited investigations have been carried out to understand the same. Therefore, the authors felt that it was necessary to consult the literature of psychology in order to find a possible answer to the following questions (Silverthorne, 2005). There is ample proof in published literature that anxiety affects individuals' decisions regarding taking risks and throwing themselves into unfamiliar situations. This anxiety arises due to their fear of losing their comfort zone which results in the individual developing a general feeling of incompetence or inadequacy about oneself to meet the impending changes. Consequently, as a natural response, such individuals not only resist organizational change, but also any justification for the same. This paper attempts to address the following questions:

1. What is anxiety and resistance?
2. How can anxiety affect organizational change and cause resistance to it?
3. Is there a proposed model for organizational change anxiety?

Within the scope of these questions, the current study aims at identifying certain specific aspects of organizational changes and how they cause anxiety and evoke resistance. How could inputs from psychology satisfactorily explain the roots of anxiety and its development in our cognition? The motivation for these current questions was the study conducted by which analyzed why organizational changes posed such a big threat to the employees. The conclusion they arrived at was that primarily, it is the universal fear of the unknown that creates the anxiety, which in turn triggers anxiety and seemingly endless cycle of negative, fear-related emotions. The paper is organized into two main parts:

1. The review of relevant literature:
 - the nature of anxiety and resistance: definition, relationship, and the cognitive perspective of explaining them;
 - the relationship between anxiety and organization change: a review of anxiety and anxiety coping models, and how they can be applied to organizational change, particularly Emery and Satir's models.
2. Conclusion: based on the review of the relevant published literature, relevant recommendations are presented.

2. Anxiety and Resistance

Definition of Anxiety

Anxiety, as a human *phenomenon*, has attracted the interest and attention of a wide range of researchers, and thus has been perceived differently by various researchers. Generally speaking, anxiety is defined a feeling of excessive worry and concern (fearful expectations) over one's future (Abdul'Aal, 2008). If this feeling continues for a longer period (about over six months) and dominates an individual's thought pattern and mental state, then it can be said that the given individual is beset

with general anxiety disorder. This disorder is characterized by the lack of control over thoughts and worries, which in turn result in certain specific somatic and cognitive symptoms, which are likely to interfere with an individual's daily functioning (Davey & Tallis, 1994). Worry is closely related to anxiety. Barlow (1988; 2004) describes worry as the attentional vigilance and distortion in information processing, such as attention and encoding, which characterizes anxiety. Basically, worry is the cognitive component of anxiety and it represents a functional state of preparation for future threats through lessening the unexpectedness and consequent impact of aversive stimuli. Thus, it decreases the surprise element and increases the individual's readiness for coping with unanticipated events that actually occur by (a) alarming the system about new incoming threatening information; (b) prompting retrieval of threat-related images and thoughts into consciousness; and (c) preparing for a future situation in a way that reduces its aversiveness (Levy, 2005; Spector, 2008). After all, unexpected, unpleasant events are more emotionally disturbing and physiologically arousing than expected unpleasant events. On the other hand, expected changes also contain potential for the mind to breed feelings of resistance (Silverthorne, 2005).

Situations of anxiety, which are perceived as threats, with frequent occurrences, result in creating certain reactions which are hard to deal with. The two feelings, which are more relevant to the organizational change framework, are namely: avoidance and resistance. Borkovec and Costello (1993) observed that when a certain set of stimuli come across as threatening, and these stimuli are avoided. On the other hand, as soon as changes tend to set in, it leads to anxiety. Simultaneously, resistance to the upcoming change also develops (Frank, 1960; Fritz, 1996). Since the scope of this paper is concerned with analyzing reasons for resisting organizational change, a brief definition of resistance is given below.

Definition of Resistance. In psychological medicine, psychological resistance is defined as the unwillingness to bring repressed feelings into one's realm of awareness (Davey & Tallis, 1994; Satir, 1991). Accordingly, resistance to change can be as seen as a behavior, adopted by an individual to protect himself from the effects of real or imagined change. On the same lines, Zaltman and Duncan (1977) describe resistance as "any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to alter the status quo" (p. 258). At the organizational level, resistance is conceptualized as an employee behavior that challenges, disrupts, or inverts prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations (Chapman, 2006; Folger & Skarlicki, 1999).

Resistance can stem from numerous causes (for more details, see Refs.). It could arise from an incomplete or unsatisfactory explanation of change. Yet another reason could be the fact that an individual creates his own ideas and expectations about the manifestations of the change, which may not necessarily be true. Still, the primary reason for resistance is that people are just unprepared for the change to set in. This could be due to the fact that having achieved a reasonable balance in their life, they start perceiving any alteration in their environment as a disturbance. In an organization, it is not realistic to expect everyone in an organization to be motivated to welcome the upcoming change. Thus, it is natural for organizational changes to generate feelings of skepticism and resistance among the employees, thus making it sometimes difficult or impossible to implement organizational improvements (Baruch, 2007; Chapman, 2006; Folger & Skarlicki 1999). Coetsee

(1999) states "any management's ability to achieve maximum benefits from change depends in part of how effectively they create and maintain a climate that minimizes resistant behavior and encourages acceptance and support" (pp. 205-206).

Anxiety and Resistance: A Cognitive Perspective

The relationship between anxiety and cognition has been discussed by different researchers from different perspectives. It is, however, generally argued that the conditioned, dysfunctional cognitions, known as dysfunctional or *automatic thoughts*, caused by anxiety and resistance are the unfortunate causes of the maintenance of anxiety. These thoughts, which are basically faulty thoughts, remodel reality in such a way that it is viewed grimmer than it actually is. This remodeling of reality often reflects itself in increasing feelings of helplessness and self-blame, to which the individuals fall victim to. The anxious person is usually unaware of the self-created negative thoughts and ideas. Quite tragically, such automatic thoughts become self-fulfilling prophecies, resulting only in strengthening feelings of anxiety, despair and the looming fear of loss of control over one's future. Related to automatic thoughts is the concept of reactive thinking which means that anxious individuals not only hold others responsible for their thoughts and actions, but also imply that they see themselves as responsible for others' feelings and beliefs. Additionally, reactive thinking could result in the anxious individual ascribing positive accomplishment to the input of others, while he starts feeling personally accountable for the negative outcomes of others (Barlow, 2004). This obviously strengthens the anxiety for the unknown and insecure situations and also fosters feelings of inadequacy and negative coping behavior. Reactive thinking plays a part in Emery's conflict model (1985), discussed in the later part of this paper. This relationship between reactive thinking and anxiety is closely connected with the development of depression in the anxious individual.

Emotion theorists state that anxiety is a cognitive association or elaboration rather than an emotion (Izard, 1992). Basic emotions, such as fear, are more hardwired and biologically innate as opposed to cognitive associations, which represent higher-order cognitive processes that are comparatively less hardwired and formed by individual life experiences. Cognitions, which can be defined as verbal or imaginative 'pictorial' events, are ideas, knowledge, interpretations, opinions, appreciations, constructions, labeling, and so on. These are closely related to oneself and his surroundings. A look into clinical psychology literature reveals certain similarities between the onset of anxiety and of depression. Theoretically, one can look at both these reactions from a very similar perspective. Both depression and anxiety find their origin in faulty cognitions, and are triggered by automatic thoughts. Beck (1985), who developed his well-known Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) to examine the presence and severity of depression, acknowledged the importance of thought content and cognitions and their salient role in the onset and development of depression. Central to Beck's theoretical vision on depression treatment are dysfunctional cognitions and the so-called schemata that lead to the same. Beck claims that an individual, based on earlier and very personal (idiosyncratic) life experiences and/or learning history, forms his world view, which is referred to as *personal paradigm, fundamental assumptions or schemata*. These schemata largely influence an individual's cognition, which manifests itself in the individual's behavior in the present and in the future (see Figure 1).

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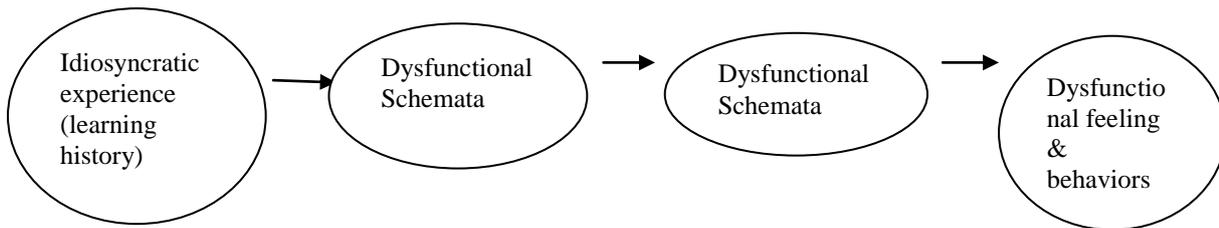


Figure 1: Beck's theory of dysfunctional schemata

A schema is described as a 'structure for screening, coding and evaluating incoming stimuli (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979); it is how an individual deciphers his surrounding environment in its many psychologically relevant facets. Through one's personal matrix of schemata, one can better orientate in time and space, as well as categorize and interpret experiences in a self-contained, meaningful manner. Generally speaking, a schema is formed during adolescence based on experiences and interactions with his/her significant others. Thus, schemata can be viewed as assumptions that form the so-called 'major' in syllogistic reasoning (Fritz, 1996). At the organizational level, a first premise, or a *major*, for example, is that in organizations, employees are always obligated to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the company, failing which they might have to face some unpleasant consequences. On the other hand, the second premise, or *minor*, would be that these personal sacrifices play a significant role in maintaining and sustaining interpersonal relationships within an organization. If relationships within an organization are strained, then generally individuals are held responsible for the same. The conclusion or *attitude here is that* in order to maintain a cordial atmosphere and maintain good interpersonal relationships with an organization, it is required that individuals get ready for some compromises and sacrifices (Levy, 2005). In this example, the major premise is that part of the cognition of the anxious individual, which is applied to the situation at hand. Thus, this individual, who is worried about the minor premise (the specific situation) consequently, ends up with feelings of guilt, anxiety and sadness if undesired things happen. The more the idiosyncratic schemata are activated, the greater is the range of stimuli that recall them, and the less logical becomes the relationship between stimulus and schema. The dysfunctional schemata forms a sort of reservoir from which (dysfunctional) cognition processes are continuously drawn and then applied to concrete situations (Chapman, 2006).

Yet another source of anxiety development is personal traumatic experience. This type of experience refers to an individual observing a particular model of response to a specific stimulus. For instance, during organizational restructuring, almost all employees in an organization observe, that either themselves or their own colleagues are the most vulnerable victims of job loss. In most cases, the main cause of this downsizing in manpower arises from the fact that the organization no longer needs the skills of the people removed from its payroll. As a result, unemployment can be a highly traumatizing experience, albeit the fact that the changes it brings are hardly ever as harsh as imagined. Meanwhile, the employees become traumatized enough and end up with the feeling that with their present skills sets, it is not possible to the demands of the new changes and to combat with the consequences.

It is not uncommon to notice that employees, especially the older ones, are diffident about acquiring new skills and knowledge. This fear for acquiring new skills (which primarily stems from their misconception that they would soon be outsmarted or surpassed by the younger or faster learners) aggravates the already existing anxiety about the future which is already quite deep-rooted in them. Therefore, an individual who has gone through the trauma of living or seeing a previous negative experience following organizational changes, is more likely to become anxious when organizational changes are announced. At this point, triggered by previous experience, his cognition starts sending warnings, resulting in the development of resistance, its cousin. Moreover, it does not necessarily mean that only those employees who have already experienced the hardship of previous organizational changes would resist changes. Even mere witnessing of how such changes affected his other colleagues in the organization is enough to run a riot of negative emotions in them. Although any change is likely to be accompanied by some hardships which the employees are bound to undergo (during which he might sometimes realize his ability to deal with changes), he is still conditioned to believe that these changes must be avoided by all means. This situation is called vicarious learning and is comparable to a direct traumatic condition.

3. Anxiety Models and Organizational Changes: Is There A Relationship?

Although published literature has reported enough about the impact of organizational change on the structuring and working of organizations, little study has been done on analyzing the psychological impacts of such changes on employees. Generally, questions which are usually raised about how to deal with imposed changes in any organizations pivot around two issues: handling those changes and the accompanying emotions. Among the various models concerning anxiety and resistance, two models which are most relevant to the present study regarding-organizational change are those of Emery's (1985) and Satir's (1991). Their relevance lies in the description of their views related to the cycle of psychological transformation that occurs during such changes.

Emery's conflict model

In his model, Emery (1985) proposes six steps through which fear about the future, can be transformed into developing innovative ideas that match the dynamic surrounding environment. These six steps occur in a consecutive fashion and an anxious individual must go through all these steps to reach the final goal- i.e. minimizing anxiety about change. The first step in the model concerns with admitting the very existence of the unknown future. Of course, the more the importance attached to this unknown future, the greater is the degree of anxiety which is likely to develop. Fear stems from a *perceptual mismatch* between personal expectations and personal perceptions of what reality actually is. When people feel that reality cannot meet their expectations in a particular situation, they seek answers from their inner feelings of fear (Izard, 1992). The irony here is that we live in a world where reality is governed by the unknown. Hence, when fear-stricken individuals continue remaining trapped in dark side of life, their fear of the unknown persists. Basically, this fear of the unknown is triggered when an individual steps or is pushed out of his familiar settings and things and is confronted by an unknown situation. To

eliminate his anxiety about confronting the unknown, such an individual starts avoiding it by retreating into the zone of the familiar; i.e., known people, structures and patterns in his life. This familiarity does not necessarily mean they are the right set of circumstances or the most comfortable of options and situations; rather, he is assuaged by the feelings of comfort, approval, acceptance, and confidence that this familiar zone provides him.

The second stage deals with *activating emotional memories*, which are located in the right hemisphere of the brain. When people encounter new situations where appropriate responses might not be at hand, they tend to search for similar incidents from their memories as a torch for them in these novel situations. This association between current and past events, when left unrecognized can by itself be a source of anxiety (Abdul'Al, 2008). This personal colored world of past experiences and emotions is based on early learning history, and three other premises or domains: approval, competence and control. All three domains are reciprocally related to one another and are independently related to self-esteem. A threat to any of these three domains implies a direct reaction on an individual's self-esteem. At a functional level, an individual who is anxious at any point of time, will activate fearful memories and experiences, thus generating further anxiety and starts acting and reacting based on his fears. Unless an individual brings up those deep-structured memories into consciousness and strives to consciously to control or alter them, the individual is likely to be entrapped in the darker emotions. One way of bringing up these memories and controlling them is by teaching through stories and metaphors, and recording the success stories, no matter how small they are. It is hoped that through controlling emotional memories, old memories can be reworked to bring out into more realistic and satisfying outcomes.

Based on what happens in step two, in step three, images about reality are created. The images in this stages move from 'what if' to 'as if,' and people tend to believe those images they have created themselves and act as though those images illusions are the realities themselves. Thus, anxiety arises due to the fact that most people delude themselves to thinking that some wrong or misfortune is impending and this may not be necessarily true. Leventhal (cited in Craske, 1999) observed in clinical cases that his anxious clients seemed normal in face of familiar problems, but were totally immobilized when confronted with unknown ones. This case, which can be equated to a state of 'trance', stems from the direct relationship between imagination and belief. Still, the lesser an individual is aware of the negative images generated by his own self, the greater is the impact of these images. Therefore, it is important that individuals recognize the existence of such images and monitor them in order to detach themselves from the negative repercussions of the same. This would ultimately prepare them for a more optimistic picture about the future.

The fourth step is the activation of the belief system, which originally developed as a response to some kind of previous experience. In this step, the images move into the left hemisphere of the brain where they correspond with the relevant analytic code (Beck, Emery & Greenberg, 1985). According to Emery (1985), during this step, there occurs a process of overcompensation of fearful images. This means that painful beliefs are converted into exactly corresponding images that the distressed individual is so desperately attempting to suppress. Thus, due to analogue code, in which current images are colored by past memories, a conflict within the anxious

individual arises. This conflict results in events labeled in an unacceptable analytic code by overestimation or underestimation the current situation. At this point, overcompensation paves way for reactive thinking occurs in an the anxious individual, thus intensifying these terrifying images by assuming that others are responsible for his own actions, feelings, and thoughts or vice versa; this process is referred to as projection. The development of such a mindset which blocks the outside perspectives (other than the self) is the first real manifestation of the development of anxiety. At the organizational level, anxious people, based on their reactive thinking, focus on the cues and neglect the context, in which organizational change is seen at a micro-level not at a macro-level. Retreating to their own personal feelings related to past experiences, they convince themselves (perhaps mistakenly), that any change would be similar in one way or another to some of their past experiences. Thus they prevent themselves from actually giving in to changes. Thus they preempt themselves from giving the opportunity of seeing the larger picture related to the implications of what change could bring in.

The scene is now open for images conflict triggered by reactive thinking- it is fifth step. This conflict is caused by anxiety and it pushes individuals to behave in the sphere of feelings and hypothetical constructs built by their self-based on their selective memories instead of accepting reality and processing of relevant information for more realistic actions. Thus, to relieve anxiety anxious individuals need to learn how to accept reality as it is, then they try to deal with it. Emery (1985) suggested the 5-step Aware-strategy to accept and know; that is, what anxiety is about and why we are anxious. This strategy assumes that individuals should remain present in the context of the situation. The five steps are (see figure 2):

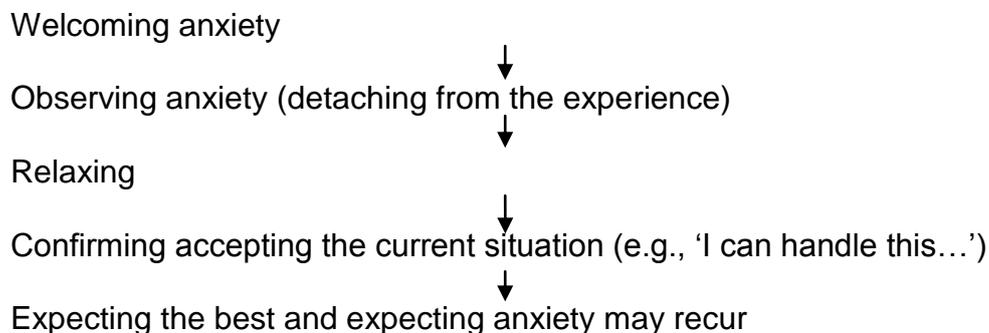


Figure 2: Emery 5-step Aware-strategy

The sixth step in Emery's model is about motivation. The sixth and final step of the Conflict Model by Emery revolves around motivation. This motivation, however, must lead to some action. Although motivating emotion starts dissolving as soon as the action is taken, the beliefs that help create the emotions are solidified. At this stage, people can, however, learn to switch from motivation based on feelings to a motivation based on choices. They choose what they want and act as they undergo the experience. To remain with the socially anxious individual example, they can accept their feelings and lack of social skills. They are then more likely to develop feelings of confidence for upcoming events and act as if they were confident in a given social situation. They learn that instead of using anxiety as a motivation, he can do the task directly (Beck, 1985).

Satir's Change Model

Similar to by Emery's (1985) model, Satir proposed a change model intended to help deal with anxiety about future. Despite the fact that this model is basically meant for family therapy, its concepts can be employed in a broader context, including the organizational context. The main tenet of this model being the fact that improvements in our life are possible all the way, the main idea behind her model, however, is helping individuals to control their anxiety by transforming the way they perceive and express themselves. The model is thus composed of five stages, all of which describe how feelings, thinking, performance and physiology work interchangeably or interactively during moments of anxiety. The first stage depicts the latest experience in which individuals feel satisfied, think that their performance patterns are consistent, and have a sense of belonging and stability in their relationships with others. This *status quo* is the main source of individuals' expectations, behavior and reactions. Thus, it is not unusual to expect that implicit and explicit rules operate in a given context. When the new experience is harder than the latest one, resistance is likely to occur. The second stage sets the scene for resistance. Resistance is often triggered by foreign elements injected in the context. Unfortunately, at the organizational level, innovation is sometimes thought of as a foreign element. The main reason for this is that innovation comes usually from a small group from within an organization who recognize the need for change in many terms. Power change is inevitable; thus, the existing power structures within an organization start resisting any change essentially by denying its validity through blocking tactics, especially the avoidance tactic. This mode of denial sparks off the chaos stage.

In the third stage, due to uncertainty, chaos begins to unfold. This chaos has several manifestations, and some of them are: (a) existing relationships become brittle or perhaps dissolve; (b) expectations prior to the change are no longer held; and (c) familiar behaviors and reactions are likely to change. The main theme encompassing this stage is that individuals start losing their sense of identity and belongingness, which proves to be the main catalyst of anxiety. Although this stage is termed as chaos, it is the initial step for a new organizational scene, where individuals are expected to explore avenues for benefits in an organization. If this is the case, individuals should be helped to focus on their feelings and needs, and should be supported accordingly. In sum, it can state that the seemingly chaotic stage is so vital to the transformation process which in turn paves the way for the integration stage. The fourth stage, the integration stage, is about sharing the idea amongst individuals. In this stage, accepting the idea of transforming idea is manifested in individuals, who are quite excited to discover new relationships and develop awareness about the new rules that build functional behaviors. However, due to the fact that over-excitement may cause frustration when the new rules do not work from the first attempt, individuals still need a large amount of support and sufficient information to keep on trying new rules. Due to this, frustration might set in and individuals may fall back into the state of chaos. Therefore, reassuring individuals and empowering them in finding new ways to cope with difficulties are crucial in combating anxiety.

The final and fifth stage in this model is the new status quo. In order to enable employees come to terms with the new changes and assimilate the same, it is important to characterize these changes by better conditions than the previous

status quo. The most important conditions, however, are providing objective feedback and granting individuals the freedom to observe, practice, and communicate what is really happening. At the organizational level, this process is called organizational learning, during which foreign elements are tried and evaluated.

Coping with Change

Basically, the above- discussed models, like other models, aim at finding how best can individuals be enabled to deal with change. The intended implication is how best an organizational leader can ensure that the whole organization shares his new vision with least resistance. Since the leader plays a unique role in the organization, he should possess certain distinct qualities to effectively manage these changes. The most apparent quality to effectively mediate the change process, however, is developing the ability to pick up early signs of discontinuity and disruption within the organization. Since anxiety represents a feeling that impedes individuals from reaching certain levels of goals, organizational leaders must do their best to mitigate its effects. Emotions which are triggered by cognitive processes can be corrected or manipulated via conscious reasoning, as shown in traumatized conditioning; this is when resistance emerges. Therefore, as a first step towards acceptance, it is strongly advised that leaders take the necessary steps to explain the upcoming events and give sufficient details to their employees. As Beck and Clark observe, (1997) "one of the most effective ways of deactivating the primal threat mode is to counter it with more elaborative, strategic processing of information resulting from the activation of the constructive, reflective modes of thinking" (p.55). In addition, self-monitoring of one's emotions is highly related to this sort of dialogue. Cognitive therapy suggests instituting detailed self-monitoring of emotions and associated cognitions in order to identify certain beliefs, appraisals, and assumptions. Once relevant cognitions are identified, they could be categorized into types of typical errors that occur during heightened emotion, such as overestimations of risk associated with changes. At this point, individuals should also examine the validity of their thoughts by considering all the available evidence. They should then seek alternative hypotheses which are more evidence-based and get a more realistic picture of what future holds for them in an organization.

In summary, reducing anxiety with respect to restructuring the organization necessitates two elements: (a) honesty; and (b) two-way communication. For the former, all relevant information concerning the reasons for such changes and the possible consequences of the same consequences should be transparently presented so that all subordinates are aware of the situation since nobody likes to be left in the dark. Also, leaders must not be afraid of emerging conflicts with their subordinates who should be given room for venting their emotions. It is also imperative that the leader explains his expectations for the future. For the two-way communication element, it is important that leaders initiate frequent communication with their subordinates. They should not just limit themselves to communicating directions and ideas, but also the differences in values. Based on the aforementioned review and conclusion, we can propose a model of organizational change anxiety and call it the 5R's model (see figure 3). The model starts with the recognition of anxiety as a natural phenomenon that is expected to arise when introducing organizational change, whatever its impact is. Accepting anxiety should lead to a search process into its meaningful paradigms; and this step is to ensure

that leaders are concerned with reality of anxiety not appearance. This Dialogue about anxiety is supposedly leading to reducing it by detaching it from past experience that are believed to steer current anxiety about change; and thus, reconstructing anxiety to be a catalyst for change, which should be implemented wisely and appropriately.

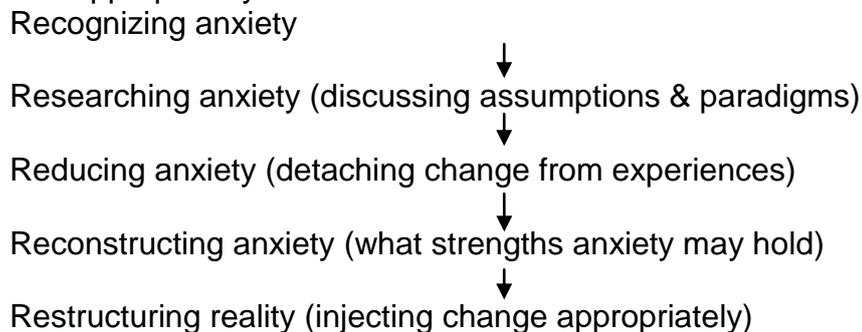


Figure 3: 5R's model for organizational change anxiety

4. Conclusion

The current paper aimed at exploring some of the psychological aspects of anxiety with respect to organizational change. Although it is not unusual for people to fear the unknown, the cause of anxiety can also lie in previous traumatic experiences. Such experiences may shake the foundations of our beliefs about security and trust in many situations - yet this reaction is quite typical and natural. However, this feeling must not trigger further anxiety and excessive worry for the future. Trauma symptoms are 'adaptive' - meaning a person can become anxious regardless of whether the incident happened to him or not. Merely listening to stories or working with someone who has had negative experiences after an organizational change is enough to scare a group of others. Once someone is traumatized, he becomes very vulnerable to any change. He becomes over-sensitive to situations of probable danger and thus starts avoiding them. Over a period of time, this array of possible dangerous events starts to broaden, and avoidance grows even further. Individuals tend to create meanings out of the contexts in which events take place. Although not everyone is sensitive to anxiety, this process of creating meaning in organizational contexts is, however, related to anxiety-prone mind sets. If organizations do not pay enough attention to this, such individuals start avoiding and eventually resisting the introduction any change.

To initiate real organizational change, it is essential to consider carefully dysfunctional cognitions in individuals and replace them with correct thoughts about the future, no matter how uncertain the future is. The most important notion here is that the fear for the unknown does not necessarily have to result in anxiety as long as leaders clearly communicate their expectations about the upcoming changes. It must be ensured that communication with organizational members occurs in an environment of complete trust, openness. Past issues should also be cleared up. Anxious individual must speak up and vent out their worries to reveal their automatic thoughts and faulty coping behavior. It is not unusual for anxious people to be unaware of them since such unconscious thoughts simply pop-up in their awareness, without giving them any further control over such thoughts. For future research, it is recommended that this model is to be empirically tested for knowledge accumulation

and practice as well. Recommendations for this purpose include developing an inventory for organizational change anxiety and test it, conducting a phenomenological study, a grounded theory project, and/or an action research project.

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