

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Listen to me:

The relationship between an organisation's listening environment and employees' openness to change.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Business Studies (Communication)

At Massey University, Wellington

New Zealand

Nicola McFaul

March 2016

Abstract

Change is a reality of organisational life. New technologies, globalisation, the vagaries of the economic climate, and internal organisational pressures drive change today faster than ever before. Yet failure rates for change can be up to 70%. Understanding the different drivers of change, and what promotes change success, is therefore critical. Researchers are recognising that change is essentially a human event, and that individuals have a major role in determining whether organisational change will be successful. Employees' attitudes towards change determine whether they will support or resist it. The focus of this study is on employee's *openness to change*, and the extent to which this variable is affected by the *listening environment* created in the organisation by the supervisor and also that created between team members.

An online survey was carried out of 485 employees in one public sector organisation in New Zealand. Measures were taken of employee openness to change, team listening environment, supervisor listening environment and potential demographic contributors. Findings were that the supervisor listening environment had a moderate effect on employees' openness to change. It also had a similar effect on the team listening environment. However, the team listening environment was found to have only a small little impact on openness to change. Four employee variables—position, tenure, age and gender—were considered, and all were found to influence the relationship between the supervisor listening environment and openness to change. This was especially so for managers, employees between 35 and 54 years of age, and female employees. The impact of employee characteristics on the openness to change variable was also looked at. The only demographic variable that had an impact on openness to change was the position an employee holds in the organisation.

The implications of these findings for management is that the quality of the interpersonal relationship between an employee, and their supervisor, as demonstrated by how the supervisor listens to them, creates an environment where employees feel listened to, cared for and connected. This influences an employee's willingness to support new and different things, that is, their openness to change. This contributes in turn to whether the employee will embrace change or resist it, and ultimately influences whether the organisational change will be successful.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was borne from the knowledge that organisational change impacts the lives of almost everyone today. The more scholars can find out about how it works, the better for all who are affected. Listening has long been known to be an essential component of communication and finding out the value of listening in the context of organisational change has been for me an interesting journey.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my co-supervisors. I was so privileged to have the wise advice of Professor Frank Sligo, and the expertise of Doctor Niki Murray. Both of them were so positive and helpful and gave me excellent feedback which lightened my spirits and kept me going.

I would especially like to thank the people who have helped me on this journey. First my family, my beloved husband, Jeff, and daughter, Betty-Alice, who encouraged me to keep going and supported me over the last two years. My sisters, and their families, and my dear friends, who have been so supportive and patiently listened to me when I thought I would never get there.

I would also like to thank the people at Organisation X who allowed me to come into their organisation and survey their staff. Letting a Master's student have access to a large and busy organisation is a big ask, and so to all of you, and to the 583 members of your staff that took my survey, you know who you are, and I would like to express how appreciative I am that you let me in.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Massey University for the excellent systems and resources they have in place that make access to information so easy and flexible, and the ability to study and research within reach of people like me. The experience has been hard, at times, and honed my resilience and perseverance, but in the end, so rewarding.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | i |
| Acknowledgements | ii |
| Table of Contents | iii |
| List of Figures..... | ix |
| List of Tables | x |
| Chapter One: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Research Aim..... | 3 |
| 1.2 Research Overview and Objectives | 3 |
| 1.2.1 Research questions | 4 |
| 1.3 Value of this Study | 5 |
| 1.4 Organisation of the Thesis..... | 6 |
| Chapter Two: Literature Review | 8 |
| 2.0 Introduction..... | 8 |
| 2.1 Organisational Change..... | 9 |
| 2.1.1 Organisational change defined | 9 |
| 2.1.2 Change is difficult..... | 10 |
| 2.1.3 Theories of organisational change..... | 11 |
| 2.1.4 Change targets | 14 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 2.1.5 | Dimensions of organisational change | 16 |
| 2.2 | Organisational Change at the Individual Level | 21 |
| 2.2.1 | Overview of attitudes | 23 |
| 2.2.2 | Attitudes towards change..... | 25 |
| 2.2.3 | Resistance to change | 27 |
| 2.2.4 | Cynicism about organisational change | 29 |
| 2.2.5 | Commitment to change..... | 30 |
| 2.2.6 | Readiness to change | 31 |
| 2.3 | Openness to Change..... | 33 |
| 2.3.1 | Openness to change defined | 33 |
| 2.3.2 | Antecedents to openness to change – contextual factors..... | 34 |
| 2.3.2 | Openness to change as an individual difference | 38 |
| 2.4. | Internal Organisational Context..... | 39 |
| 2.4.1 | Organisational climate | 39 |
| 2.4.2 | Supportive climate | 40 |
| 2.4.3 | Communication climate..... | 42 |
| 2.4.4 | Change communication | 43 |
| 2.4.5 | Interpersonal communication..... | 46 |
| 2.5. | Listening in Organisations | 48 |
| 2.5.1 | Understanding listening | 49 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|----|
| 2.5.2 | Listening-centred communication | 50 |
| 2.5.3 | The listening climate in organisations | 51 |
| 2.5.4 | Group listening climate | 51 |
| 2.6 | Listening Environment and Openness to Change: Summary and Current Research..... | 52 |
| Chapter Three: Method | | 56 |
| 3.0 | Introduction..... | 56 |
| 3.1 | Research Methodology..... | 56 |
| 3.2 | Research Setting..... | 58 |
| 3.3 | Participants..... | 59 |
| 3.3.1 | Characteristics of the sample..... | 61 |
| 3.4 | Survey Tool | 65 |
| 3.5 | Procedures | 67 |
| 3.5.1 | Data collection | 69 |
| 3.5.2 | Piloting the survey..... | 69 |
| 3.5.3 | Implementation of the final survey | 69 |
| 3.5.4 | Data analysis | 70 |
| 3.6 | Ethical Considerations..... | 71 |
| 3.7 | Conclusion..... | 71 |
| Chapter Four: Results | | 72 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 4.1 | Preliminary Analysis | 72 |
| 4.2 | Internal Reliability: Openness to Change, Team Listening Environment, and Supervisor Listening Environment | 73 |
| 4.3 | Summation of Scales and Descriptive Analysis: Openness to Change, Team Listening Environment, and Supervisor Listening Environment..... | 74 |
| 4.3.1 | Employee perceptions of openness to change | 74 |
| 4.3.2 | Employee perceptions of the team listening environment..... | 75 |
| 4.3.3 | Employee perceptions of the supervisor listening environment . | 76 |
| 4.4 | Correlations between Openness to Change, the Team Listening Environment, and the Supervisor Listening Environment | 77 |
| 4.4.1 | Openness to change and the team listening environment | 77 |
| 4.4.2 | Openness to change and the supervisor listening environment. | 78 |
| 4.3.3 | Post Hoc Analysis: Supervisor listening environment and the team listening environment..... | 79 |
| 4.4.4 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and employee position | 80 |
| 4.4.5 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and employee tenure | 82 |
| 4.4.6 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and employee age | 85 |
| 4.4.7 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and employee gender | 87 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.5 | Analysis of the Difference between Openness to Change and Employee Characteristics | 89 |
| 4.5.1 | Openness to change and position..... | 90 |
| 4.5.2 | Openness to change and tenure..... | 91 |
| 4.5.3 | Openness to change and age | 92 |
| 4.5.4 | Openness to change and gender..... | 92 |
| 4.6 | Conclusion..... | 93 |
| | Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion | 95 |
| 5.1 | Relationship between Openness to Change and the Listening Environment..... | 95 |
| 5.1.1 | Openness to change and the team listening environment | 96 |
| 5.1.2 | Openness to change and the supervisor listening environment | 97 |
| 5.1.3 | Supervisor listening environment and the team listening environment..... | 99 |
| 5.1.4 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and position . | 100 |
| 5.1.5 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and employee tenure | 103 |
| 5.1.6 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and age | 105 |
| 5.1.7 | Openness to change, the listening environment, and gender .. | 106 |
| 5.2 | The Influence of Employee Characteristics on Openness to Change .. | 107 |
| 5.3 | Limitations of this Research | 108 |

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 5.4 | Suggestions for Future Research..... | 109 |
| 5.5 | Conclusion..... | 111 |
| | References | 113 |
| | Appendix A: Survey Items | 132 |
| | Appendix B: Survey Information Sheet..... | 133 |
| | Appendix C: Emails to Survey Respondents | 136 |
| | Appendix D: Low Risk Ethics Letter..... | 137 |
| | Appendix E: Survey Codebook..... | 138 |
| | Appendix F: Table 4.16: Multiple Comparisons between Openness to Change and Tenure - Tukey HSD Test..... | 143 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1.1. Proposed Model of how the group listening climate in an organisation affects employees' attitudes towards a change..... | 2 |
| Figure 2.1. Process Models of Organisational Change | 13 |
| Figure 2.2. Levels of Change..... | 16 |
| Figure 2.3. The Change Triangle..... | 17 |
| Figure 2.4. Incremental Change | 18 |
| Figure 2.5. Well-known Organisational Change Methods..... | 20 |
| Figure 2.6. Antecedents, explicit reactions, and change consequences of organisational change | 22 |
| Figure 2.7. Systems model of the listening process. | 50 |
| Figure 3.1 Cohen's Guidelines for determining the effect size of ANOVA's and Correlations | 61 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 3.1. Tenure, Position, Age, and Gender of Respondents..... | 62 |
| Table 4.1. Mean Ratings for Openness to Change Scale..... | 75 |
| Table 4.2. Mean Ratings for Team Listening Environment..... | 76 |
| Table 4.3. Mean Ratings for Supervisor Listening Environment..... | 77 |
| Table 4.4. Correlation between Openness to Change and the Team Listening Environment..... | 78 |
| Table 4.5. Correlation between Openness to Change and the Supervisors Listening Environment..... | 79 |
| Table 4.6. Correlation between the Supervisors Listening Environment and the Team Listening Environment..... | 79 |
| Table 4.7. Correlation between Openness to Change and Team Listening Environment by Employee Position..... | 81 |
| Table 4.8. Correlations between Openness to Change and Supervisors Listening Environment, by Employee Position..... | 82 |
| Table 4.9. Correlations between Openness to Change and Team Listening Environment by Employee Tenure..... | 83 |
| Table 4.10. Correlations between Openness to Change and Supervisor Listening Environment, by Tenure..... | 84 |
| Table 4.11. Correlations between the Team Listening Environment and Openness to Change, by Age..... | 86 |
| Table 4.12. Correlations between the Supervisor Listening Environment and Openness to Change, by Age..... | 87 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 4.13. Correlation between Openness to Change and Team Listening Environment, by Gender..... | 88 |
| Table 4.14. Correlation between Openness to Change and Supervisor Listening Environment, by Gender | 89 |
| Table 4.15. Multiple Comparisons using Tukey's Test for the Difference between Positions and Openness to Change..... | 91 |