

Organizational Change and Anxiety: Developing an Instrument for the 5Rs Model

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Abstract The goal of this study is to develop an instrument based on the 5Rs model for managing the anxiety that results from organizational change. The 5Rs are Recognizing, Researching, Reducing, Reconstructing anxiety, and Restructuring reality. The developed instrument (15 statements: 12 for organizational anxiety and 3 for organizational change) was tested on a randomly selected sample (n = 163) representing organizational leaders. Obtained data showed that the content validity (the degree of agreement within a panel of experts) was acceptable, and the reliability coefficients for the organizational anxiety subscale and organizational change subscale were acceptable. Moreover, the regression analysis indicated that the organizational anxiety could significantly and uniquely predict the organizational change. Relevant recommendations are included.

Keywords Organizational Anxiety, Organizational Change

1. Introduction

An organization's inability to prepare employees effectively before attempting a change initiative can be a common cause of change implementation failure, and financial and psychological cost. According to Schein [1], organizations commonly move into change implementation before individuals or groups are psychologically ready. An intention to change an organization is often accompanied by concern about this change because of assumptions formed by the organization's individual members. This in turn can lead to resistance to this change.

Based on Alqahtani and Alajmi's [2] study of a theoretical model that was proposed for organizational change anxiety, this paper aimed to develop and test a questionnaire for organizational change anxiety. The study developed a questionnaire explaining the different stages of the anxiety model. The researcher considers this questionnaire important

because it increases our understanding of developing specific tactics for managing anxiety effectively.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a survey instrument to assess how organizational anxiety and organizational change are managed in light of the 5Rs model developed by Alqahtani and Alajmi [2], reporting evidence of reliability and validity.

3. Literature Review

Emery Model. The Emery model, which focuses on the six steps to overcome fear about the future, explains that to reach the final goal of minimizing anxiety about change, an organization should cover all of these steps to reach "the degree to which organizational environment promotes satisfaction of these needs, and especially autonomy, would determine the extent to which an employee would experience high levels of self-esteem, self-actualization, and well-being, and low levels of depression and anxiety" [3]. The first step is how people handle an unknown future. An individual's personal expectations often do not match the reality of a situation [4]. People form attachments to familiar situations, which does not necessarily mean that these are the right set of circumstances. The second stage considers activating emotional memories, in which subjects look for suitable responses in previous experiences for the new situation; this then becomes a source of anxiety [5]. The second stage also concerns personal past experiences and emotions connected to the three domains: approval, competence, and control. All of these domains, separately or combined, are related to self-esteem, which is a direct reaction to any threat facing the three domains. At a functional level, people will activate fearful memories, and start acting and reacting based on their fears. People can overcome fear by bringing deep-structured memories into consciousness and trying consciously to control them. People can control these memories by teaching

success stories. In step three, images about reality are created. The images in this stage move from “what if” to “as if.” People tend to believe these images that they have created and act as if they were in fact real. The anxiety arises from people thinking that something bad will happen, and this is not necessarily true.

Leventhal (cited in Crask, 1999) observed that his anxious clients are normal when they face familiar problems, but that they feel anxiety when they face unknown ones [6]. This situation can be equated to an almost trance-like state and stems from the direct relationship between imagination and belief. People must be aware of the existence of these negative images and monitor them to avoid the negative effects they can cause.

In the fourth step, according to Beck, Emery, and Greenberg, the images move to the left hemisphere of the brain, where they correspond with the relevant analytic code [7]. According to Beck and colleagues, during this step, a process of overcompensation of fearful images occurs according to an analogue code [7]. Current images are colored by past memories, and a conflict arises in the anxious person. This conflict results in events labeled in an acceptable analytic code by overestimation or underestimation of the current situation.

At this point, overcompensation paves the way for reactive thinking and intensifies these terrifying images. The person assumes that others are responsible for his or her life, a process known as *projection*.

The first appearance of the development of anxiety is others' opinions (i.e., other than the self). At the organizational level, anxious people, based on their reactive thinking, focus on cues and neglect the context. Organizational change is seen at a micro-level and not a macro-level, which they perceive with their personal feelings based on past experiences. Because they cannot see the larger picture, they prevent themselves from allowing change to happen.

The fifth step is based on reactive thinking. This occurs when anxiety pushes people to behave under the effects of feelings that are based on their selective memories instead of reality. To overcome the anxiety, people must learn how to accept reality as it is and handle it. Emery and colleagues [7] suggested the five-step awareness strategy; accepting and knowing this strategy assumes that people can and should remain in the context of the situation. The five steps are 1) welcoming anxiety, 2) observing anxiety, 3) relaxing, 4) confirming and accepting the current situation, and 5) expecting the best but realizing that anxiety may recur.

The sixth step is about motivation. Motivation leads to certain actions and comes from emotions, but when the action is then taken, the motivating emotion starts to disappear. At this stage, people learn to switch from motivation based on *feelings* to motivation based on *choices*. People choose what they want and act as they live the experience. They develop the feeling of confidence and act

as if they were confident in a given situation. Instead of using anxiety as a motivation, they can do the task directly [7].

Satir's Change Model. Satir [8] proposed a change model to help handle anxiety about the future. The main idea of this model is that improvements in life are always possible. People can control their anxiety by transforming the way in which they perceive and express themselves. This model comprises five stages, all of which describe feelings, thinking, performance, and psychology during work activities.

The first stage focuses on the last experience in which the subject felt satisfied and stable in his or her relationship with others. This last experience is the main source of a person's expectations, behavior, and reactions. Resistance is likely to occur when the next experience is harder than that last one.

The second stage sets the scene for resistance. Unfortunately, innovation is sometimes thought of as foreign in an organization. Innovation usually comes from a small group within the organization that recognizes the need for change in certain areas. Power change is inevitable, and its structures start from within, resisting any change by using certain tactics to deny its validity. This model of denial leads to the third stage, the chaos stage.

This chaos takes several appearances, including 1) existing relationships dissolve, 2) expectations prior to the change are no longer held, and 3) familiar behaviors and reactions are likely to change. The main theme of this stage is that people begin to lose their sense of identity and belongingness (being an accepted member of the group), which proves to be the main catalyst for the anxiety. This chaos stage is the initial step for a new organizational dynamic, in which people are expected to explore avenues to benefit the organization. The chaotic stage is vital to the transformation process, which in turn paves the way for the fourth stage, integration.

Accepting the transformation can cause frustration when the new rules do not work at first. People need support and sufficient information to keep on trying the new rules; they need to be helped to find new ways to cope with difficulties and still combat the anxiety. The fifth and final stage is the new status quo. Employees can come to terms with new changes by characterizing these changes as being better than the previous status quo.

Providing objective feedback and the freedom to observe, practice, and communicate what is really happening is of utmost importance. At the organizational level, this process is called *organizational learning*. The previously discussed models aim to determine how people can best handle change. The implication is how an organizational leader can ensure that the entire organization shares his or her vision with the least resistance. The leader must possess certain qualities to manage these changes effectively; the most important quality is developing the ability to recognize early signs of discontinuity within the organization.

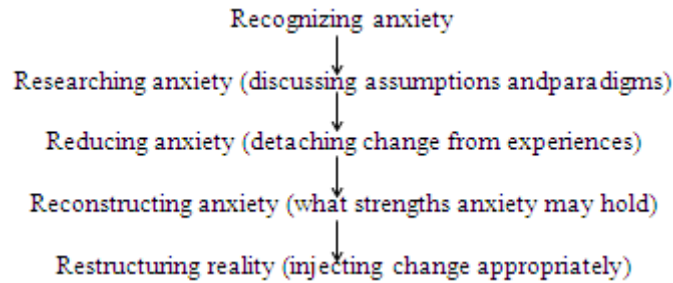


Figure 1. 5Rs model for organizational change anxiety

Organizational leaders must do their best to minimize the negative effects of the anxiety that impedes people from reaching their goals. Emotions that are affected by cognitive processes can be corrected using conscious reasoning, as shown in trauma conditioning, a behavioral paradigm in which people learn to predict adverse events. As the first step toward acceptance, the leader should explain the upcoming events and provide enough details to their employees to allay any anxiety. As Beck and Clark observe [9], “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 mode of thinking.” Cognitive therapy suggests detailed self-monitoring of emotions and associated conditions to identify certain beliefs and assumptions. Overestimation of risk is associated with change. Employees should examine the validity of thoughts against all the available evidence and seek alternative hypotheses to obtain a more realistic picture of what the future holds.

To sum up, reducing anxiety requires two elements: honesty and two-way communication. Honesty necessitates that all information concerning the reasons for change is presented so that all subordinates are aware of the situation. Change leaders must allow freedom for subordinates to express their emotions, and they should explain their expectations for the future. Leaders must allow two-way communication with their subordinates, not only ideas and directions but also differences in values. For this, we propose a model of organizational change anxiety called the *5Rs* (see Figure 1).

This model starts with the recognition of anxiety as a natural phenomenon that is expected to arise when introducing organizational change. Accepting anxiety should then lead to a search process into its possible paradigms. To ensure that the leaders are concerned with the reality of anxiety and not its appearance, this dialogue about anxiety should lead to reducing it by detaching it from past experience.

4. Methodology

Instrument Development

Hinkin[10] states that there are three stages and steps recommended for instrument development:

I. Stage 1: Item generation, where the primary concern is content validity

II. Stage 2: Scale development, consisting of three steps (study design, scale construction, and reliability assessment), where the focus is on identifying a set of items for the construct, reliability, and construct validity

III. Stage 3: Scale evaluation, where the primary focus is on further evidence of construct validity of the new measure

The instrument was developed based on a proposed model (5Rs model) of Alqahtani and Alajmi’s study [2]. The questionnaire is divided into two sections:

- Section I: Includes demographic information: sex, age, educational level, department, position, current position, previous work positions, total staff within the organization, supervised staff, and career development programs
- Section II: Measures assessing the 5Rs model (Recognizing anxiety, Researching anxiety, Reducing anxiety, Reconstructing anxiety, and Restructuring reality).

The first four stages measure anxiety, and the fifth stage measures change. The responses were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.); the higher the score, the higher the level of agreement. The instruments used were tested for reliability and clarity.

Study Participants

The study sample (n = 163) was a randomly selected sample representing the organizational leaders on public organizations within the State of Kuwait.

Procedures

Having obtained the required permissions, researchers distributed the questionnaires to the study participants. When the questionnaires were collected back, they were then codified and processed, using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 2.0). All statistical tests were run at the significance level of 0.05.

Table 1. Correlation coefficient between subscale.

| | | scale1 | scale2 | scale3 | scale4 | scale5 |
|--------|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| scale1 | Recognizing anxiety | 1 | 0.227** | 0.184* | 0.142 | 0.234** |
| | | | 0.004 | 0.019 | 0.070 | 0.003 |
| | | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 |
| scale2 | Researching anxiety | 0.227** | 1 | 0.487** | 0.280** | 0.393** |
| | | 0.004 | | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 |
| scale3 | Reducing anxiety | 0.184* | 0.487** | 1 | 0.451** | 0.363** |
| | | 0.019 | 0.000 | | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| | | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 |
| scale4 | Reconstructing anxiety | 0.142 | 0.280** | 0.451** | 1 | 0.235** |
| | | 0.070 | 0.000 | 0.000 | | 0.003 |
| | | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 |
| scale5 | Restructuring reality | 0.234** | 0.393** | 0.363** | 0.235** | 1 |
| | | 0.003 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.003 | |
| | | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 | 163 |

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Findings and Discussion

The instrument was judged by a panel of experts (five experts) to validate its construct according to the model conceptualization. The agreement among the experts exceeded 80%. The reliability coefficients for the 5Rs instrument were 0.73 for the organizational anxiety scale and 0.57 for the organizational change scale, indicating that the two scales were reliable, taking into consideration that the organizational change scale was composed of three statements only. No negative feedback was reported with respect to the clarity of the instrument used, indicating that the statements were clear and understandable.

For further validation of the obtained data, the correlation coefficients were all positive, statistically significant (except for the correlation between recognizing anxiety and reconstructing anxiety, which was not significant).

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 0.445 ^a | 0.198 | 0.193 | 0.31488 |
| ^a Predictors: (Constant), Organizational change | | | | |

ANOVA^b

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | |
|-------|----------------|--------|-------------|-------|--------|--------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 3.936 | 1 | 3.936 | 39.698 | 0.000 ^a |
| | Residual | 15.963 | 161 | 0.099 | | |
| | Total | 19.899 | 162 | | | |

^a Predictors: (Constant), Organizational change

^b Dependent Variable: Organizational anxiety

The regression analysis was run to assess the whether the total score of the organizational anxiety management can

predict the total score organizational change. The model was significantly predictive ($R^2 = 0.198$, $F = 39.698$, $p = 0.000$), where the unique contribution of the leader’s ability to manage organizational anxiety was 12%.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the current study is to develop an instrument based on the 5Rs model for managing organizational change anxiety. Obtained findings showed that the developed instrument was valid and reliable. Organizational leaders therefore can use the 5Rs model for anxiety management to better facilitate change projects in their organization and manage their employees’ anxieties for better change projects. It is still recommended, however, that the study be replicated using the developed instrument to further its validity and reliability across diverse situations and organizations.

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