

Radboud University Nijmegen

Bachelor Thesis

– Topic 13: Internal communication in organisational change –

Communicating Change in Practice: an Exploratory Study on the Reorganisation of the Dutch National Police

Verandercommunicatie in de praktijk: Een exploratief onderzoek naar de reorganisatie van de Nationale Politie



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Abstract

Research has shown that change is crucial for organisations to stay competitive in their environment. Communication can play a decisive role in making these changes successful. The latter was mostly found in effect studies which researched the effect of communication in retrospect. Based on these findings, models to guide empirical research were proposed. In this field, the manager's perspective on why and how they communicate in times of change has only received little attention. The present study aimed to close this hiatus by means of ten semi-structured interviews with executives that implemented the reorganisation of the Dutch National Police. The findings were then compared to a model proposed by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005). Evidence was found for communication creating trust, certainty and readiness for change. Moreover, two new components were discovered that play a role in change communication: understanding and organisational culture.

1. Introduction

It is crucial for an organisation to change in order to remain competitive in its environment (Okumus & Hemmington, 1998). Nokia and Kodak are good examples to underline this, as they were unable to change and adopt to their environment, leading to the loss of their leading position in the mobile phone and analogue photography industry (Birkinsaw, 2013; Mui, 2012). This demonstrates the importance for organisations to be able to manage change adequately in order to survive. Nevertheless, change results in failure more often than success, as around 70 percent of all attempts to organisational change end in a negative outcome (e.g. Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2008).

Ineffective communication was found to be one of the reasons why organisational change can fail (Kotter, 1996). Several studies have concluded that leaving employees in the dark about changes in their organisation will increase uncertainty (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998), reduce their level of commitment (de Ridder, 2004), and decrease trust in upper management (de Ridder, 2004). Subsequently, ineffective communication is expected to reduce an employee's readiness for change (Elving, 2005). This can pose a threat to organisational change, since its success ultimately depends on willingness to change from every employee (Robertson, Roberts, & Porras, 1993). Communication is thus vital in making organisational change successful.

Many researchers have already discussed the role of communication in organisational change, often in effect studies that analysed the effect of communication in retrospect (e.g. de Ridder, 2004). Others give recommendations based on these findings (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). This means that, ultimately, theory is limited to speculations. The manager's perspective has hardly been discussed yet. How do they decide upon change communication in practice? To what extent do these findings coincide with theory? This study aimed to close the hiatus between theory and practice. It intended to reveal the manager's perspective on how and why change is communicated by means of qualitative exploratory research.

This thesis begins with a theoretical framework that first gives a broader perspective on change management in paragraph 2.1., discusses change communication in 2.2. and its effects in 2.3., resulting in two research questions. Paragraph 3 discusses the research method that was used to answer these questions. The results of this study are described in paragraph 4, and are explained and further discussed in paragraph 5.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Change management

Change is an omnipresent phenomenon in organisations (By, 2005). It is crucial for organisations to change in order to remain competitive in their environment and maintain their right to exist (Okumus & Hemmington, 1998). Consequently, it is important to cope with change adequately. The management of change has been defined as “the process of continually renewing an organi[s]ation’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers” (Moran & Brightman, 2000, p. 66). Since the ability to manage change is a desirable competence, many researchers have examined the management of change (By, 2005).

In his review about change management, By (2005) showed that change could come in all shapes and sizes, thus there are many different theories that address how to manage it. For example, he differentiated change management based on scale, ranging from fine-tuning, the continuous process of bringing plans, actions and individuals in line (Senior as cited in By, 2005), to corporate transformation, which is a drastic shift in the entire organisation (Dunphy & Stace, 1993).

Another way of differentiating change strategies is by analysing how exactly the change comes about (By, 2005). Bamford and Forrester (2003) stated that the most prominent options are planned and emergent. They argued that the emergent approach focuses on continuous change created with employee participation. As this type of change is unstable and uncertain, it cannot be planned (By, 2005). The planned approach shows the necessity of different stages in order for change to be successful (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). The three-step model by Lewin (1947) is an example of the different stages of planned change (By, 2005). According to Lewin (1947), the first step of change involves unfreezing the current status-quo, behaviours, and routines in order to adopt change. In the moving phase, individuals learn new behavioural skills and are delegated new responsibilities. Lastly, this new set of behaviours and responsibilities needs to be established as status-quo (Lewin, 1947).

Boonstra (1991) created a different approach to managing change and dissected two major strategies: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach¹. In the first strategy, managers design change with little room for employee participation. Acceptance of change needs to be established after its implementation, whereas the bottom-up

¹ The Dutch concepts “ontwerpbenadering” and “ontwikkelbenadering” were translated freely to English

strategy aims to generate acceptance earlier (Boonstra, 1991). Since employees are involved in all stages of the change, employee satisfaction should be higher with the bottom-up approach than with the top-down approach (Boonstra, 1991).

Despite the existence of many theories concerning the management of change, less than thirty percent of attempts to organisational change result in a positive outcome (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2008). Kotter (1996) described the most common mistakes that can lead to change failure, and specifically mentioned ineffective communication as one of them. Earlier research (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998) confirmed that failed communication can be a major factor that leads to unsuccessful organisational change. In the following paragraphs, communication and its effects on organisational change are explained in greater detail.

2.2. Change communication

Change communication is another topic that has been discussed extensively in literature. This paragraph first gives a general idea on change communication and then extensively discusses the effect of communication on organisational change by means of a conceptual model developed by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005).

De Ridder (2014), described two different types of organisational communication: task-related and non-task-related. The first detailed the employees' routine responsibilities, whereas the latter dealt with organisational goals and values. Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) stated that, based on this differentiation, change communication could have two different goals: informing employees being the first, and creating a communication climate in which employees can react to change as the second. The first goal entails informing the employees about their tasks, responsibilities and the "what", "how", "when", and "why" of change in the organisation (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). The secondary goal is characterised by participation of employees and creating the opportunity for employees to react to plans (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). It focusses on the employees' relation to fellow employees and the executives.

2.3. The effects of change communication

There has been an extensive amount of research conducted on the effects of communication on organisational change (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; de Ridder, 2004).

These effects were summarised and brought into one conceptual model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) to guide empirical research. It focusses on the feelings that change can evoke among individual employees, and how they can be influenced by means of communication. As Figure 1 below shows, Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) stated that the two different types of change communication could affect employees' uncertainty about change, their commitment to the organisation and their trust in upper management. Together, all five influence the employees' readiness for change. The model and its relations are discussed in further detail and are supported with additional research in the following paragraphs.

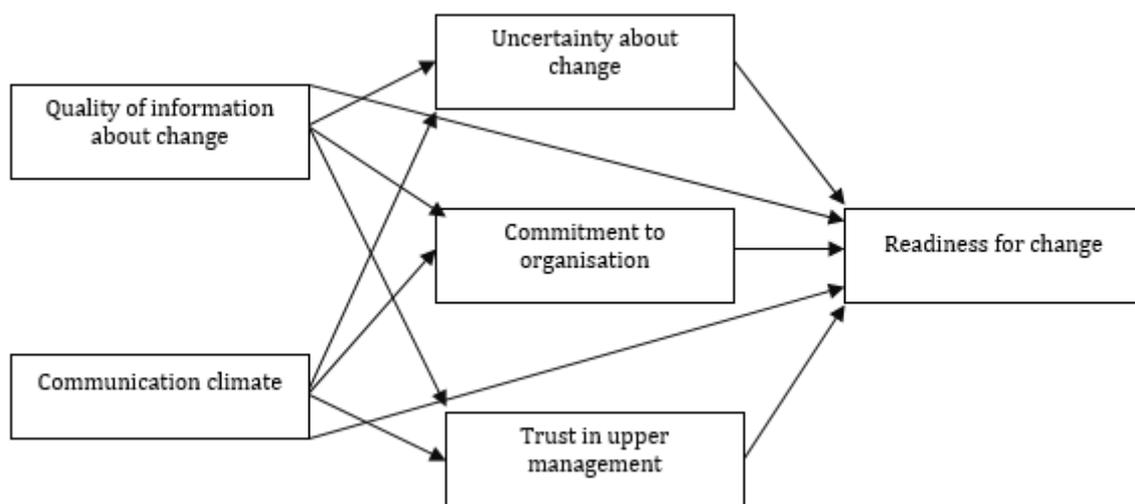


Figure 1. Conceptual model on the effects of change communication (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005)²

2.3.1. Trust

The first component that is expected to be affected directly by communication in Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst's model (2005) is trust. A frequently used and accepted definition (Agote, Aramburu, & Lines, 2016) of this component describes trust as "a psychological state compromising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395).

The importance of trust during organisational change can be underlined with Boonstra's two approaches (1991). Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) argued that trust was important because a large portion of organisational change is implemented

² The Dutch "conceptueel onderzoeksmodel" and its components have been translated freely to English

with a top-down approach. Since employees have little opportunity to participate in this strategy, it is vital that they trust the manager's ability to find the most adequate solution to the problem (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2015).

De Ridder (2004) found that task-related communication affected employees' trust in upper management. The effect study by Agote et al. (2016) found that, by means of informing employees about management's motives for change, and showing the effects of that change on for individual employees, trust can be improved. DiFonzo and Bordia (1998) presented that, in order to maintain trust within the organisation, the manager's action and communication should coincide. On top of that, they found that employees perceived managers to be more trustworthy if they presented both positive and negative effects of change to employees.

2.2.1. Commitment

The second component expected to be affected directly by communication in Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst's model (2005) is commitment. It can be defined as a "force that binds people to organi[s]ations" (van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007, p. 117). Three different types of commitment have been established (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The first is affective commitment, an emotional connection and identification with the organisation. Secondly, employees with strong continuity commitment stay at an organisation because it would be more inconvenient to leave than to stay. Lastly, normative commitment is an obligation that employees perceive to stay with an organisation. Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) expected that more information and an opportunity to react to change could increase commitment. Employees who are highly committed to an organisation could be more ready to change for it (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005).

The proposed relationship between communication and commitment has been confirmed in several studies (e.g. de Ridder, 2004; van Vuuren et al., 2006; Luo, Song, Gebert, & Feng, 2016). Effect studies by de Ridder's (2004) and van Vuuren et al. (2006) both showed that communication can increase affective commitment. Luo et al. (2016) found that a leadership style in which the leader describes the change's benefits on the individual employee significantly influenced affective commitment. In the effect study by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005), affective commitment was influenced by the communication climate.

2.2.2. Uncertainty

According to the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005), the last component that change communication directly affects is uncertainty. This is defined as “the psychological state of doubt about what an event signifies or portends” (DiFonzo et al., 1994, p. 296). Organisational change makes the employees’ future less predictable and therefore creates concern about what consequences change will bring (Callan, 1993). More specifically, there are three different types of uncertainty that can arise during change: strategic, structural and job-related (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). Strategic uncertainty is about the goal and the vision of change, whereas both structural and job-related uncertainty deal with potential consequences for the employee (Bordia et al., 2004). Structural uncertainty refers to responsibilities and tasks, whereas job-related uncertainty deals with uncertainty related to the future existence of the job (Bordia et al., 2004).

According to the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), individuals who are exposed to high uncertainty levels seek information to reduce this feeling. Consequently, employees that feel uncertain during organisational change should seek information as well. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory also states that when communication is increased, uncertainty is reduced (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Indeed, several effect studies (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004; Bordia et al., 2004) have shown that effective communication can reduce both the employee’s knowledge gap and uncertainty. Not closing this gap can lead to rumours because employees might try to satisfy their need for information with speculations, which can harm organisational change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998).

Communication was shown to be most effective in reducing uncertainty when it was used to inform employees early on in the change process (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). Furthermore, employee participation in decision-making was demonstrated to be a means of effective communication (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Bordia et al., 2004).

2.2.3. Readiness for change

The component that is expected to be ultimately affected by communication, trust, commitment, and uncertainty is employee readiness for change (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). It has been defined as “the cognitive precursor to the behaviours of either resistance, or support for, a change effort” (Armenakis & Harris as cited in Elving,

2005). According to Elving (2005), employee support for change can be seen as a continuum with resistance to change at one end and readiness for change at the other. Pol and Swankhuisen (2013) distinguished three different types of resistance during change: reactance (people think that the change will limit their own options), scepticism (people doubt the sincerity of the message) and inertia (people do not feel like changing).

In a model proposed by Elving (2005), readiness for change predicted the success of organisational change. This is because, despite the fact that managers initiate change, Robertson, Roberts, and Porras (1993) found that the employees are ultimately the ones who determine its success. Their study explained that the outcome of proposed organisational change within an organisation ultimately depends on the change in behaviour of every single person within that organisation. This means that it is crucial in a changing organisation for all employees to be ready to change.

Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) also found that the quality of information and perceived uncertainty were both predictors of readiness for change. DiFonzo and Bordia (1998) found that employees are more willing to change if there was minimal uncertainty perceived about change. Another study by Shah, Irani, and Sharif (2017) found that loyalty, the emotional attachment to an organisation and therefore a construct similar to affective commitment, affected how much the employee wanted to contribute to organisational change. Vakola (2014) found that trust and communication climate were related to the employee's readiness for change. This means that evidence is found with regard to the assumption that communication, trust, commitment and uncertainty can influence readiness for change.

2.3. Research question

Many studies have dealt with the role of communication in the organisational change process. Multiple of these examined the effect of communication in retrospect by means of quantitative research (e.g. de Ridder, 2004). Some studies make recommendations and suggestions based on these findings (e.g. DiFonzo and Bordia, 1998), while others create theoretical models to guide empirical research (e.g. Elving, 2005).

According to Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005), managers should communicate to employees during organisational change in order to reduce uncertainty, increase trust, and ensure commitment. They state that this is how management can increase employee readiness for change. This is essential, since change depends on

individual behaviour within an organisation (Robertson et al., 1993). As was shown above in great detail, there is empirical evidence for the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005). However, it is not clear whether these theories are sufficient, or if other components play a role in change communication. In conclusion, there is much theory about change communication, but it is only limited to speculations. Little research has focussed on both how and why change is really communicated in practice.

This study aimed to close the hiatus between theory and practice. It intends to reveal the manager's perspective on how and why change is communicated. Therefore, the research questions of this study were

RQ1: What role does communication play in organisational change from the perspective of a change manager?

RQ2: To what extent does theory differ from practice?

3. Method

3.1. Instrumentation

The research question was answered by means of qualitative research. For this exploratory study, ten semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain insight into the interviewee's perspectives and experiences. All of the interviews started with general questions about the employee and their profession. After that, questions about organisational change in general and the police reorganisation were asked. The interview continued with the topics from the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) (communication to inform, communication climate, uncertainty, commitment, trust and readiness for change). These topics were operationalised in the topic list (appendix), which formed the guideline for the interviews. The topics were ideally brought up by the interviewee; if not, backup questions were used. This was mostly the case for the topics of commitment and trust. In order to avoid guiding the interviewee in a specific direction, it was important that open questions were used. This guaranteed both the neutrality of both the interviewees and their answers, as well as the quality of the results in this study.

3.2. Participants

The interviewees were executives at the Dutch National Police. This organisation was chosen because of their on-going organisational change. In 2011, a law amendment decided the consolidation of 26 regional police corps into one national police corps

(Minister van Veiligheid en Justitie, 2012). This meant that the Dutch police had to be reorganised drastically. In terms of By (2005), the change can be described as planned corporate transformation. However, the change did not take place as planned: it took longer than expected and there was high uncertainty about the professional futures for employees (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, 2015).

The Dutch National Police employ 65,000 persons and are divided into ten different geographical units (Politie, n.d.a). The size of the Dutch National Police created the opportunity to conduct several interviews within the same organisation. By interviewing executives who were working in different units, detailed insights about the reorganisation and its differences and similarities throughout the entire country were gained. This created a more homogenous group than it would if executives from different organisations were interviewed. Therefore, the results from this study are more meaningful for this specific context of the National Police than comparing different changes.



Figure 2. The eleven units of the Dutch National Police (Politie, n.d.b)

In total, ten interviews with executives of the Dutch National Police were held. The executives were not from the upper management and were rather responsible for the implementation of change than its policy. In two cases, the interview was attended by two participants: the main interviewee (executive) was accompanied by a staff employee (the operational management specialist or the operational specialist). This means that the total number of participants was 12. Their age ranged from 40 to 65 and 9 out of the 12 respondents were male. The executives were employed in the following seven of the total ten geographical police units that are shown in Figure 2 above: Noord-Nederland, Oost-

Nederland, Midden-Nederland, Amsterdam, Zeeland and West-Brabant, Oost-Brabant and Limburg.

The executives were employed in several levels of the hierarchy in the Dutch National Police. To give more insight of the scale at which the executives work, a short explanation will follow about the functions. The head of operations is one of the four managers of a geographical unit, for example, Noord-Nederland. They lead the sector heads, who manage a smaller area called “sector” in the unit, for example, Drenthe. These units are separated into teams, e.g. Zuid-Oost Drenthe, which are managed by the team chefs. The teams in these interviews consisted of around 200 employees. The employees in those teams are separated into smaller groups of around thirty employees, who are managed by the operational expert. Figure 3 below gives an overview of the functions in an organisational chart.

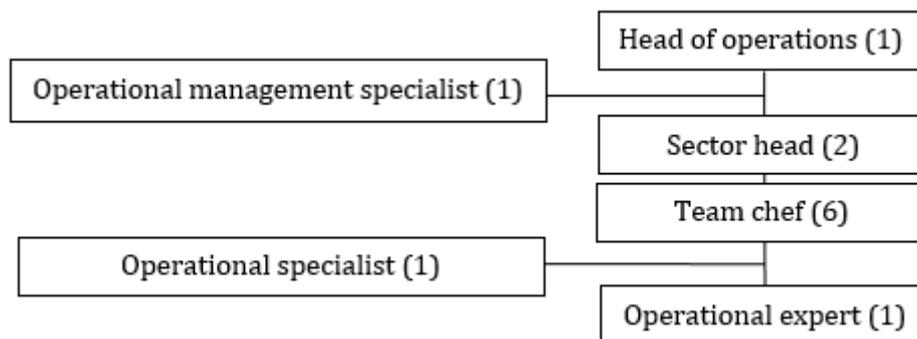


Figure 3. Organisational chart showing the functions of the interviewees and their hierarchy. The number of interviewees in this function is shown between brackets.

3.3. Procedure

The interviews were conducted by six different researchers. Each interview was attended by two of the six researchers. One researcher conducted the actual interview, while the other took notes on the interviewee’s behaviour.

In order to make an interview appointment with the executives, several police offices throughout the country were contacted by telephone, email, or Facebook. They were given a short explanation about the study with the request for interested police executives to take part in an anonymous interview. After that, an appointment for the interview was made if the supervisor was interested. The supervisors were interviewed at their workplace, which means that there was no controlled lab setting. The intention behind this was to help the interviewees feel at ease during the interview.

In order to break the ice, the interviews started with a short small-talk conversation. The interviewees were asked if they agreed to the recording of the interviews and were asked to sign an agreement form. Then, the purpose of the interview was explained. In order to protect the liability of the interviewees and the results, this was not too explicit: the interviewees were told that the interview was about the implication of organisational change in general. The interviewees were told that the interview was about their personal experiences and opinions, which meant that there was no wrong or right answer. This was done in order to encourage the interviewees to speak freely and about their personal thoughts. The topic list (appendix) shows that the interview then continued with general questions about the corporate transformation of the police and its management. After that, the components of the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) were discussed. The interview ended with a few evaluation questions.

The interviews were 45 to 90 minutes in length. This largely depended on how much information the interviewee was willing to share. The ambiance during all the interviews was relaxed. During the interview, the aim was to ask questions that were broad and very general. The strategy used by the interviewers was to ask questions, listen to the answers, summarize and ask deeper questions if necessary.

3.4. Analysis

Since this study was based on earlier theoretical research and tested the conceptual model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005), a deductive approach was used to analyse the interviews. First, the interview recording was transcribed word for word. All relevant fragments for the topics and possible bycatches were coded in a table with the following information: participant, topic, key words, citation, notes and the actual fragment. New topics were created for bycatches. A different researcher ensured that all relevant information from the interview's transcript was coded. Both researchers came to an agreement. Another different researcher checked if all fragments match the given topics and came to an agreement with the first researcher. This guaranteed the intercoder reliability.

All the information from the table was summarised per topic. This procedure was repeated for every interview, resulting in one summary per interview giving information per topic. The summaries were then categorised per topic, resulting in a document

showing what was said per topic per participant. Every researcher individually compared the opinions of every participant per topic in order to find similarities and differences.

4. Results

This section will discuss the results of the interviews based on the elements in the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005). There were several bycatches, including urgency and organisational culture, which will be discussed further in this section.

4.1. Evaluation of the reorganisation

Every interview started with questions about the reorganisation at the Dutch National Police. The interviewees mentioned four different goals for the creation of the National Police: uniting the police units, cutting costs, changing culture, and improving the quality of work. More specifically, the goals related to cutting costs and improving the quality of work seemed to contradict each other. Satisfaction about the reorganisation differed, too. Some interviewees stated that they were content, while one employee stated:

“I have never experienced a reorganisation that was this bad.”

The reasons for dissatisfaction differed as well: participants from rural areas stated that they did not have enough freedom to adapt the plans to their needs, while others stated that there was too much freedom. Some others mentioned the size of the organisation. Nearly all of the participants clearly stated that the reorganisation took too long.

4.2. Change Communication

4.2.1. Inform

All of the participants mentioned that it was important to be honest and open towards employees. Several participants stated that it was important to not only communicate the “what”, but also the “why” in order for employees to understand the reasons for change. However, where one of the participants stated that it would be best to share every small step with the team, another stated that it is important to first be certain about the information. This was because when things changed, uncertainty would arise among the employees. Therefore, waiting for security about the information was more important to this participant than communicating timely.

Both the deficient communication from the upper management and informing employees were often mentioned in the same breath:

“That is the most important thing, that you know on time and therefore can communicate timely time and take [employees] along.”

The executives believed that they were often informed late in the process, which meant that there was no opportunity for them to inform the employees timely, despite having the intention. It was also found difficult to communicate with employees because of the complexity of the reorganisation and that the consequences were different for every person.

The participants mentioned several methods to inform their employees. Most of them mentioned newsletters and mail, intranet, personal (one-on-one) conversations and larger group meetings. Others chose to inform their employees during briefings. Half of the team chefs mentioned that they informed employees through the operational experts, but also that sometimes they found this to be insufficient. The operational experts occasionally (unknowingly) formed a barrier between the employees and the team chef because they communicated insufficiently or shared their own dissatisfactions. One of the team chefs stated:

“Because I basically do not trust anybody, I participated in all the layers of the organisation.”

4.2.2. Communication climate

The executives used several means in order to create opportunities for employees to react to change: team meetings, work sessions and personal conversations were mentioned many times. One of the sector heads disclosed that they had created a buddy system to support employees in need of extra help. For some of the team chefs, it was also important to have informal conversations that are not work-related, for example, about relationships. This helped to reduce the distance between an executive and the employees.

Many interviews showed that it was important to give the “what”, but let the employees decide the “how”:

“You try to give frames for the people to build in.”

Participation, entrepreneurship, and ownership were encouraged in the organisation. This means that several executives let their employees make important decisions. An example of this is a team chef who let the employees decide the design of the interior of the new police station:

“That gave us a stunning report that we did not interfere with at all, even though it is attractive to exert your influence being a team chef.”

However, it is also important to note that the operational expert stated that he did not use participation during the reorganisation. This was not because he did not want to, but because he did not have a say himself:

“If I create the impression that you can participate but everything has already been decided, then we will not invest time in that. Because you will be disappointed.”

4.3. *Effects of change communication*

4.3.1. *Uncertainty*

Only one participant did not notice any uncertainty among his employees, but all of the others did. The participant without uncertainty was an operational expert who only worked with police agents on the street. Neither the work nor its location was going to change drastically for them. Most of the other participants explained that uncertainty arose because of the exact details of their job, such as:

“Where will I work? What will I do? Who will be my chef?”

Also, several participants mentioned that some uncertainty arose regarding the potential to lose their job, while other interviewees stated that the police offered a job guarantee, meaning that losing a job would not be possible.

All participants stated that uncertainty created resistance among the team members, which was why it was important to reduce it. According to the interviewees, this can be done by informing the employees clearly about the reorganisation and its impact on each individual employee. The most frequently mentioned means to do so were personal conversations. Despite these attempts, some interviewees stated that at least some uncertainty always exists.

4.3.2. *Commitment*

With regard to the commitment, many interviews showed that employees feel connected to their job rather than to the organisation itself. One participant stated

“I once had someone crying in here who said: ‘When are we going to catch thieves again?’ The job is what truly connects. The content of the job.”

The participant explained that employees felt committed to their work, but that the reorganisation’s impact on it led to a decrease. This was something he noticed because of a strong increase in absence through illness. Several other interviewees had noticed the decrease in commitment as well. Some participants stated that commitment to their own team was very strong but not so much in relation to other teams, other units or the national police itself. One participant mentioned that he would rather attribute the change in commitment to a change in generations than to the reorganisation: people do not have lifetime jobs anymore nowadays. He noticed that commitment was high enough and did not take any actions to change it:

“If we received a notification that there is a thief in a housing estate, you would see all the cobble stones flying up and every car would be gone and they would try everything to catch that thief.”

As to how commitment is created in the national police, several interviewees mentioned that commitment existed because police officers felt a strong intrinsic motivation to serve their country and its citizens:

“Because there is something like an intrinsic motivation in police employees to do the right thing for the [organisation’s] environment.”

For extrinsic factors, they mentioned the certainty that the national police offers in terms of the job guarantee that was discussed earlier. When uncertainty arose because of reorganisation, employees felt unassured about that guarantee and felt less committed. One participant also stated that employees feel committed because of the lack of other options; since working at the police requires very specific education, employees believe that they have no opportunities to work for different organisations. This dependence also creates the feeling of commitment:

“So people see only very little mobility in their own ability. [...] I can only stay with the police or something like that [...]. So the commitment is more of a dependence.”

Several participants mentioned that it was important to have personal conversations with employees who were considering the decision to leave the organisation. Only one participant mentioned a communicative means for affecting commitment, which was a programme to increase commitment with the police and the citizens.

4.3.3. Trust

Several interviewees stated that they think their employees trust them. An important indicator for these statements were how often employees asked for help and also the employee satisfaction survey. There were differences among the executives about the function of trust: one participant stated that

“Trust has nothing to do with reorganisations.”

He explained that trust is always important in an organisation and that trust is not a tool that you should suddenly start to use because the organisation is changing. Others did mention trust as an important factor in reorganisations.

Some interviewees mentioned that they attempted to create trust by having personal conversations and being open and honest. Others mentioned that trust can be created by giving employees responsibilities and letting them participate.

“So the how-question is very important. You have to leave that to [the employees]. Then you’re giving the responsibility to them.”

Several participants mentioned the importance of actions: getting up at night when the team is having problems, protecting the employees, and trying to get the employees into new educating courses were all means that are different from communication but could still create trust.

4.3.4. Resistance – readiness for change

Except for one, all of the participants mentioned that they had experienced resistance. Among the participants who had experienced resistance, this was often because employees did not understand why they had to change. Changes were often perceived as requirements (“musts”) instead of new and attractive opportunities. In order to change

this, the interviewees explained that they gave the employees an opportunity to participate:

“When you involve the employees and they can have their own influence, you obviously notice that things go way easier.”

By giving employees a say when making important decisions, understanding and enthusiasm were created. This also prevented negative reactions later in the process, since the employees had decided themselves what the outcome should look like. This is explained in more detail in 4.4.1. Some participants also simply did not want to change, which was said to be a type of the organisational culture at the national police. This will be further elaborated upon 4.4.2. Experienced fear and uncertainty led to an increase in resistance among employees.

In the few cases of heavy resistance (e.g. ignoring the chef or not doing work), a direct confrontation was needed. The participants explained that their communication goal was also adjusted according to the resistance that they experienced. For example, if executives are merely informing at first and then experience high resistance, they then adopt their communication to more participation. The perceived resistance influences the communication strategy.

The one interviewee who stated that there was no resistance was the operational expert who also stated that there was no uncertainty in his team. Because he and his team felt like there was no opportunity for them to participate or interact, they felt acquiescence. The interviewee mentioned an utterance that was used very frequently in his team:

“We cannot change anything about it anyways.”

The employees felt discontented about certain changes that were made in the National Police, but they did not try to change it or show resistance because it would not have any effect. Serving the citizens was more important than attempting to change the reorganisation. Dissatisfaction did not directly mean that employees showed resistance.

4.4. *Bycatches*

4.4.1. Understanding

A concept that was not represented in the conceptual model but played a role in the conversations was understanding. Many interviewees mentioned that it is important to explain to employees why it is necessary to change. By creating understanding for the motives, a sense of urgency and enthusiasm were created among the employees.

Several participants mentioned that it was vital that the employees could understand the change, why it is logical and how it is beneficial to the organisation but most importantly to the citizen. This led to the employees feeling less resistance towards change.

“When you can explain why [change] would improve something for the citizen, that we will deliver more quality or that we will do other things in order to better inform the citizen, then they will understand why we do it and it will not be perceived as a “must” that much.”

Also, it was important to create understanding for the difficult position of the executive. By giving the opportunity to react and participate, the employees could stand in the team chef's shoes and see how difficult the position is:

“When they are discussing in groups and puzzling, they recognize how incredibly difficult it is to look in the crystal ball.”

Some interviewees mentioned also that if the employees have this information, they see that the executive is not the culprit, but instead actually holds a heat shield above his employees by saying “no” to certain change topics. By informing and creating communication with room for participation, understanding was established, which could result in less resistance.

4.4.2. Organisational culture

Many executives mentioned that changing the culture was a crucial part of the reorganisation. One participant stated that

“Let's say, the majority among us does not really like change.”

Another participant explained that the older employees in the police were especially stubborn and did not like change or taking the initiative. This was unbeneficial to organisational change.

One team chef gave a clear explanation about how he aimed to change the culture in his team. He wanted to do this by holding conversations with the employees and explaining them which behaviour is expected from them. He stated that

“If you speak to people about their behaviour and give feedback about it, you ultimately change culture. Because culture is nothing more or less than how we do the things that we all do together.”

The team chef also mentioned that, due to the hierarchical structure in some of the police units, employees think that they only have to execute the tasks. The team chef now wanted to change this part of the culture by motivating the employees to take a more active stance and give their own suggestions.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study sought to shed light on the manager’s perspective on change communication and investigate whether it is used in the way that is proposed in other studies. Until now, research on change communication mainly consisted of effect studies (e.g. de Ridder, 2004) or gave suggestions based on these findings (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). The manager’s perspective was never really taken into consideration. This study gave insights on how the managers view change communication by means of ten interviews with executives of the Dutch National Police. In order to show the extent to which the theory coincides with practice, this section will first discuss and explain similarities between both the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) as well as other earlier studies, and this study, then the differences and give additions to the model. These findings will then be summarised in a new model. Lastly, limitations and suggestions for further research will be discussed.

As the results showed, the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) can form a basis for the role of communication during organisational change. Communication to inform and to create a climate with opportunities for employees to react were both discussed extensively in all interviews. However, the executives were restricted in the execution of their intentions because of both the limited information

given by the upper management and the 'barrier' of operational experts. The different levels of the organisation caused noise when communicating.

Communication was found to influence the readiness for change in several ways. Resistance mostly existed of two out of the different types described by Pol and Swankhuisen (2013): reactance (employees were afraid of the consequences that change would have for them) and inertia (employees did not feel like changing). The inertia was largely attributed to organisational culture. In earlier effect studies, only informing was shown to reduce resistance (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). However, the interviews showed that the communication climate was used to reduce resistance as well; giving the employees an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process created enthusiasm, understanding and prevented complaints. This means that the interviews support the relation between the communication climate and readiness for change from the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005).

With regard to uncertainty, the interviewees mentioned all types of uncertainty described by Bordia et al. (2004). Although many described structural uncertainty, some others also mentioned job-related uncertainty. This is in contrast to the job guarantee that several other participants mentioned. Especially the executives themselves showed strategic uncertainty, as the goal of the organisation was unclear to them:

“For me, this is the most unclear and ambiguous reorganisation that the Dutch government ever experienced. [...] Everyone basically lost why we started.”

This uncertainty was also found among the employees, as they sometimes did not understand why certain changes were made. For all types of uncertainty, both communication goals played an important role, similar to what was found in effect studies (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 2004). Uncertainty was found to influence the readiness for change, which already had been found by several effect studies (e.g. Bordia et al., 2004).

Moreover, it was found that trust can be increased by giving the employees their own responsibilities and the opportunity to participate and react. Honesty (communication to inform) increased the trust in upper management as well, which was found also found in an empirical study by de Ridder (2004). However, the executives stated that it also important to make effort for the employees when they need assistance. Earlier research also showed that supervisory support was important in creating trust among employees (e.g. Zhang, Tsui, Song, Li & Lia, 2008). Communication is thus not the

only means by which trust can be created. Only two interviewees stated that trust was important in the reorganisation, which means that the confirmation between trust and readiness for change is rather weak.

Some components from the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005) were neither denied nor confirmed by the findings of this study. Commitment was viewed differently by the executives than it was in theory: the intrinsic motivation to serve the citizens was mentioned many times and appears to play an important role. However, this type of commitment cannot be categorised in one of the three types of commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991). The commitment to the organisation was determined by the dependence on the national police: the costs of leaving the organisation were perceived to be greater than the benefits, which resembles the continuity commitment. Affective commitment existed on the level of the team but not so much for the entire organisation. In conclusion, the employees do not work at the police because they like the organisation (affective commitment) or because they feel obligated (normative), but because they think that leaving would be more inconvenient than staying (continuity) and they feel high intrinsic motivation.

Only in one out of ten of the interviews were communicative actions explicitly mentioned in relation to commitment. The team had created a programme to increase commitment to the team and citizens. None of the interviewees stated that communication did not have any influence on commitment. This means that the relationship between communication and commitment has neither been confirmed nor denied. This is in contrast to earlier research, which found that informing employees (de Ridder, 2004; van Vuuren et al., 2006; Luo et al., 2016) and creating opportunity to react (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005) affected commitment. A possible explanation for this would be that the previously mentioned studies found the relationship for affective commitment, which was low at the Dutch National Police. One could assume that these components are less influenced by external factors such as communication, since intrinsic motivation already comes from within and continuity commitment existed partly due to the job guarantee.

The relation between commitment and resistance to change has neither been confirmed nor denied, which is in contrast to Shah et al. (2017), who found that commitment affected how much employees wanted to contribute to organisational change. However, these findings were for affective commitment, whereas the police

employees rather showed intrinsic motivation and continuity commitment. The interviewees did state that the lack of participation in combination with the intrinsic motivation created acquiescence: because I cannot change anything and protecting the citizen is more important, I will not show any resistance.

Some additions to the model could make it more suitable for the particular change situation at the Dutch National Police. The model now describes change communication as having two separate goals: informing, and creating a communication climate with opportunities for employees to react. In this study, it appeared as if the two go hand in hand, instead of being two separate goals, as is stated in the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005). It also became clear that communication does not only affect resistance to change, but that resistance also affects the communication style. This interaction could be a good addition to the model, since it shows the dynamism of change communication and the anticipation on the employees' behaviour.

Another addition that could be made is the relation between uncertainty and commitment. The interviews showed that employees felt committed to the organisation because of the certainty in form of job guarantee. The interviewees stated that their employees felt a reduction of that certainty, which led to a reduction in commitment. The relationship between uncertainty and commitment implied by the results was not represented in the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005).

On top of these additions to the existing components, understanding and organisational culture were shown to be important as well in the interviews. Giving information about why organisational change is necessary created understanding for the importance and the logic of the change. The opportunity to participate created understanding as well and sometimes even enthusiasm. These factors then increased the readiness for change. Understanding could form a useful addition to the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005).

The other component that was mentioned several times was organisational culture. In contrast to the previously mentioned components that deal with individual feelings and processes, this component plays a role on the organisational level. The culture in the organisation was found to negatively influence the readiness for change. The interviews showed that in general, police employees do not like change and are not willing to change. Inertia appeared to be a part of the police culture. This means that culture could affect readiness for change. In terms of the three-step change model by

Lewin (1947), this means that the organisational culture can make it difficult to make the first step: unfreezing the employees out of their current routine and patterns. However, an interviewee stated that communication can help to change the behaviour and ultimately the culture in the organisation. This implies that there could be a relationship between communication and organisational culture.

Concluding the information above, the executive's perspective has revealed differences and similarities to existing theory. However, because of the limitation in the execution of the intentions of the executives, the model is applicable to this situation to only a certain extent. New additions to existing theory were made: understanding and organisational culture. To give a better overview of these findings, the new model in Figure five was made. The relations that were confirmed in the interview are shown as normal arrows, the relations that have neither been confirmed nor denied are shown as striped arrows. The new components and relations were added to the model as well.

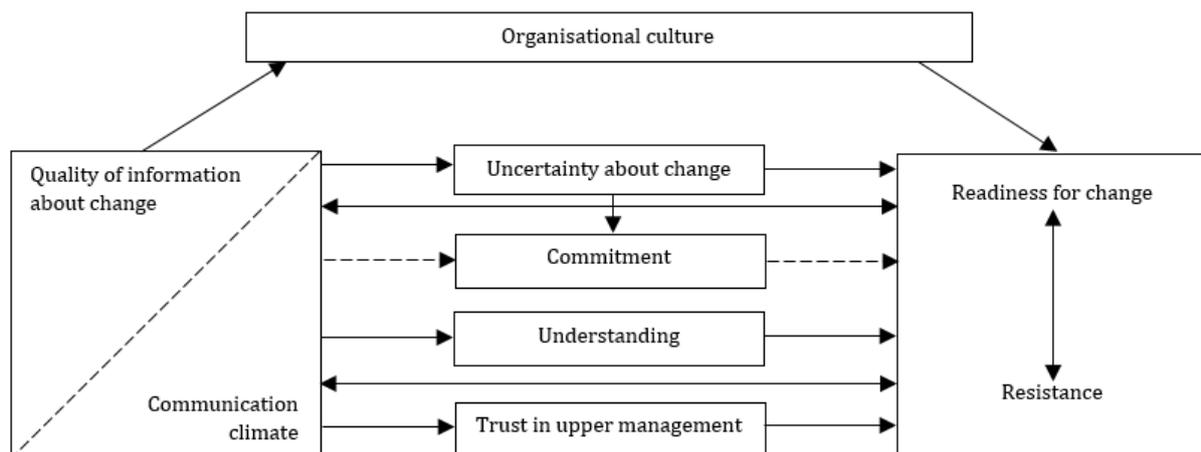


Figure 4. New proposed model based on the manager's perspective on change communication and the model by Elving and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2005).

Limitations and further research

A limitation to this study is that the findings are restricted to one very specific context: the reorganisation of the Dutch National Police. This makes the findings strong for this specific context, but could mean that they would differ in other contexts. Referring back to By's scales (2005), this reorganisation was a form of planned corporate transformation. The model could be different for change on a smaller scale, such as fine-tuning, or for emergent changes. This leads to the suggestion that further qualitative research could

investigate whether similar results would be found in other types of organisational change. On top of that, further quantitative research could seek to find empirical confirmations of the new concepts that were suggested in this study.

Another limitation to this study is that, despite the fact that the police reorganisation was still on-going, many aspects were discussed in retrospect. To gain even more insights in the process of decision-making in the area of change communication, it would be interesting for further research to accompany the process of creating change communication as well. In this way, the findings would not be influenced by knowing if the communicative means were successful, and therefore give an even truer reflection of the manager's intentions.

Practical implications

This study has shown that, from the perspective of the executives, communication plays an important role in organisational change. To cite one of the interviewees of this study:

“There is no change without communication.”

The findings can be relevant for the executives at the Dutch National Police, especially since the reorganisation is still on-going. These findings can be used to optimise their communication towards the employees. Also, it can offer extra input to reflect their own communication strategy. Several interviewees have already shown interest in the findings of this study.

Moreover, this study can be useful for executives that are planning to change their organisation, especially for changes on a similar scale to the Dutch National Police, being corporate transformation (By, 2005). They can use the findings to plan their reorganisation and prevent resistance to change as much as possible.

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6. Appendix

A. Topic List

1. Introduction

- a. Start with small talk
- b. Introduction of the interviewers (name, educational programme), explain what the study is about

This interview is for our bachelor's thesis. We are interested in the question how change is implemented in practice. This is an interesting topic since there is a great deal of literature about change in organisations, but there is not (yet) a study that focusses on the manager's perspective on how and why they implemented change.

- c. Ask interviewee for a short introduction about him-/herself: education, background, function, career path
- d. Let interviewee sign the official document that states
 - i. That he agrees to the recording of the interview
 - ii. That data such as the police unit or district can be used, but that names will remain anonymous for privacy reasons
- e. Ask the interviewee if:
 - i. They want to receive the completed thesis
 - ii. If there are any questions. If not, the interview will start.

2. General questions about organisational change and the reorganisation of the Dutch National Police

- a. What do you think is organisational change?

Check if this is in line with the definition by Moran and Brightman
- b. Can you tell something about the reorganisation at the Dutch National Police?
- c. What was / is your role during that reorganisation?
- d. What did you think about this reorganisation? Did you support it?
- e. What did you do in order to make the reorganisation as successful as possible?

Is important to continue asking deeper questions in order to make the interviewee mention communication and the components by himself. If this does not happen, the following back-up questions can be asked

3. Communication

- a. What did you do in the area of communication to make the implementation of change as successful as possible? And: why did you do it that way?

Backup questions

- b. To what extent did you try to inform the employees about the change? Can you give an example? And why did you do this?
 - i. See if the interviewee mentions reducing uncertainty or resistance or increasing trust or commitment. Ask deeper questions if possible.
- c. To what extent did you give your employees the opportunity to react to the changes? Can you give an example? And why did you do this?
 - i. See if the interviewee mentions reducing uncertainty or resistance or increasing trust or commitment. Ask deeper questions if possible.

4. Back-up questions resistance

- a. To what extent did you experience resistance?
- b. How did you try to reduce this?
- c. To what extent were the employees – from your perspective – positive about the changes? To what extent did they want an implementation? How did you try to reduce or increase these feelings?
- d. To what extent did the employees try to facilitate or complicate the implementation of these changes? How did you try to reduce or increase these feelings?
- e. To what extent do you have the impression that your employees were able to change?

5. Back-up questions trust

- a. To what extent do you have the impressions that your employees trust you?
- b. Why do you have this impression?
- c. To what extent do your employees think that you do the right thing?
- d. How did you try to influence that? And how did you really do it?

6. Back-up questions commitment

- a. To what extent do you think that the employees feel committed to the organisation?
- b. What communicative role did you play with regard to these feelings?
- c. To what extent did employees consider leaving the organisation? How did you try to influence this?

7. Back-up questions uncertainty

- a. To what extent did you notice any uncertainty among your employees?
- b. To what extent did you try to influence this feeling? How did you do this?

8. Final questions

- a. To what extent were you satisfied about the reorganisation? Why?
- b. To what extent are you happy about the results so far?
- c. What could you have improved upon during the reorganisation?
- d. How do you experience the implementation of the changes by your executives?
- e. If you had to paint the perfect picture, what would the organisational communication look like during organisational change?

Bijlage A. Verklaring geen fraude en plagiaat

Print en onderteken dit *Verklaring geen fraude en plagiaat* formulier en voeg dit formulier als laatste bijlage toe aan de eindversie van de bachelorscriptie die in papieren versie wordt ingeleverd bij de eerste begeleider.

Ondergetekende
[Voornaam, achternaam en studentnummer],

Etienne VOS 54488598

Bachelorstudent Communicatie- en Informatiewetenschappen aan de Letterenfaculteit van de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, verklaart met ondertekening van dit formulier het volgende:

- a. Ik verklaar hiermee dat ik kennis heb genomen van de facultaire handleiding (www.ru.nl/stip/regels-richtlijnen/fraude-plagiaat), en van artikel 16 "Fraude en plagiaat" in de Onderwijs- en Examenregeling voor de BA-opleiding Communicatie- en Informatiewetenschappen.
- b. Ik verklaar tevens dat ik **alleen teksten heb ingeleverd die ik in eigen woorden** geschreven heb en dat ik daarin de regels heb toegepast van het citeren, parafaseren en verwijzen volgens het Vademecum Rapporteren.
- c. Ik verklaar hiermee ook dat ik **geen teksten heb ingeleverd die ik reeds ingeleverd heb in het kader van de tentaminering van een ander examenonderdeel van deze of een andere opleiding zonder uitdrukkelijke toestemming van mijn scriptiebegeleider.**
- d. Ik verklaar dat ik de onderzoeksdata, of mijn onderdeel daarvan, **die zijn beschreven in de BA-scriptie daadwerkelijk empirisch heb verkregen en op een wetenschappelijk verantwoordelijke manier heb verwerkt.**

Plaats + datum

Nijmegen, 6 juni 2017

Handtekening

Etienne VOS