

## Is It Crucial to Use Information-Based Theory in Explaining Attitude towards Change?

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**Abstract** - The purpose of this article is to describe the various theories used in research on attitudes to change. Theoretical framework that has been used could be grouped into three perspectives, which are based on social influence, individual differences, and information. Based on literature review in that three perspectives, there is a theoretical gap in the perspective of information, however it is not in the first two. Accordingly, authors recommend the use of information perspectives, particularly focus on theory of information framing when to do attitude research. This needs to be done not only to clarify the effect of information factors on attitudes towards change, but also to develop research based on information theory in the future.

**Keywords:** attitude towards change; social influence-based theory; individual difference-based theory; information-based theory.

### INTRODUCTION

In general organization would continually design and execute several change programs (Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012; Shin, 2013). It is implemented in order to adapt with the dynamic environment (Liu & Perrewe, 2005; Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). Nevertheless, not all change programs could be implemented as planned (Knippenberg, Martin, & Tyler, 2006; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Kuntz & Gomes, 2012). Previous studies found that the success of any change programs is influenced by attitudes towards the changes (Lines, 2005; Herold, Fedor, & Caldwell, 2007; Kuntz & Gomes, 2012; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Positive attitudes increase such a success (Wharton & Brunetto, 2007; Hornung & Rousseau, 2007) and negative attitudes cause failures in the implementation of change programs (Neiva, Ros, & Tores da Paz, 2005; Danisman, 2010). To make such change programs able to be implemented as planned, organizations should grow up some positive attitudes towards changes among their members (Oreg, 2003; Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2008).

There are some theories that may be used to explain the antecedent of attitudes towards change, namely social influence-based theory, individual difference-based theory, and information-based theory. First, the social influence-based theory includes social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), and social information processing approach (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). According to the social exchange theory, attitude is considered as the function of reciprocal social relationship (Emerson, 1976; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) generating interdependent responsibility and characteristics among those in a social relation (Cropanzano &

Mitchell, 2005). In some researches, it is revealed that employees' positive attitudes towards any changes is response to some good treatment they get from their leader (Wharton & Brunetto, 2007; Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). The social identity theory, explains how one's conception is influenced by his/her individual member status in his/her social group (Tajfel, 1982). An individual in the high level of organizational identification significantly shows a more positive attitude towards organizational changes (Knippenberg, Martin, & Tyler, 2006). The social information processing approach, explains that an attitude is adaptively formed in accordance with any information one gets from others (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In a research it is found that any comment or opinion from a credible source may give a very strong effect on employees' attitudes towards changes (Ellis, 1992).

Second, an individual difference-based theory; covers the self regulation theory (Bandura, 1977), the traits personality perspective (Tsaousis, 1999), and the theory of personal values (Schwartz, 1992). This group argues that an attitude formed is potentially from oneself (Oreg, 2006). The self regulation theory suggests that an individual has different ability in reaching a set goal (Bandura, 1991, 1999). An employee who thinks that he may be able to face some changes possesses more capability in setting a goal and shows more serious efforts in succeeding organizational change programs (Kuntz & Gomes, 2012). The traits personality perspective explains that internally an individual possesses some tendency to be stable to refuse or to accept any organizational change programs (Oreg, 2003). Vakola, Tsaousis and Nikolaou (2004) using the five factor model, reveal that traits are related to positive attitudes towards change namely extraversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, and openness to experience; but are negatively correlated with neuroticism. The theory of personal values explains that attitudes are influenced by personal values (Sverdluk & Oreg, 2009). Personal values are standards serving as a social justification about certain attitudes (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). In a research, an openness to change values and conservation values respectively are positively and negatively correlated with one's will to support organizational changes (Kwang, Ang, Ooi, & Leng, 2005).

Third, the information-based theory; covers the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), information processing approach (Kuvaas, 2002), behavioral decision making approach (Kuvaas, 2002), and schematic approach (Fiske & Tylor, 1984). The uncertainty reduction theory regards that an individual always wants to reduce any uncertain situation by seeking information available in one's environment (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The more information, the more possibilities to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity will be; then this will influence one's acceptance to organizational changes (Ellis, 1992; Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). According to the information processing approach, the more information, the more raw materials are used to interpret and to understand any facts in an environment (Kuvaas, 2002). Any addition of the amount of information also influences some knowledge and also changes an individual's perception (Kuvaas, 2002).

In contrast with the two explanations above, according to the behavioral decision making approach, the amount of information will not reduce any uncertainty and ambiguity, even spoil any decision-making process and result in some overloading amount of information (Kuvaas, 2002). The overloading amount of information may deviate any attention into unessential information (Eppler & Mengis, 2004) and cause some contradiction among information (Daft & Lengel, 1993). According to Oreg (2006), a large amount of information is as bad as little amount of information both may cause some resistance to organizational change programs. According to the schematic approach (Fiske & Tylor, 1984), since an individual has possessed a scheme of organizational changes, it is merely a certain aspect one pays attention to, although a large amount of information exists, but not all are taken (Bartunek & Moch, 1987). In other words, a large amount of information is not important according to the schematic approach (Bartunek & Moch, 1987).

It can be concluded that there is an argument whether or not the quantity of information is important among the information-based theory. Because of that theoretical gap, it is suggested to do a research more focused on an information framing which is how the essentially same information is presented or framed in other fashions (Oreg, 2006; Liu & Perrew, 2005). A research on the effects of information framing on attitudes towards an organizational change setting has not much been paid attention (Oreg, 2006), though the concept of information framing might potentially be

able to predict perceptions, decision making and individual attitudes (Merilainen & Vos, 2013; Mandel, 2014). Information framing may allow for the information processing (Hallahan, 1999). Individual tends to use cognitive heuristic or the rule of the thumb when encountering any information framing (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The effect of any information framing on attitudes according to Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson (1997) is not towards some changes in the belief in the information substance but the weighing of values to the framed information. If any information framing may result in positive evaluation, positive attitudes will be produced, whereas if the information framing may bear some negative evaluation, negative attitudes will be generated. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). Following this line of thought, then it is necessary to use information base theory on attitude towards change study.

#### ***Information Factor and Attitudes toward change***

In some researches it is found that the information factor may give strong effects on attitudes towards organizational changes programs (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Liu & Perrew, 2005). According to Wanberg dan Banas (2000), information plays very vital roles in the context of organizational changes. Without information, employees will not know exactly what will happens and it may cause their feelings to be suppressed (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). In any situation with no information, employees usually rely on rumors (Napier, Simon, & Stratton, 1989). Such a condition also makes them look for information out of organization (Richardson & Denton, 1996). Rumors and information from outer sources may trigger biases in perception, and also cynical attitudes (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997), and resistance to organizational changes (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005).

The main objective of giving information is that one knows and may anticipate any changes that might happen, any consequences arise, and any new roles one plays in the process of the change (Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). Information may also reduce any uncertainty (Kramer, 1993; Miller & Monge, 1985; Jimmieeson, Terry, & Callan, 2004; Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008) and increase the level of efficacy (Terry & Jimmieeson, 2003) during the process of organizational changes. Information availability is positively correlated with acceptance (Wanberg & Banas, 2000) and cooperation during the process of the change (Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). Even, Miller dan Monge (1985) found that it is better to have little, though negative information than none.

One of the alternative theories that may be used to explain the effect of information on the organizational change programs is the expectancy value model [EVM] of attitude proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The EVM considers that any attitude is from belief in the magnitude of either positive or negative value possessed by the object of attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The object of attitude believed has positive consequences, bearing favorable attitudes, negative ones, unfavorable attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Positive or negative evaluation of an object of

attitude is based on any information one receives (Ajzen, 1991, 2011; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Information on the value of the object of attitude is a basic factor in the EVM. Information may reinforce or weaken belief, where this then influences one's attitude towards the object of attitude (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

### ***How do information framing affects attitudes***

Sometimes one wants to do something because of the information framing instead of information substance factors (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hallahan, 1999; Merilainen & Vos, 2013). Though differently framed, the meaning of information remains the same (Merilainen & Vos, 2013). Interestingly, one may be influenced by information framing. This fact is considered as evidence that there is an irrationality side in human mind when one is making a decision (Mandel, 2014; Schlotmann & Tring, 2005). There some theories that may be adopted to explain why one is influenced by information framing.

According to the prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), a positively framed information causes an individual has a tendency to choose an alternative with sure gain than uncertain gamble. This tendency is called as risk aversion. But when an information is negatively framed, most people choose risky gamble than sure loss; it is called as risk seeking (Mandel, 2014; Peng, Miao, Feng, & Xiao, 2013; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Pinon & Gambarara, 2005). According to the simple cue effect perspective, information which is positively frame tends to be more quickly reacted to (Smith & Petty, 1996), much more easily processed in the cognitive domain (Dunegan, 1993), and more persuading to individuals (Petty & Wegener, 1998). One tends to have some favorable impression to the meat which is positively described (75% fat free) than that negatively described (25% fat) (Levin, 1987). The negativity bias hypothesis perspectivestates that any information which is negatively framed tends to be more strongly reacted to (Dunegan, 1993; Gonzales, Dana, Koshino, & Just, 2005; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), carefully ad seriously processed, and to have very strong effects on attitudes (Smith & Petty, 1996; Petty & Wegener, 1998).

The explanations given by the prospect theory, simple cue effect and the negativity bias hypothesis seems incoherent because it is unclear which frame more determines attitudes. It looks that it is necessary to explore other perspectives which are stronger. Some researchers state that the expectancy value model of attitude (EVM) perspective (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008) seems to be able to solve the problem. The EVM perspective assumes that information framing works by activating information saved in an individual memory (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). Information framing does not serve as supplying new information on an issue, but weighing any consideration or consequences related to the issue (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Chong & Druckman, 2007). The weight of an issue may be from anything arousing

motivation, attracting attention, becoming one's interests and need (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). In the EVM perspective, attitude is not merely influenced by the framing valence, but more caused by the magnitude of value of the object of attitude described in the framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008; Ajzen, 1991; Brinol & Petty, 2012).

On the base of the meta analysis, two framing strategies widely used as communication strategy are found, namely action framing and attribute framing (Pinon & Gambarara, 2005; Merilainen & Vos, 2013). Action framing strategy is a model of conveying information focused on whether it is important or not to do a certain action with its consequence accompanying the action (Hallahan, 1999). Attribute framing strategy is the model of delivering information on the quality of object, event, or persons under negative or positive perspectives (Hallahan, 1999; Pinon & Gambarara, 2005; Merilainen & Vos, 2013).

Information arranged using the action framing may be seen in a research by Peng, Li, Miao, Feng dan Xiao (2013, p.163); which is positively arranged :

*“ Doctor tells you that although you particularly like to eat bacon, if you stop eating, your body cholesterol content would be significantly reduced, and thus the possibility of suffering from cardiovascular disease would be greatly reduced. Would you continue to eat bacon? ”,*

and negatively arranged:

*“Doctor tells you that although you particularly like to eat bacon, if you continue to eat, your body cholesterol content will significantly rise, and thus the possibility of suffering from cardiovascular disease would be greatly increased. Would you continue to eat bacon?”*

Research results indicate that subjects with positive action framing strategy shows higher willingness to obey doctors' advices than those with negative framing strategy (Peng, Li, Miao, Feng, & Xiao, 2013). Based on the EVM perspective, less risky situation or the cholesterol content reduction and heart diseases avoidance are considered to be more beneficial than higher risks in diseases. On the basis of theoretical studies and research results on the relations between positive (negative) action framing and attitude, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Positive action framing positively affects attitudes towards change.

Hypothesis 1b: Negative action framing negatively affects attitudes towards change.

Peng, Li, Miao, Feng dan Xiao (2013, p.163) arrange information positively in the attribute framing (*“100 patients taking one kind of medicine, 70 patients became better. How would you evaluate the drug effect?”*) and also negatively (*“100 patients taking one kind of medicine, 30 patients didn't become better. How would you evaluate the drug effect?”*). Both attribute framings are presented to two different groups. The result is that the subjects receiving positive

attribute framing tend to make more positive evaluation than those receiving negative attribute framing (Peng, Li, Miao, Feng, & Xiao, 2013). Based on that explanation the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: Positive attribute framing positively affects attitudes towards change

Hypothesis 2b: Negative attribute framing negatively affects attitudes towards change.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that social influence and individual difference-based theory has been able to explain the antecedent of attitudes well. But the information-based theory still leaves some problems, especially there is an argument whether the quantity of information is important for the uncertainty reduction theory and the information processing approach on the one hand, and for behavioral decision making approach and the schematic approach on the other hand. To solve such a theoretical gap between the information-based theory group, author suggests that it is necessary to do a research more focused on an information framing; how the essentially same information is presented or framed in other fashions. The rationale is that any attitudes towards organizational changes may not be influenced by the amount or content of information but by how the information is framed.

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