English summary

New perspectives on change management – An interdisciplinary study of psychological reactions to planned organizational restructuring and the importance of individual differences and workplace factors as a basis for HR strategic change management.

Purpose/aim
The purpose of the thesis is to explore employees’ psychological reactions to organizational change and the reasons for - or causes to - these reactions. Further to explore to which extent individual differences and workplace conditions can prevent or intensify negative psychological reactions to organizational change. One of the main challenges to identify factors that cause negative psychological reactions is to actually know which aspects of organizational change that makes people react negatively to changes in the workplace.

The overall objective was thus to study the relative importance of individual differences and workplace conditions for psychological well-being and stress, job-related attitudes and organizational efficiency in organizations undergoing change. Looking at the human factor the aim is to gather scientific knowledge about what makes organizations efficient and effective in a context of organizational change. At a more concrete level the aim is to explore what motivates employees to a positive attitude towards organizational change and how can one prevent voluntary turnover in a context of organizational change. The aim is also to generate knowledge about what makes organizations sustainable for human health and wellbeing during organizational change.

Other research
Other research has showed dramatically negative consequences for human wellbeing and health of organizational change, especially when organizational change results in downsizing. This study investigates the effect of organizational restructuring without the risk of losing one’s job.

Studies of organizational restructuring are less clear about the individual consequences and do not show a particularly large and general negative effect on wellbeing and health. On the other hand organizational changes of different types appear to have an overall negative effect on job-related attitudes and in general also on the psychosocial working environment.

Studies have demonstrated with regard to the significance of individual differences that perception or appraisal of change and the change process have an effect on psychological reactions to organizational change. Also personality seems to have some importance. Moreover, with regard to the importance of workplace-related factors studies have showed a general association with health and wellbeing and a link between the quality of leadership and job-related attitudes.
**Design/methodology/approach**

The study population was employees from the Danish Defence. Two empirical studies using an observational cross-sectional design were conducted: A questionnaire study and a semi-structured group interview study. This thesis analyzes explicitly only the results from the questionnaire study.

Eight workplaces from the Danish Defense were chosen to participate in the questionnaire study. Five workplaces were chosen for statistical analysis fulfilling selected inclusion criteria. The overall response rate was 77.4 percent (N=462). An epidemiological perspective and a model from the occupational health literature the Job Demands Resources model (JD-R model) by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) were used when analyzing data.

As a first step the questionnaire study involved development of a large scale questionnaire for studying individual reactions to organizational change and the role of workplace conditions and individual differences as mediating, moderating or confounding factors of negative reactions to organizational change. A second step was to validate the questionnaire for studying organizational change. A third and just as important step was to motivate the respondent to complete the questionnaire.

**Findings**

Results showed that individual consequences of restructuring had only a small effect on stress and voluntary turnover but had no general effect on psychological wellbeing, attitudes toward organizational change and organizational commitment. In this study stress was measures as self-assessed level of stress and voluntary turnover as self-reported thoughts of quitting.

Change perception was furthermore found to be more powerful than individual consequences of restructuring indicating that cognitive appraisal is an important factor in understanding reactions to organizational change. The findings therefore suggest that organizational change per se can only partially explain negative reactions to change. In the study change perception had the greatest general impact on individual stress among the tested individual variables. In addition the results showed that not all participants experience high levels of stress when they experience major change in the workplace. The results also showed that individual difference including individual change tolerance have no or a very small effect on negative reactions to organizational change. Moreover results showed that workplace conditions have a greater effect on negative reactions than both organizational changes per se and change perception in an organization undergoing planed changes. These results supports the hypothesis that negative reactions to a large extent often is caused by the negative impact organizational change can have on workplace conditions.

In conclusion, the study supports that workplace conditions have a much larger effect on negative reactions to change than individual differences. The study found no moderating effect of either workplace factors or individual resources on the relationship between organizational change and negative reactions. The results therefore only partially support the JD-R model. But the results do support the direct influence of workplace conditions on both psychological strain and motivation and workplace resources seem to prevent negative reactions to change.
Research limitations/implications
The study has several limitations. One of them is that the cross-sectional research design can not demonstrate causality. Other limitations related to the chosen research design are the risk of common method bias and information bias. Also in many cases there has only been used one variable in analyzing the effects of each factor in the study. Additionally just a limited number of individual differences and workplace conditions have been studied and only one dimension of change perception. Future research should among other things attend to study the effect of more individual differences and workplace conditions and use different research methods and study populations and test for more mediating, moderating and confounding variables.

The study does not support the classic stimulus-response model of psychological change reactions but do supports a cognitive appraisal model of reactions to organizational change. Furthermore the study finds partially support for the JD-R model.

Practical implications/recommendations
The study has several implications for change management. One of them is that management should pay more attention to the working environment during organizational change and less attention to individual differences. The model below (Figure 1) summarizes the practical implications of the study in four key areas of action.

![Figure 1 HR strategic areas of action when implementing change in organizations](image)
**Originality/value**

Management and leadership literature often view human reactions to change - both change in general and organizational change - as a matter of personality and human nature. The thesis challenges that perspective and existing models of change reactions with profound consequences for change management.

The JD-R model by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) is being used in this thesis as a broad tool for human resource management. This model is originally developed in the research field of health and safety in the workplace.

Knowledge from the study of the importance of individual differences and workplace conditions could be of benefit for both employers and organizations by contributing among other things to the development of knowledge of how organizations can reduce or prevent the negative effects of organizational change on employees. Moreover, this knowledge can contribute to scientific-based guidelines for strategic human resource management during organizational change.

The study also contributes to the effort to demonstrate a link between positive/negative system and employee effects when focusing on improvements in the workplace and implementing organizational change.