The Influence of Occupational Self-Efficacy on the Relationship of Leadership Behavior and Preparedness for Occupational Change

Dr. Birgit Schyns

University of Tilburg, The Netherlands

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Department of Human Resource Sciences

PO Box 90153

5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands

e-mail: B.Schyns@uvt.nl

Phone: 0031/13/4662827

Fax: 0031/13/4663002

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* Requests for reprints should be addressed to Birgit Schyns, University of Tilburg, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Human Resource Sciences, PO Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands, e-mail: B.Schyns@uvt.nl

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Abstract

A theoretical framework for the relationship between preparedness for occupational change, occupational self-efficacy, and leadership is presented. Preparedness for occupational change is defined as the wish to acquire higher task demands (i.e. greater complexity) in the sense that employees have thought about change but have not yet acted to seek change. It explained why preparedness for occupational change is central prior to, during, and after organizational change is introduced. A model of determinants of preparedness for occupational change is established. The application of this model in different stages of organizational change is demonstrated. Central aspects in this model are self-efficacy and leadership. Self-efficacy influences preparedness for occupational change in the different stages. This effect is demonstrated using the three assumed outcomes of self-efficacy (i.e., initiation of behavior, persistence, and effort) and their relationship to preparedness for occupational change. It is assumed that perceived leadership influences occupational self-efficacy. Three factors influencing self-efficacy (mastery experience, vicarious learning, and verbal persuasion) are regarded as possibly being responsible for this effect. The implications of the model for organizational practice are discussed.

Keywords: Preparedness for Occupational Change, Organizational change, Self-efficacy, Leadership

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More and more employees are confronted with changing task demands due to organizational change processes. In this context, Hesketh (2001) invited scientists to deal with organizational change and its influence on personal career management. Organizational change can involve the introduction of new technologies as well as changing organizational structure, for example when levels of hierarchy are reduced, that is, a the flattening of hierarchies takes place. These changes often include changes in employees' tasks. When new technologies are introduced, employees have to learn how to handle them either through (formal) qualification or through learning on the task. Tasks also often change in the case of the flattening of hierarchies. In some cases tasks of supervisors become part of the subordinates' tasks.

Some studies on organizational change concentrated on how supervisors adapt to organizational change processes (see Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 1999; Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne,1999), others focussed on employees' adaptation to relocation (Eby & Russell, 2000; Landau, Shamir, & Arthur, 1992; Noe & Barber, 1993). In this paper emphasis is put on the employees' side in organizational change processes, especially on the changing of tasks. The aspect of relocation is not addressed here. Priority is placed on the employees' tasks.

In general, three main areas of occupational change can be differentiated: Organizational change, job change, and task change. Organizational change refers to the restructuring of the whole organization (for example as reactions to radical environmental change, see Audia, Locke, & Smith, 2000). Job change (e.g. Ostroff & Clark, 2001) implies a change for the employee (which – of course – can also occur in organizational change processes) such as relocation, lateral change, career change. Task change refers to a change in task demands. Theses changes can be accompanied by

organizational or job change but can also occur as a reaction to the introduction of new technologies. Task change can thus include job change, but not necessarily so.

The latter case is addressed in this paper or - more precisely - the task is the focus of this paper in so far as it might change due to organizational change processes. Preparedness for occupational change is defined in this paper as the wish to acquire higher task demands (i.e. greater complexity) in the sense that employees have thought about change but have not yet acted to seek change (for a detailed definition see below). The extent to which organizational change implies a change of location or job change (such as lateral change or promotion) is not taken into account.

When organizational change processes take place, organizations need employees willing to take over new tasks. For the employees, preparedness for occupational change can be crucial, as employees not willing to adapt to change may lose their jobs in organizational change processes.

As preparedness for occupational change is therefore crucial in organizational change processes the questions arises as to which personal and organizational requirement are preconditions for employees' preparedness for occupational change. With respect to employees' characteristics, it seems that self-efficacy, that is the conviction that one can successfully execute a given behaviour required to produce certain outcomes (Bandura, 1977a, p. 193), plays an important role for employees in the process of organizational change. McDonald and Siegall (1992, 1996) examined the role of self-efficacy in reactions to technological change. Their results indicate that employees' self-efficacy influences their adaptation to organizational change, as explained in more detailed below.

Organizations also need employees who might function as change agents. In change processes, supervisors who show preparedness for occupational change can serve as role models and can encourage their subordinates by assuring them that they will be able to cope with the changes. This behavior on the leaders' side leads to followers' self-efficacy as will be explained in more detail below. In essence, leaders can support their employees in change processes. Thus, leadership is important in organizational change processes. These considerations lead to a model that explains

the role of leadership and self-efficacy in the process of the development of preparedness for occupational change in organizational change processes. This model can be helpful for organizations by offering suggestions as to what to do to support preparedness for occupational change.

Before explaining the relationship between preparedness for occupational change, self-efficacy, and leadership, the definition of preparedness for occupational change used throughout this paper will be introduced. Prior to the discussion and the implications for future research, the theoretical framework is further explained by establishing a model of self-efficacy and leadership as determinants of preparedness for occupational change.

Preparedness for occupational change

Organizational change processes influence employees tasks in different ways. The case where organizational change processes lead to higher task demands for the employees concerned is concentrated on. Higher task demands are defined in line with the action core theory (for an overview see Frese & Zapf, 1994) as task characteristics that require more action regulation on the part of the employee. The necessity to take on tasks with higher task demands than the previous task arises when supervisor tasks are integrated in the task of a former subordinate. If for example an employee has constructed printers out of material given to him / her by the supervisor before the organizational change process and is now -additionally - responsible for the flow of material this implies that he / she has to think about which material is needed at a certain point of time. Therefore, the employee has to cope with higher task demands. New technologies are sometimes connected with higher task demands, as well. In some cases computer programming knowledge is needed after organizational change where a mechanical set up of machines was possible before. Preparedness for occupational change is thus defined as the wish to take over a task with higher task demands (in the sense explained above) than those that existed in the previous task. This definition as a “wish” is understood in the sense of the transtheoretical model of Prochaska and DiClemente

(1983) as a contemplation state: Employees think about change but have not yet taken action with respect to initiating change[1].

Preparedness for occupational change is relevant in three stages of organizational change: (a) prior to change, (b) during change, and (c) after change.

(a) Qualifications might be necessary prior to changes so that when the changes are introduced the employees are already prepared (e.g. through qualification). Furthermore, fast changing organizations might need employees who seek changes for themselves, for example through learning new tasks, through proactive behavior (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989), or through initiative (Frese, 2001). Whereas learning a new task is independent of one's present job or profession, initiative is defined as the development of new goals and self-determined actions and has to be congruent with the goals of a company (Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, and Tag, 1997). Proactive is the stable tendency of a person to seek change in his / her environment and is regarded as a disposition (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

(b) In the midst of the process of change, organizations need change agents – that is, employees who convince others of the necessity and the positive aspects of the change. In addition, they need employees who are willing to accept new tasks.

(c) After the changes have been introduced, organizations need employees who are willing to cope with those changes and adapt to them in a way that is constructive for the goals of the organization (e.g. through higher performance).

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1995) defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). These beliefs influence not only the initiation of behavior, the expended effort, and the persistence of behavior in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1982, 1984) but also the goals people set for themselves (Bandura, 1984).

As to the development of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977a/b, 1982, 1997) names four sources of self-efficacy: Mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and

emotional states. The four sources and their relationship to the occupational context as they are important for the issue of preparedness for occupational change (as will be shown below) are briefly exlained. The forth source of self-efficacy is not explained in detail here as it is a weak influence on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) and -probably -can not be influenced by leaders although in a working context physiological arousal might be interpreted as anxiety and thus lead to lower self-efficacy.

The successful execution of a behavior leads to an increase in self-efficacy concerning this behavior (Bandura 1977a, 1982). Bandura (1977a) calls this mastery experience. For example, a person who has learned that he / she is able to produce a certain behavior will probably believe he / she could produce this behavior again. If the experience is made in different situations the belief will extend to different kinds of situations and thus become more general.

Self-efficacy can also be increased by seeing somebody else (a model) show a certain behavior (Bandura, 1977a, 1982). This is called vicarious experience (Bandura, 1977a). In order to make the learning process successful the model must have certain attributes. For example, the model should be similar to the learning person (Bandura, 1977a and b, 1982).

In a working context, vicarious experience can easily be imagined. In most cases, people work together in a way that they are able to see each other and thus use each other as a model. They will usually perceive each other as similar regarding their abilities as they all do about the same job and will probably have about the same qualifications.

A third source of self-efficacy is social or verbal or social persuasion. People who are told that they will be able to execute a certain behavior will be more willing to try to execute this behavior (Bandura, 1977a, 1982). Their self-efficacy regarding this task increases. In a working environment, there are colleagues on the one hand and superiors on the other who encourage or discourage a person concerning his / her abilities. Of course, leaders can effect self-efficacy through all of the three processes mentioned above (see section “leadership” and Schyns, 2001a).

Preparedness for occupational change and self-efficacy

As stated above, Bandura (1982) emphasizes that self-efficacy influences the initiation of a certain behavior, the effort spent on a task, and the persistence on a task in the face of obstacles. These self-efficacy outcomes are important in the working context (e.g. Ashford & Saks, 2000; Early & Lituchy, 1991; Farr & Ford, 1990). They are described further in the this section and their importance in relation to preparedness for occupational change in different stage of organizational change is outlined. Not all outcomes of self-efficacy are relevant in all three stages of organizational change.

The initiation of behavior is especially relevant prior to organizational change. It can motivate employees to learn new tasks and can also lead to proactive behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-efficacy is positively related to taking initiative (Speier & Frese, 1997). In the context of organizational change, the relationship between initiation of behavior and self-efficacy could be confirmed by Morrison and Brantner (1992), who concentrated on enhancers and inhibitors of learning a new job. Self-efficacy was positively related to learning a new job and thus considered as an enhancer. Self-efficacy therefore probably influences the processes prior to organizational changes when qualification becomes necessary.

Noe and Wilk (1993) included self-efficacy in their study on developmental activities. Self-efficacy was positively related to different measures of developmental activities. Thus, it can be assumed that employees with high self-efficacy are more prone to invest in their own career and strive for higher task demands.

Persistence is especially relevant during organizational change. Often, change processes are connected with backlashes, for example when new technologies do not work as expected or when new structures first lead to lower productivity. Employees with high self-efficacy and thus high persistence are less prone to "give up" when obstacles appear in organizational change processes. This could be true after organizational change as well.

The effort spent in the execution of behavior may be especially important after organizational change. When changes are introduced, performance is supposed to be at least as high

as it was before the change process. Employees with high self-efficacy are prone to put in more effort and thus, their performance will be good even after changes in their task.

Empirically, the notion that self-efficacy is positively related to organizational change in general is supported by several studies. Wanberg and Banas (2000) showed that self-efficacy was positively related to openness to organizational change suggesting that self-efficacy has particular relevance in prior to change processes.

McDonald and Siegall (1992) studied the impact of self-efficacy on job attitudes, behaviors, and performance of field service technicians whose job had undergone major changes. They found that self-efficacy (in this case technological self-efficacy) was positively related to satisfaction, commitment, and work quality. It was negatively related to lateness and absence. It can be derived from these results that self-efficacy has a positive relationship to adaptation to organizational change.

Theory and research on organizational change and self-efficacy support the assumption that preparedness for organizational change and self-efficacy are positively related. Research suggests that this is true prior, during, and after organizational change is introduced.

Leadership and self-efficacy

Leaders influence employees' self-efficacy. This process can work through the mechanisms mentioned above: mastery experience, vicarious experience, and social persuasion.

Supervisors distribute tasks. They can also delegate tasks. Thus, they can provide opportunities for their subordinates to experience high task demands and thus to experience mastery. For example, in Leader-Member Exchange research, supervisors were found to delegate different levels of tasks to their employees (Schriesheim, Neider, Scandura, & Tepper, 1992; Yukl & Fu, 1999). Thus, some employees get difficult and important tasks whereas others do not. As a consequence, some employees have the possibility to fulfill difficult tasks and thus, the opportunity to increase their self-efficacy beliefs. In general, experiences of success have a positive impact on

self-efficacy although failures may lead a person to believe that he / she has learned from failure and thus will be successful in the future (Farr & Ford, 1990). In the case of the constructor of printers introduced in the section "Preparedness for occupational change", the supervisor could have asked the employee to care for the flow of material at times when the supervisor is not present.

Supervisors can serve as models for their employees and provide possibilities for vicarious experience. They might show that a task is not really difficult to fulfill by their own example. This can increase employees' self-efficacy, especially if leader and member are similar. To take up the constructor example again, the supervisor's could arrange the flow of material in a way that the employee can observe how this is done (e.g. ask the employee to assist him / her).

In daily interactions, supervisors can motivate their employees verbally. Thus, social persuasion is addressed. They can encourage them to take over difficult tasks (e.g. to secure the material flow). They can also communicate high expectations to their followers (this functions even unconsciously as Pygmalion research suggests, see e.g. Eden, 1990; King, 1971). The next section presents the empirical evidence on the relationship between leadership and self-efficacy. Thereby, leadership refers to different theoretical backgrounds.

Studies on leadership and self-efficacy

Leadership has been shown to be related to self-efficacy, for example in Pygmalion research (Eden, 1990). The Pygmalion effect focuses on effects of (in most cases falsely induced) expectations of leaders on their followers. These expectations influence leaders' behaviors in so far as they support the subordinates they perceive (after inducement of expectations) as high potentials. The leader behavior in turn influences followers' self-efficacy (Eden, 1990). Sutton and Woodman (1989) showed that leader behavior influenced self-expectations in an organizational context over a period of three months.

In research on transformational leadership, self-efficacy has also been shown to be related to leader behavior (Schyns, 2001b, Shea & Howell, 1999). Transformational leadership refers to exceptional leader behaviors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration as they are connected to charismatic leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1995).

In a cross-sectional study with a heterogeneous sample of employees on the relationship between transformational leadership and occupational self-efficacy, Schyns (2001b) found a significant correlation between the two constructs of r = .21. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the design, no conclusions can be drawn about the direction of influence: Either subordinates with high self-efficacy tend to perceive transformational leadership (independent of their leaders' behavior) or the leaders enhance subordinates' self-efficacy.

In an experimental study with 99 graduate students, Shea and Howell (1999) examined the effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between transformational leadership, task feedback, and performance. Shea and Howell (1999) state that "The results of the present study indicate that the charismatic leader may have been successful at instilling confidence in the participants that they could do well at this task, whether or not they received task feedback on their performance" (page 392).

In a longitudinal study of 56 subordinate-superior dyads of a large company, Murphy and Ensher (1999) showed that Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is positively related to self-efficacy. Leader-Member Exchange is an approach focusing on the quality of the relationship between a leader and each of his / her subordinates. It turned out that for employees who low in self-efficacy LMX lead to increased self-efficacy believes.

Schyns and von Collani (2002) examined an instrument to assess occupational self-efficacy. Using a cross-sectional design, they found a significant correlation between Leader-Member Exchange and occupational self-efficacy of r = .17 in a sample of employees on low levels of organizational hierarchy. Again, nothing can be concluded about the direction of influence.

Empirical research underlines the theoretical proposition that leadership and self-efficacy are positively related: Pygmalion research suggests that leader behavior (influenced by false

information / expectation) influences subordinates' self-efficacy; transformational leadership and Leader-Member Exchange are also positively related to self-efficacy.

Model of leadership and self-efficacy as determinants of preparedness for occupational change

These considerations on preparedness for occupational change, self-efficacy, and leadership are summarized in a model in **Error! Reference source not found.**. Self-efficacy influences preparedness for occupational change in its three stages as proposed here. Prior to organizational change, self-efficacy influences preparedness for occupational change as it serves as an enhancer for learning new jobs (Morrison & Brantner, 1992), is related to openness for organizational change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000) and to developmental activities (Noe & Wilk, 1993). During organizational change, employees with high self-efficacy will persist longer when faced with obstacles in their new tasks and will expend more effort as self-efficacy theory suggests (Bandura, 1997). After organizational changes, employees with high self-efficacy more easily adapt to these changes than employees with low self-efficacy (McDonald and Siegall, 1992). They also expend more effort on the new task.

Leadership influences self-efficacy through the processes proposed by Bandura (1977a): Leaders may provide the opportunity for mastery experience to their subordinates. They may serve as a model and encourage their subordinates through verbal persuasion. Supportive leadership is thus important for employees self-efficacy in all stages of change. Thus, the model presented here is a flow model, indicating that leadership influenced self-efficacy through the explained processes. Self-efficacy in turn influences employees' preparedness for occupational change in different stages of organizational change.

Summary and Implications

In this paper, the relationship between preparedness for occupational change, self-efficacy, and leadership was considered. The definition of preparedness for occupational change involves the question of higher task demands (especially as it is connected to organizational change). In this

sense, preparedness for occupational change refers to the willingness to take on tasks with higher demands than the present task.

This preparedness is related to self-efficacy in so far as employees with high self-efficacy take on more demanding tasks more willingly. Their self-efficacy leads them to assume that they can successfully fulfill a task and thus, they will not only take on this task but also persist longer in its execution if they do not succeed at once (Bandura, 1997). Different processes influence self-efficacy. In an organizational change context, qualification can enhance self-efficacy prior to change. In a training context employees learn how to execute tasks and thus their self-efficacy improves (see Bloom & Sheerer, 1992).

It is also important for employees' self-efficacy that they are informed about the kinds of changes that are connected to organizational change. Only with full knowledge of future tasks can employees speculate about the extent to which their competence will meet up to the new demands.

Leadership influences self-efficacy through different processes, namely through the possibility for mastery experience, the possibility for vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion. With respect to self-efficacy, a leader can provide possibilities for mastery experience, for example through task assignments. This can be done prior to change but will also be of importance during and after change. Assignment of tasks involving great responsibility does not only lead to the possibility of mastery experiences but also implies that the supervisors trusts the employee as far as his / her abilities are concerned.

The model introduced here connects important organizational variables. Especially in times of increasing organizational change, it is necessary for companies to prepare their employees for a change in their task. The model presented here can serve as a guide for organizations in different stages of organizational change. It shows the important role of leadership via self-efficacy. However, it has to be taken into account that leaders are affected by organizational change themselves. Thus, their tasks might change as well (Brodbeck & Rendisch, 1993).

Recent research has emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in organizational contexts. If the model is proved to be valid, organizations that plan changes or that are in the middle of change processes need to pay particular attention to their employees' self-efficacy. This can be done through a training of their leaders on how self-efficacy is influenced in a working context. Specific leader behavior which could be extracted from Pygmalion research (e.g. Eden, 1990) and proved to influence followers' self-efficacy can be integrated in this training.

In addition, it could be important for organizations to identify employees with high self-efficacy as they are probably more willing to accept change and are better able to adapt to change. They could serve as change agents for their colleagues and subordinates. The model presented here can thus be helpful in organizational change processes.

Future research

As seen above, some parts of the model are already supported by recent research. In order to test the complete model, all components of the model should be examined in one study. The model refers to different stages of change which have to be taken into account in future research. The process of leaders influencing followers' self-efficacy should be examined in all stages of change. In this model, to be seen as a first suggestion, the same influencing processes (i.e., mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion) were assumed to be relevant for all stages of change. It is however reasonable to assume that different processes have different amounts of influence on followers' self-efficacy in the three stages of organizational change.

Whereas the model addresses stage of change connected to organizational change, an interesting topic would be followers' self-initiated change concerning their career. For example, employees with high self-efficacy might search for change in a way that also affects the organization, for example through voicing propositions for change.

Finally, one has to take into account that organizations can stay in a constant state of change. Thus, the stages of change might not be differentiated in organizational praxis. Different processes like learning, persistence, and adaptation will probably amalgamate in organizations. For leaders it

will thus be important to constantly try and enhance employees' self-efficacy via the methods introduced here.

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