

**BOHICA; Bend over, here it comes again...**  
***Construction and test of a Change Fatigue instrument***

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***Abstract***

Within change literature, pace and frequency of organizational change are reoccurring topics. The pace is experienced as high and the frequency of change within organizations appears to be growing exponentially.

This lead to study to more extent ‘change fatigue’ that already received attention in both practice-oriented and scientific literature. Despite this attention, the origin, consequences and implications of change fatigue still remain unclear until today. Lack of acceptance and agreement on the necessity of the change can result in negative attitudes, like “BOHICA: Bend Over Here It Comes Again”.

We constructed a change fatigue instrument that was studied in relation with important aspects of communication change as well on resistance to change and uncertainty. The relevance of this construct can be traced back because of the strong relations we found in this study.



## ***Introduction***

Since change is omnipresent in organizational life, one could argue that in general employees are used to change and well equipped to implement and deal with change. However, depressing statistics about the success of organizational change prove otherwise (Burnes, 2003).

Employees find themselves in an environment where continuity as a rule merely lies in the fact that organizational change is all-pervading (Nguyen Huy, 2002). The pace of change is experienced as high and the frequency of change within organizations appears to be growing exponentially (Doyle, Claydon & Buchanan, 2000). This requires a high stamina from employees in handling uncertainty and levels of stress that both have a tendency to arise or intensify due to organizational change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Riolli & Savicki, 2006). Combining the rising levels of uncertainty, stress and the disappointing organizational outcomes (Burnes, 2003) it is no wonder that initiatives for change cannot automatically count on a supportive attitude from employees (Reichers, Wanous & Austin, 1997). Therefore, a commonly seen response of organizational employees is a general resistance to change, or in change fatigue (Stensaker, Meyer, Falkenberg & Haueng 2002; Garside, 2004).

A definition of change fatigue is “the individual’s response of becoming disoriented or dysfunctional as a result of too much stimulation” (Stensaker et al., 2002, p.298). Important in this definition is the belief that change fatigue is an individual response and not something for an organization as a whole. The consequence of change fatigue is disorientation and a dysfunctional state, which is due to over-stimulation. One of the precursors of change fatigue mentioned in the literature is excessive change. The excessiveness is due to the pursuit of “several, seemingly unrelated and sometimes conflicting changes simultaneously” (p.302) and the introduction of new changes prior to completing and evaluating the prior change (Stensaker et al., 2002).

The importance of research into change fatigue is twofold. First, change fatigue is a hard aspect for professionals in organizations, which are responsible for the organizational change and therefore have to effectively deal with the problem of change fatigue. In creating a changing workforce to make the initiated change a success. Change fatigue could be an aspect that occurred because of former changes and could have no or little relation with the current change. If there is an influence of

change fatigue on the contribution of the employees to change, organizations can put this knowledge into use. Secondly, from a scientific standpoint it would be interesting to see whether change fatigue is an aspect of the in the literature widely used term of resistance to change (Piderit, 2000) or that change fatigue is a separate construct.

Therefore, we will present two studies. We operationalized the construct of change fatigue by conducting interviews and by selecting statements that could be an indication of change fatigue. Furthermore, we tested the selected items on reliability and validity by relating these to, for instance the number of changes the employees experienced, and tenure. In the second study change fatigue was related to several communication and information variables, and again related to resistance to change. By relating the concept of change fatigue to information and communication variables, it was possible to predict whether positively evaluated information quality and communication processes actually enhance sense-making processes (Weick, 1995; Bolden & Gosling, 2006) in the organization, and eventually will prevent feelings of change fatigue.

In the remaining of this paper we will first outline the theoretical explanations on change fatigue and cynicism and we will introduce our hypotheses.

### **The arise of change fatigue**

Research by Doyle et al. (2000) has shown that lots of people are just tired of constant change. In the same study more than half of the respondents agreed with the notion that mistakes are repeated because there was no time to learn from what happened in the past. Related to this, a little over half of the respondents agreed that they do not have the luxury of time to pause and reflect on the change projects. This illustrates the lack (of time) to evaluate. The authors found that whenever former change was evaluated as valuable on personal- or organizational-level, future change would be positively received. When former change was negatively evaluated, an upcoming change project is expected to provoke cynicism and hostility.

The experience of change fatigue is an individual perception. However, research has shown that the level in the organizational hierarchy of an organizational member influences the possibility of experience of change fatigue. Middle management and the workforce are at higher risk than top management. Top management is most often the initiator of organizational change, which means that

they are aware of the necessity of the change and have access to a bigger amount of information (Stensaker, et al., 2002, p.302). Lower level employees have to deal with uncertainties as a result of the change. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT; Berger and Calabrese, 1975) suggests that when a person experiences uncertainty, he or she will seek information to reduce this uncertainty. Any information is valued, regardless of the source of this information.

Age seems negatively related to distress in reaction to work stressors. One of the possible work stressors is of course change; therefore it seems logical that older employees show lower level of distress in reaction to organizational change than younger employees (Neupert, Almeida & Turk Charles, 2007). One could argue that the increased experience of older employee could also help them to adapt to change. There is an interaction between age and management support on the perceived changes in person-job fit. Younger employees were able to adapt to new function demands caused by change, when they were supported by management. Yet, older employees were not able to adapt and neither did high age increase the positive relationship between change fairness and person-organization fit (Caldwell, Herold & Fedor, 2004). Since there is little scientific support for the first relationship between age and change fatigue, it seems logical to hypothesize this in line with the second relationship.

Hypothesis 1:

1: Evaluation regarding the former change projects in general will be negatively related to the experienced change fatigue, such that higher-level employees will experience lower change fatigue and lower level employees will experience higher change fatigue.

Hypothesis 2:

2: Function will be negatively related to the experienced change fatigue.

Hypothesis 3:

3: Age will be positively related to the experienced change fatigue.

### **Consequences of change (fatigue)**

Changes evoke several reactions. These reactions vary from enthusiastic and positive to resign to resistance (Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001). Resistance to change is no new kid on the block as opposed to change fatigue (e.g. Lewin, 1945 in Dent & Galloway Goldberg, 1999). Kotter (1995) concludes that organization members often support the vision of major changes and want to contribute to them. What prevent them from this contribution are obstacles like organization's structure or dilemmas between the change vision and their own objectives, and clumsy communication and information (Elving, 2005).

BOHICA refers to a resigned state, and is one of the coping mechanisms described by Stensaker et al. (2002). These mechanisms are classified along two dimensions. One dimension was based on the level of activity the individuals displayed in reacting to the change, called active/passive. The other dimension concerned the likelihood of implementation, called change probable/improbable. BOHICA, bend over here it comes again was the most frequently reported coping method in the article of Stensaker et al. (2002). Employees stay focused on their daily tasks that make them passive towards the change, but they remain active to a certain degree in realizing their everyday jobs. An important finding is that a large amount of the people who mentioned BOHICA as the chosen coping mechanism had been exposed to a number of change programs.

Besides the perception of BOHICA as a coping mechanism, it is also seen as a syndrome. Connell and Waring (2002) focused on the relationship between organizational change, employee cynicism, the psychological contract and the sustainability of change initiatives. Connell and Warning (2002) found out that employees became very cynical towards change and management when running change projects got interrupted to implement new change projects. This cynicism was explained as uncertainty, doubt, skepticism and distrust and was called the BOHICA syndrome.

### **Cynicism and change fatigue**

Given that change fatigue is a relatively new concept it is useful to search for variables that show similarity with fatigue. One of those variables is organizational change cynicism. Abraham (2000) described this form as cynicism due to unsuccessful change efforts. This organizational change cynicism results in pessimism about the success of future efforts and the belief that change agents are lazy and

incompetent. Organizational change cynicism can function as a frame for making sense of change related events. Change fatigue and cynicism have a lot in common. Both variables are based on the result of previous change initiatives (Doyle et al., 2000; Garside, 2004; Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005). Both concepts are logically linked to the factor trust: to trust the chosen change strategy and to trust the change agents and initiators (Doyle et al., 2000; Stanley et al., 2005). Dunsing and Matejka (1994) present characteristics of a Bohican, in which cynical is part of the description: “Bohicans are old, experienced, cynical employees... and an approach to change best characterized as ‘Bend Over, Here it comes Again!’”(p.40).

The question remains, what is the difference between cynicism and change fatigue? The causes are very much alike, yet fatigue is perhaps due to a higher number of changes. Cynicism and change fatigue seem to be different responses to these causes. Both are negative attitudes, but cynicism is better characterized as a pessimistic attitude, a negative framework towards everything that is related to the change (Abraham, 2000). Change fatigue is a state that can be described as resigned attitude towards change. Not willing or feeling able to put an effort into the change.

Hypothesis 4:

4: The number of changes undergone is positively related to the experienced change fatigue.

### **Readiness for change**

Change results depend on the effort of individual employees as mentioned before (Robertson, Roberts & Porras, 1993; Goodman & Dean, 1982; Tannenbaum, 1971). This effort starts with support for the change. After all, something we do not support is usually performed badly or not at all.

Support is a passive variable; a more active one is the effort employees are willing to contribute. These two together are called ‘readiness to change’. Resistance is the cognitive precursor of readiness for organizational change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002).

Hypotheses 5:

5a: Change fatigue is negatively related to support for the change.

5b: Change fatigue is negatively related to the intended contribution to the change.

### **Information versus communication**

As the success of a change effort depends on the input of organizational members, these individuals ought to be facilitated in delivering that input. One important part of that facilitation is providing information and communication about the change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Lewis & Seibold, 1998).

In practice the concepts information and communication are used as interchangeable, but they are not. Information stands for data that can be retrieved in documents, on websites etcetera. This information can get evaluated on correctness, timeliness and on completeness. Communication refers to the interaction between employees, the workforce and the managers within the organization. This concept contains the possibility to express opinions, whether there is attention for these opinions and the room to disagree (Elving, 2005; Cummings, 2004).

The relationship between communication, information and change outcome variables has been a focus in many papers on organizational change. In several publications the importance of communication is underlined (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Previous research showed that information and communication have a positive influence on the support of employees for the change (e.g. Bennebroek Gravenhorst, Werkman & Boonstra, 2003; Elving, Werkman & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2006).

However, until now, no light has been shed on the influence of these two variables on change fatigue. The relationship between the quality of the information provided by the organization and the quality of the interactions on readiness for change has been found in various studies (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004; Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). It can be argued that qualitative high information, which is perceived as on time, correct and providing answers to the questions of employees, will be positively related to the absence or a low degree of change fatigue. The same can be argued for the communication; when the interactions about the change between managers and employees are satisfying, you might expect that change fatigue will be prevented.

Hypothesis 6:



6a: Perceived quality of information on the change will have a negative influence on change fatigue.

6b: Perceived quality of the interaction (communication) will have a negative influence on change fatigue.

To test our hypothesis we had the opportunity to do research in two different organizations.

## **Study 1a**

### **Introduction**

To test whether change fatigue is a relevant item among employees who have been often confronted with changes, interviews were held with thirteen persons working in a department of a Dutch financial institution that operates globally. This organization can be found in the global top twenty of financial service industry and in the top ten of the European financial organizations. The research was conducted in the Dutch part of the organization. The main goals of conducting the interviews were to find aspects related to change fatigue based on employees' responses.

### **Method**

Since change fatigue is such a relatively new concept it is interesting to find out what kind of associations people have when the term is mentioned. Thirteen employees were randomly selected from three of the five departments of the organization. The interviews were semi-structured, following a topic list, which started with general questions about the function, the task and tenure. Subsequently, associations of the employees with change fatigue were asked. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. The need for a structured approach in the analysis of qualitative data was met by adopting the content analysis approach, which involved reading of the transcripts for several times in order to identify themes and statements related to change fatigue. The main goal was to try to determine associations with the concept of change fatigue, to assure that the construction of change fatigue would follow the experiences employees had with this construct.

## Results

The number of changes appears to be the origin of change fatigue, according to the expressed associations. This notion was based on associations like: *“too many changes, “never stop changing”, “it happens over and over again”*. The pace is another originator which gets illustrated by citations like: *“not able to get any rest”, “not being capable to keep up”*. This eventually results in an attitude that is best described as *“being too tired to even start with a change”*.

The reported change fatigue resulted for five of the thirteen interviewees in a state of mind that is best described as ‘resignation’. This state is explained as: *“letting the changes go by and waiting to see what happens”*. The next three quotes exemplify this attitude:

*“So that does results in some kind of tiredness like there we go again.”*

*“Well, you want to do the work that has to be done, you do that. That is not the fatigue. The fatigue is like, on the one hand, there we go again.”*

As an origin of change fatigue the lack of acceptance of the necessity of all those changes is mentioned and also the amount of time and energy required. The next quote exemplifies that: *“I think the change fatigue find its origin in the fact that people do not see the use of all that repeating changes and it costs too much time and energy.”*

Several associations that were made can be traced back to the pace and frequency of changes. To summarize, these associations can be grouped as *“too many sequent changes”, “change keeps going on”, “not being able to keep up with the pace of change”*.

The outcome of these processes can be called ‘resignation’ and a lack of motivation to do anything at all to pursue the change goals: *“In the beginning you try to step it up a bit, to give them what they want, despite the fact that the change that is started makes that almost impossible. Well that is something that stops at some time. Then you think I’m not getting into that anymore. That’s a bit that fatigue.”*

What is striking about this last quote is the sense of ‘them’, thereby referring to management. It appears that this respondent *is* willing to contribute at the starting point but feels hindered by management. The next quote underlines that notion: *“... Well, do we keep on going on, do we have to, is there no other way, do they even realize what this all means for us, uhmm, well...”*

The sense of them and us is a sign of a perception of top management that dictates the direction and goals without considering the employees.

### **Study 1b**

A set of 46 possible items was selected, based on the results from the interviews after extensive reading of the transcripts of the interviews. This first set of items was reviewed on clarity. Furthermore it was made sure the content of the items was change fatigue and not resistance to change, change scepticism or any other (related) aspects.

Finally, eight items were left which were incorporated in a questionnaire that was sent to a sample of 1150 employees (of the total group of approximately 2650 employees in the target division). These were all employees of the same financial institution as where the interviews were conducted. Of these employees 415 responded, which means a response rate of 36%.

Besides change fatigue, questions were asked about gender, age, as well as tenure. Also, questions were incorporated about the number of changes the respondents undergo within their current position in this organization, and their overall evaluation of these changes.

### **Results**

In order to test the value of our eight items concerning change fatigue, a confirmative factor analysis (CFA) was performed in which the items about uncertainty and readiness for change were included, which were shown to be reliable in several other studies (see Bennebroek Gravenhorst et al., 2003; Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005). In total there were six items concerning uncertainty, with questions like “In general it is clear what the changes in the organization mean for my personal situation.” Readiness for change was measured using two variables, support for the change, and willingness to contribute actively to make the change successful (Bennebroek Gravenhorst et al., 2003; Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2005).

If change fatigue is a separate variable, we should find different loadings in the CFA of the items of change fatigue in comparison with the uncertainty items and the readiness for change items. The final rotated solution within the factor analysis revealed a five-factor structure, with a percentage explained variance of more than

57%. The change fatigue items loaded on two different factors. Six items loaded on one factor, with loadings all above .65. Two items loaded on separate factors, with loadings of respectively .47 and .56. These two items were on the basis of this confirmative factor analysis excluded from the further analysis. This means that our final variable for change fatigue consists of six items.

To test the value of the newly created variable, it was tested whether there were differences between various subgroups of respondents on this variable. Age, tenure and the number of changes the employee underwent probably will influence the existence of change fatigue. Therefore, older persons probably will experience more change fatigue, just as persons who have been around in the organization for a long time.

These differences were tested using analysis of variance. Age seemed to be of significant influence on change fatigue ( $F(3,390) = 4,22, p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{age} < 30} = 2.86$ ;  $M_{30 < \text{age} < 40} = 2.69$ ;  $M_{40 < \text{age} < 50} = 2.85$ ;  $M_{\text{age} > 50} = 3.07$ ). The oldest employees faced the highest levels on change fatigue. It can be concluded that Hypothesis 3 can be accepted. Tenure also had a significant influence on change fatigue ( $F(3,390) = 4,83, p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{tenure} < 5 \text{ years}} = 2.79$ ;  $M_{5 < \text{tenure} < 10} = 2.67$ ;  $M_{10 < \text{tenure} < 20} = 2.79$ ;  $M_{\text{tenure} > 20} = 3.02$ ). The longer the employees are employed by the organization, the more they have change fatigue. Gender did not significantly influence change fatigue ( $F(1, 392) = 1,27, \text{ns}$ ).

Besides these demographic differences, statistics were included about general evaluations of the changes in the organization made by the respondents. First of all the respondents were asked to rate the number of changes they experienced. From the analysis of variance it showed that change fatigue was the highest in the groups who experienced six till ten changes ( $M = 3.14$ ). The group who experienced more than ten changes had a slightly lower mean score on change fatigue ( $M = 2.90$ ); whereas the group who experienced five or less than five change had the lowest experience of change fatigue ( $M = 2.65$ ;  $F(2, 390) = 7,11, p < .001$ ). Based on these results, hypothesis 4 is supported, with exception for people who experienced more than ten changes.

The evaluations of the respondents regarding the changes in general were tested. First, respondents were asked whether the changes had the results that were formulated at the start of the change program (answer rates: never, seldom,

sometimes, often and always). Secondly, respondents were asked whether the changes had consequences in general on their functioning and how they evaluated the consequences (answer possibilities were: very negative, negative, not negative/not positive, positive, and very positive). Results showed that change fatigue was significantly higher for respondents who judged the changes in general as a failure ( $F(4, 390)= 12,01, p<.001$ ). Furthermore, as expected, the respondents who experienced the consequences as very negative had a higher score on change fatigue compared to the groups of respondents who experienced the results of the change as positive ( $F(4, 366)= 29.08, p<.001$ ). Hypothesis 1 is hereby supported.

Finally, the influence of the hierarchical level of the respondents on change fatigue was tested. The function respondents indicated (open question) was recoded into four different categories, (1) top management and board, including regional directors, (2) staff functions, such as advisors, (3) middle management level, including all kind of senior staff, team leaders and so on, and (4) respondents from the operating core, account managers, assistant account managers. Results showed a significant influence of hierarchical level ( $F(3, 366)= 7.59, p<.001$ ;  $M_{top}= 2.44$ ,  $M_{staff}= 2.33$ ,  $M_{middle}= 2.90$ ,  $M_{lower}= 2.82$ ). Hypothesis 2 is supported, in that sense, that higher experienced level of change fatigue can be found by employees lower in the hierarchy of the organization.

### **Discussion study 1**

Results from the interviews showed that change fatigue was a recognized concept. The respondents came up with several aspects regarding change fatigue. These aspects were divided into change scepticism, resistance to change and the change fatigue aspects. These aspects were made suitable for further testing in the quantitative part of study 1.

The results of the quantitative study, aimed at constructing change fatigue showed first of all that the set of items did not all load on one factor. Of the original eight items, only six loaded in a confirmative factor analysis on one factor. The newly created variable was tested on its validity by performing several analyses of variance. As predicted, age was a significant predictor of change fatigue, just as tenure. The evaluations of changes in general are an indication of the validity of the construct. Respondents who judged the changes as negative, and who judged that the goals of

the changes were seldom reached, had higher scores on change fatigue than the respondents who had more positive evaluations of the changes.

## Study 2

### Introduction

The second study conducted was aimed to see whether the newly created variable of change fatigue had a relation with information and communication variables.

Furthermore, the reliability and the validity of change fatigue were also tested.

### Method

#### Organization

The second study was part of a study within a regional governmental organization. We used an online questionnaire with several variables, which were, contrary to the first study not aimed at change in general, but at one particular cultural change program. For the purpose of this study, only results to test our main questions and hypothesis will be presented below.

First of all, the construct of change fatigue needed to be tested with a confirmative factor analysis, with readiness for change and uncertainty items. In Table 2 the variables are listed which we used for our analysis in this study.

**Table 2: Variables used in the analysis in study 2.**

Variable	Number of items	Example
Necessity of the change	5	Indicates to what extend employees know why change is needed. <i>Example: I know why we are changing</i>
Goals and directions of change	5	Indicates to what extent employees are familiar with the goals and direction of the change. <i>Example: I am familiar with the goals of the change</i>
Information about the change	7	Indicates how employees assess the information supply about the change. <i>Example: The information about the change is good</i>
Communication about the change	10	Indicates how employees assess the communication and interaction about the change. <i>Example: Everyone can give his or her opinion about the change</i>
Room for diversity	5	Indicates how employees assess the opportunities for having a different opinion. <i>Example: Constructive criticism about the change is valued</i>
Uncertainty	4	Indicates to what extent the change causes uncertainty. <i>Example: The changes makes me feel insecure about my future in the organization</i>
Support for the change	5	Indicates to what extent employees support the change. <i>Example: I believe the changes are necessary</i>

Contribution to the change	5	Indicates to what extent employees contribute to the change. Example: I make a noticeable contribution to the change
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## Respondents

The online questionnaire was offered to approximately 1,000 persons, with an initial response of 147 (14,7%), but these respondents did not complete all questions from the questionnaire. It was decided to delete the responses that had more than 50% missing values, which left a final set of 94 responses.

## Results Study 2

A confirmative factor analysis was performed with the items listed under uncertainty, support for the change and contribution to the change with our six-item scale for change fatigue. The results show a four-factor solution with 67,5% of the variance explained. All six items of the change fatigue questionnaire loaded on one factor, with factor loadings above .63.

To test the relationship of change fatigue with age, tenure and gender an analysis of variance was performed. Age had a significant influence on change fatigue, as expected ( $F(3, 90) = 3.61, p < .05$ ). The younger respondents experienced less change fatigue than the older respondents did ( $M_{<30} = 2.42$ ;  $M_{30-40} = 2.74$ ;  $M_{40-50} = 2.82$ ;  $M_{>50} = 3.25$ ). Hypothesis 3 is accepted. Tenure also had a significant influence on change fatigue ( $F(3, 85) = 5.87, p < .001$ ). The individuals who had the highest tenure with the organization experienced the highest feelings of change fatigue, although it is remarkable that the group who had a tenure of 10- 20 years experienced less change fatigue in comparison with respondents who had a tenure from 5- 10 years ( $M_{<5 \text{ years}} = 2.60$ ;  $M_{5-10 \text{ years}} = 2.75$ ;  $M_{10-20 \text{ years}} = 2.59$ ;  $M_{>20 \text{ years}} = 3.40$ ).

The female and male respondents did not differ significantly on the change fatigue variable. Finally the individuals who evaluated the change as positive experienced a lot less change fatigue than those respondents who experienced the change as negative ( $F(2, 90) = 11.70, p < .001$ ;  $M_{\text{negative}} = 3.45$ ;  $M_{\text{neutral}} = 3.14$ ;  $M_{\text{positive}} = 2.87$ ).

The used communication and information variables were first of all tested on their distinctiveness with confirmative factor analysis. In the original constructed six

variables did show a factor solution of five factors with an explained proportion variance of .65. The five different factors did not exactly present the variables as presented in Table 2. After evaluating the results the following factors remained, in which three items were deleted because of loadings on all factors below .45. The first factor was labelled as provision of information about the goals and necessity of the change (8 items factor loadings  $>.52$ ). The second factor consisted of four items that we labelled as the availability of information about the change (loadings  $>.61$ ). The third variable was labelled as negative interactions in the organization (5 items loadings  $>.56$ ). The fourth factor consisted of four items (loadings  $>.65$ ), and was labelled as positive interactions about the change. The fifth and last factor revealed from the confirmative factor analysis consisted of four items, and was labelled as lack of participation from employees (loadings  $>.59$ ).

The means, standard deviations and correlations between the variables from the confirmative factor analysis and change fatigue will be presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Means, standard deviations and correlations between the information and communication variables, support for the change and willing to contribute to the success of the change and change fatigue in study 2**

Variable	M (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Information about goals and necessity	3.20 (0.69)	-	.63 <sup>2</sup>	-.36 <sup>2</sup>	.38 <sup>2</sup>	.22 <sup>1</sup>	.63 <sup>2</sup>	.57 <sup>2</sup>	-.44 <sup>2</sup>
2. Availability of information	3.01 (0.74)		-	-.43 <sup>2</sup>	.32 <sup>2</sup>	-.19	.41 <sup>2</sup>	.47 <sup>2</sup>	-.37 <sup>2</sup>
3. Negative interaction about the change	3.12 (0.69)			-	-.32 <sup>2</sup>	.55 <sup>2</sup>	-.43 <sup>2</sup>	-.43 <sup>2</sup>	.60 <sup>2</sup>
4. Positive interaction about the change	2.92 (0.51)				-	-.22 <sup>1</sup>	.45 <sup>2</sup>	.35 <sup>2</sup>	-.35 <sup>2</sup>
5. Lack of participation	3.44 (0.60)					-	-.37 <sup>2</sup>	-.31 <sup>2</sup>	.59 <sup>2</sup>
6. Support for the change	3.31 (0.82)						-	.60 <sup>2</sup>	-.65 <sup>2</sup>
7. Willing to contribute for the success of the change	2.94 (0.70)							-	-.45 <sup>2</sup>
8. Change fatigue	2.87 (0.85)								-

<sup>1</sup> $p<.05$ ; <sup>2</sup> $p<.01$ ; <sup>3</sup> $p<.001$



From Table 3 we concluded that all constructed variables had an influence on change fatigue. To test the relative influence of the listed variables a regression analysis was computed. The result of this regression analysis will be shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: results from a regression analysis with change fatigue as dependent variable and information about goals and necessity of the change, availability of information, negative interaction about the change, positive interaction about the change and participation as predictors.**

Variable	$\beta$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Information about necessity and goals of change	-.21 <sup>2</sup>	
Availability of information	-.02	
Negative interaction about the change	.30 <sup>2</sup>	
Positive interaction about the change	-.09	
Lack of participation	.36 <sup>3</sup>	
		.49

<sup>1</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>2</sup> $p < .01$ ; <sup>3</sup> $p < .001$

Model:  $F(5, 90) = 18.44, p < .001$

What is striking is the fact that the strongest effect on change fatigue is found for lack of participation. Negative interaction about the change proved to have a significantly moderate effect on change fatigue, which delivers support for hypothesis 6a.

Information about the necessity and goals of the change is another moderate effect on a significant level. Surprisingly, positive interaction about the change did not have a significant effect and the effect that was found was really small. Hypothesis 6b is thus partly supported, only for the part that negative interaction has a positive relationship with change fatigue. The same is applicable for the availability of information. These predictors together explain 49% of variance of change fatigue.

The influence of the hierarchical level of the respondent was also tested. The function variable had originally eleven different levels functions which were recoded into five different levels, (1) higher (top) management, (2) staff members, including team leaders and program leaders, (3) advisors and policy employees, (4) administrative employees, including technical employees and service employees. Top managers were not among our respondents, which left four different groups on this variable. Analysis of variance showed that respondents from higher hierarchical levels showed less change fatigue than lower level employees did ( $F(2, 84) = 6.59, p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{staff}} = 1.96$ ;  $M_{\text{advisors \& policy}} = 2.70$ ;  $M_{\text{administrative}} = 3.24$ ). Thus supporting hypothesis 1.

**Table 5: Results of the regression analysis in which the information and communication variables and change fatigue are related to support for the change and willing to contribute to the success of the change**

Variable	Support for the change		Willing to contribute to the success of the change	
	$\beta$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Information about necessity and goals of change	.43 <sup>3</sup>		.36 <sup>2</sup>	
Availability of information	-.08		.11	
Negative interaction about the change	.00		-.12	
Positive interaction about the change	.16 <sup>1</sup>		.08	
Lack of participation	.00		-.06	
Change fatigue	-.43 <sup>3</sup>		-.11	
		.56		.37

<sup>1</sup>p<.05; <sup>2</sup>p<.01; <sup>3</sup>p<.001

From table 5 it shows that change fatigue has a significant influence on support for the change, not necessarily on willing to contribute to the change. Hypothesis 5a is supported but 5b needs to be rejected.

## Discussion

With this research we wanted to contribute to the research into organizational change and the role of communication in organizational change. The focus of our contribution is on change fatigue, a concept frequently mentioned within organization life. We constructed a scale to measure the amount of change fatigue and related the concept to various other change related and organizational communication variables. The implications of this paper are two-sided. On one hand these results show that change fatigue is one of the influences on support for the change. Organizations that pursue supported change should therefore invest in preventing or decreasing experienced change fatigue. On the other hand if organizations try to prevent change fatigue they should improve the information about the necessity and the goals of the change. Negative interaction about the change should be prevented and investment should be done in the possibilities and ways organization members can participate in the change process.

In order to reduce or prevent change fatigue organizations should not invest solely in the availability of information. Investment should be in developing and improving participation; this is in line with Boonstra (2000) and of course in general in organization development and concepts like sensemaking. Also that energy should

be put into the prevention and enhancement of the interaction of the change and informing employees on the necessity and goals of the organizational change.

### **Limitations and strengths**

The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data enabled us to present a rich view on change fatigue. Associations with change fatigue have been used to construct the scale. Therefore the risk of self-fulfilling prophecy based on literature decreased.

In study 2 we focused on a specific change project. Based on theory it would have been better to focus on general changes within the organization. To conduct studies in real life situations always remain a negotiation between the organization and the researchers. The focus on a specific change program was on request of the participating organization.

These conclusions of our study are based on studies in two different, Dutch organizations. Of course, to validate the construct of change fatigue and the relation of the construct with other variables should be done in more organizations and in other cultures. We hoped to have contributed to the in our view importance of employees responses to change.

### **Future research**

*‘People desperately need meaning in their lives and will sacrifice a great deal to institutions that will provide this meaning for them. As individuals become increasingly disenchanted and disillusioned with work and fatigued by the constant demand to change and to be flexible in response to organizational needs, employers now need to actively recognize the meaning and emotional aspects of work. Work is about a search for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying’* (Cartwright & Holmes, p. 206). This quote summarizes the general feeling of many employees in organizations, facing the next change, without a proper evaluation of the former one. Change seems to be the only constant in organizational life today.

With the construction of a scale to measure change fatigue we hope to contribute to the further explanation of success or failure of organizational change. Especially the relation with all kind of communication and information variables make that changes can be made more successful. Change is related to sensemaking

(van Vuuren & Elving, 2008), and sensemaking is essential in adopting a change by an individual employee, but also the way for organizations to go forward with change. If changes are continuous, why do organizations treat them as episodic? Maybe changes fail so much (approximately 70%; Boonstra, 2001; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006) because managers in general refuse to evaluate former changes and do not reflect what employees really are capable of. With this study we hoped to have contributed to further unravelling change and the role of communication in the success of organizational change.

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