# Journal of Organizational Change Management

## Article information:

## Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

## For Authors

## About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

# Employees' emotions in change: advancing the sensemaking approach

Sevda Helpap and Sigrid Bekmeier-Feuerhahn
*Institute of Corporate Development,*
*Leuphana University Lüneburg, Lüneburg, Germany*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Organizational changes are emotionally charged processes, and scholarly research has increasingly emphasized the impact of employee emotions on successful change management. This impact has rarely been considered in light of approaches focussing on employee sensemaking. To address this critical gap, the purpose of this paper is to combine the model of enacted sensemaking with insights from the Affect Infusion Model.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To test the model, the authors surveyed 261 employees with a vignette study and performed structural equation modeling on the results.

**Findings** – The findings reveal that emotions significantly affect employees' level of psychological resources, particularly change commitment, efficacy, and expectations. Furthermore, change commitment and efficacy are significant predictors of resistance intention, which confirms (to an extent) the validity of enacted sensemaking, and these factors mediate the relationship between employees' emotions and their resistance intentions.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study focussed on the early stages of a change initiative. Therefore, the authors only considered employee assessment at one point in time.

**Practical implications** – This model has managerial utility for explaining how employees' resistance intention regarding change is influenced by employees' emotions and their psychological resources.

**Originality/value** – The results broaden the horizons because they suggest a model of "emotionally primed" enacted sensemaking for employees during organizational change by offering a new theoretical framework (enacted sensemaking and substantive processing) and a new methodological approach (quantitative vignette study).

**Keywords** Emotion, Change, Sensemaking, Resistance, Structural equation modelling

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The sensemaking approach has been influential in explaining and describing cognitive processes in response to change. Many scholars have used this approach to elucidate how recipients develop understanding of change and the resulting outcome (Aula and Mantere, 2013; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Maitlis, 2005; Mantere *et al.*, 2012). In general, sensemaking is required when responding to an unknown, unprecedented, and unexpected situation that cannot be interpreted with available schemata (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

Although most studies of organizational change have explored the role that cognitive processes play in making sense of the change, change can also be affectively laden, which requires an emotional lens. Many studies in recent decades provided evidence that employees react with a variety of emotions toward organizational change (Kiefer, 2005; Huy, 2002; Mossholder *et al.*, 2000). Studies indicating the impact of employees' emotions

on their perceptions (Lerner and Keltner, 2000), decisions and judgments (Bodenhausen *et al.*, 1994), and behavior (George and Zhou, 2001) emphasize this issue's vital role in organizational life. Management studies therefore indicate increasing interest in the dimensions, mechanisms, and consequences of employees' emotions.

In understanding the reactions of employees toward change, sensemaking research has focussed exclusively on the cognitive processes and has largely ignored or underestimated the impact of employee emotions (Maitlis *et al.*, 2013). Thus, researchers increasingly call for an integration of the emotional dimension into the sensemaking model (Weick *et al.*, 2005; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Liu and Perrewe, 2005). First attempts have considered emotions (e.g. Maitlis *et al.*, 2013; Steigenberger, 2015), but hardly any theoretical and empirically tested integration of the emotional dimension exists in the current model of sensemaking. To contribute to the current discourse, we provide a theoretical integration of employees' emotions to Weick's model of enacted sensemaking by using insights from substantive processing within the Affect Infusion Model (AIM). Furthermore, by transferring the enacted sensemaking model to the context of change, we offer an empirical testable model.

The model of enacted sensemaking that was introduced by Weick in 1988 employs commitment, efficacy, and expectations and has exerted considerable influence (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) but has not yet been applied to the context of organizational change or to change relevant outcomes, such as employee resistance, although resistance is recognized as one of the most relevant reactions toward change (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Madsen *et al.*, 2005; Oreg, 2006; Paterson and Cary, 2002). This study transferred the model of enacted sensemaking to the context of change and therefore examines the combined impact of emotional and cognitive evaluation on employees' intention to resist change.

Finally, this study makes some important contributions to current debates. First, we expand the enacted sensemaking model by integrating the emotional dimension. Second, we transfer the model to the context of change and examine employees' resistance intention, and third, we apply quantitative methods instead of qualitative. We thus examine the direct impact of emotions on employees' psychological resources, which consist of their commitment, efficacy, and expectations, and their indirect effects on resistance intention. In addition, we empirically test the enacted sensemaking in its entirety on employees' resistance intention. This study therefore has significant implications because it offers a sophisticated theoretical and empirically tested model of "emotionally primed" enacted sensemaking. Moreover, because the current literature on sensemaking is primarily qualitative in nature (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), this study contributes to current discourse by introducing a new methodological approach.

### The impact of emotions on employees' psychological resources
The introduction of change can cause a variety of different emotional reactions among affected employees. Some employees might feel anxious, frightened or frustrated, whereas others feel hopeful and pleasant (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006; Mossholder *et al.*, 2000; Huy, 2002). More studies now acknowledge the importance of emotions and indicate their vital role on important outcomes of change (Vuori and Virtaharju, 2012; Liu and Perrewe, 2005; Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001).

Whereas the enacted sensemaking approach developed by Weick discusses the interplay of sensemaking and actions, the emotional dimension has mostly been neglected in prior research. Weick himself considers his groundbreaking 1988 work on

enacted sensemaking to be "basically cool and cognitive" (Weick, 2010, p. 545). Integrating emotion and cognition, AIM is a comprehensive model of the judgment processes of individuals that describes the circumstances under which affective reactions influence cognitive processing.

There are many reasons to expect substantive information processing, a processing strategy within AIM, in the context of organizational change (George and Jones, 2001), and several indicators suggest a conceptual overlap between substantive information processing and sensemaking. Major change initiatives that have personal relevance for the recipient are characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Balogun, 2001). All of these characteristics are relevant to substantive processing and to sensemaking. Moreover, substantive processing and sensemaking are associated with high cognitive effort, which is required when individuals confront atypical and complex circumstances and must develop new interpretive schemata (Forgas, 1995; Weick, 1988, 1995; Weick *et al.*, 2005).

In situations where a substantive processing strategy is needed, emotions have an important influence on the judgment process through affect priming (Bower, 1991; Forgas, 1995). Affect priming suggests that judgments are indirectly impacted by emotions through selective influence on attention, encoding, retrieval, and associative processes (Forgas, 1995; Bower, 1991; Singer and Salovey, 1988). Thus, judgments made using a substantive processing strategy are consistent with concurrent emotions. Positive emotions therefore lead to more positive judgments, and more positive memories are recalled (Bower, 1981; Douglas and Shepherd, 2000; Forgas, 1990). Consequently, the combination of substantive processing and enacted sensemaking allows us to theoretically explain and empirically examine the role of employee emotions on their enacted sensemaking. The approach of AIM offers distinct cues about basic variables of the enacted sensemaking model and the influence of emotions. Under the role of affect priming, we propose that change recipients' emotions influence their psychological resources to the extent that change commitment, change efficacy, and negative expectations may be adversely affected because of increasing negative emotions. By contrast, positive emotions are more likely to facilitate change initiatives because employees with positive emotions are more likely to believe in the value of the change initiative (affective change commitment) and their ability to adequately master the challenges during the change initiative (change efficacy), in addition to expecting a positive outcome (expectations):

*H1.* Employees' positive emotions are positively related to change commitment.

*H2.* Employees' positive emotions are positively related to change efficacy.

*H3.* Employees' positive emotions are negatively related to negative expectations.

### Employees' psychological resources and resistance intention
Weick (1988) identifies capacity, which we will refer to as efficacy, commitment, and expectations as important variables that facilitate or constrain individual enacted sensemaking. Depending on the level of these variables, individuals will respond differently to given situations. For example, Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) discuss the implications of these concepts as shared meaning and their either helpful or harmful impact when dealing with change. Following Sonenshein and Dholakia's (2012) approach by examining these variables as individual rather than shared concepts, we refer to these variables as employees' psychological resources for their sensemaking.

Prior studies have highlighted the critical role of commitment, efficacy, and expectation to explain change (Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012; Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Wanberg and Banas, 2000). Each variable is related to employee behavior in different ways: by fostering a desire to perform (affective change commitment), by believing in one's own performance (change efficacy), and by connecting previous and future performances (expectations). Thus far, the questions remain about the combined impact of these three psychological resources on employees' resistance intention, as a central dimensions of employees' reaction toward change. Resistance is a common and unavoidable response to organizational change and is one of the most frequently examined variables of employee behavior (Oreg *et al.*, 2011; Pardo del Val and Martínez Fuentes, 2003). Because resistance is highly affected by social (un)desirability, studies on change tend to assess the intention of employees to engage in resistance behavior (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Stanley *et al.*, 2005, see review of Oreg *et al.* 2011).

The degree of employees' level of change commitment, efficacy, and expectations will influence their resistance intentions. Commitment to change can increase employees' support for a given change or, in reverse, low commitment can facilitate resistance intentions (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Myer *et al.*, 2004). Change efficacy reflects the degree to which individuals believe in their ability to acquire the cognitive and behavioral resources that they must have to successfully navigate organizational change (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Wanberg and Banas, 2000). Hence, change efficacy can strongly affect enacted sensemaking because it generates the feeling among employees that they can do something about the situation and can contribute to change initiatives (Weick, 1988). Thus, if an employee has low change efficacy, his/her intention to resist will be relatively high compared to an employee with high change efficacy. Weick (1988) compares expectations with assumptions about the events, crises, or changes that "influence enactment in a manner similar to the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 313). Members of an organization create an environment in which expectations will be confirmed. Consequently, negative expectations about a new or ongoing change are more likely to be associated with resistance behavior, which tends to yield results that match employee expectations, e.g., that a given change initiative is a mistake. Thus, we derive the following hypotheses:

*H4.* Change commitment is negatively related to resistance intention.

*H5.* Change efficacy is negatively related to resistance intention.

*H6.* Negative expectations are positively related to resistance intention.

### The mediating role of employees' psychological resources

In the first section, we introduced employees' emotions as an important dimension for their psychological resources in organizational change by referring to substantive processing and the result of affect priming. In the second section, we applied the enacted sensemaking model to the context of organizational change by combining the three psychological resources with employees' resistance intention. The combination of these two approaches suggests an emotionally primed enacted sensemaking model in which the psychological resources perform a mediating role. Sensemaking theory suggests that behavior – or action, as Weick calls it – is the result of a previous interpretation of a given situation (Weick, 2010). In addition, the AIM provides conclusive evidence that emotions substantially affect judgment processes before individuals can behave in a certain manner (Forgas, 1995; Forgas and George, 2001). Thus, by combing these models, we

propose that employees' change commitment, efficacy, and expectations will mediate the impact of emotions on resistance intention. Our final hypothesis summarizes this prediction. The overall model is presented in Figure 1:

*H7.* Employees' (a) change commitment, (b) change efficacy, and (c) expectations mediate the relationship between their emotions and resistance intention.

## Methods
### Research procedure
To empirically test our model, we conducted a vignette study involving specific change scenarios (Devos *et al.*, 2007; Lau and Woodman, 1995; Thomas *et al.*, 1993). In an experimental vignette study, participants are assigned to a scenario and asked to imagine themselves in the described situation. The scenario described the current situation of the fictitious electronics company TECH Inc., the decision of management to restructure the company, and the communication of this change initiative. The applied scenarios were developed based on actual restructuring cases. Participants were asked to assume the position of employees and answer the follow-up questions on the questionnaire.

The manipulation check indicated that 79 percent of respondents perceived the case studies to be authentic, and 89 percent said that they were not reminded of any specific company, which might have led to biased data. Emotions "are not diffuse in that they have particular stimuli" (Lundberg and Young, 2001, p. 531). To ensure a stimulus that causes intensive emotional responses by the participants, we decided to focus on company-wide restructuring programs. Because we were particularly interested in negative and positive emotions to change and in creating variance in terms of emotions, we decided to use participatory and programmatic change communication strategies (Russ, 2008; Helpap, 2016). Thus, participants were randomly assigned to responding to a participatory or to a programmatic change.

### Questionnaire and sample
To collect data, we cooperated with institutions and universities that provide programs for professional development, such as project management seminars. The potential participants were contacted via e-mail. A total of 261 employees participated in the survey. Most participants (77 percent) had more than three years of work experience
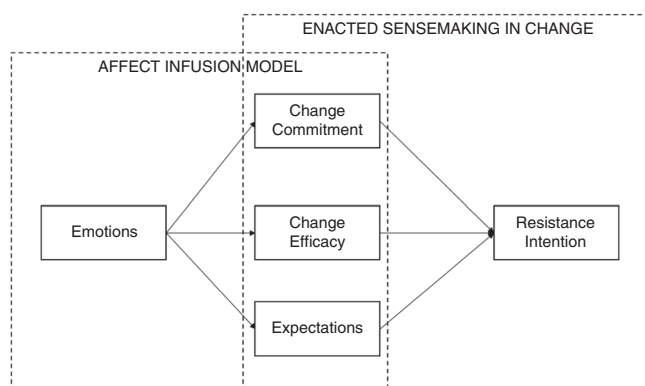
Figure 1.
Hypothesized model combining the AIM and enacted sensemaking in the context of organizational change

and were in the lower hierarchical levels; 61 percent had no managerial responsibilities. Of the participants, 48 percent were female with an average age of 32 (SD = 9.1). In addition, 91 percent had previous experience with organizational changes. Of these participants, 71 percent were affected by the changes initiated in their companies.

### Measurements

Emotions were measured using a six-point semantic differential scale involving five items based on the PANA scale (Watson *et al.*, 1988) and the PAD scale (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). To select relevant change-related emotions, we followed Kiefer (2005) and Lundberg and Young (2001). For example, two items were "pleased-annoyed" and "hopeful-despairing." The Cronbach's $\alpha$ value for this scale was 0.91.

Change commitment was measured using two items of the well-established affective commitment scale introduced by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). The $\alpha$ value for this scale was 0.72.

Change efficacy was measured following Ashford (1988) by assessing perceived change-specific self-efficacy with two items that were applied in Wanberg and Banas (2000) and Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012). The $\alpha$ value for this scale is 0.60.

Expectation was analyzed via a content analysis of answers to an open-ended question. Based on the previous literature (e.g. Haddock *et al.*, 1994), we used broad, open-ended questions to make inferences regarding employee understanding and interpretation of organizational change. Although expectations function as important dimensions of psychological resources in organizational change, few studies examine this dimension. Hence, we chose to evaluate individual expectations by analyzing the answers to open-ended questions. We asked the participants to explain the current change initiative to a former colleague and, in particular, to describe their personal expectations regarding the introduced changes. Following the content analysis procedure (Berelson, 1952), two research assistants analyzed the qualitative data by developing a list of codes. The answers were grouped in two main categorizes: positive and negative expectations. Because the great majority described negative expectations, we particularly focussed on negative expectations and counted the words that participants used to describe their negative expectations. Thus, we were able to assign numeric values to each individual in terms of expectations and include those numbers in the statistical analysis.

Resistance intention was measured with the scale proposed by Oreg (2006). Two items were used to determine to what extent participants would engage in resistance behavior. Cronbach's $\alpha$ suggests an acceptable internal consistency with 0.75.

## Results

### Construct validity

Following the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we first tested the quality of our measurement model and then tested the proposed conceptual model. We tested the quality of the measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model with its five latent constructs and 14 measures was built for CFA. The AMOS (22) software was applied to develop and test the CFA and the structural equation model (SEM) using the maximum likelihood estimation procedure. The CFA revealed that the model fit the data well. The goodness-of-fit statistics were as follows: $\chi^2 = 73.59$; df = 45; $p = 0.005$; $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.64$; GFI = 0.95; AGIF = 0.92; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.049. The *t*-values for the items were acceptably high, suggesting that

the items reflected their respective underlying constructs; the $t$-values ranged from 16.77 to 5.01. Discriminant validity was obtained for all variables because the variance extracted for each construct was greater than its squared correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

To determine the extent of a common method bias, we applied the Harman single-factor test. The single-factor model indicated that $\chi^2(90) = 1{,}098.1$. We calculated a $\chi^2$ difference test against the six-factor measurement model to assess the impact of common method variance. This test revealed a significant difference between the $\chi^2$ values of the two models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 947.16$, $\Delta df = 23$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the single-factor model had a significantly worse fit than the measurement model for this study. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of the main variables are reported in Table I.

### Test of hypothesized relationships
The second step of our analysis involved testing the hypothesized structural model presented in Figure 1. In the SEM, all variables were included and analyzed together. The fit statistics of the hypothesized model ($\chi^2 = 78.36$; df $= 46$; $p = 0.002$; $\chi^2/$df $= 1.70$; GFI $= 0.95$; AGIF $= 0.92$; CFI $= 0.98$; RMSEA $= 0.05$) are well within the acceptable range, indicating a good model fit.

*Test of direct effects*. The analysis revealed that the emotional reaction had significant positive effects on commitment ($\beta = 0.75$; $p < 0.001$), supporting *H1*. The relationship between emotions and efficacy is also positive and significant with $\beta = 0.38$; $p < 0.001$, supporting *H2*. Finally, the results indicate a significantly negative association between the occurring emotions and the quantity of negative expectations among employees ($\beta = -0.22$; $p < 0.001$), supporting *H3*.

The following hypotheses are related to the enacted sensemaking theory. The SEM revealed that the path from change commitment to resistance ($\beta = -0.79$; $p < 0.001$) was negative and significant, which supported *H4*. The path from efficacy to resistance intention was negatively significant ($\beta = -0.25$; $p < 0.017$), supporting *H5*. The path analysis measuring the relationship between expectations and resistance was not significant, indicating no relevant prediction of resistance intention by the expectations of the recipients. Consequently, *H6* is not supported by this study.

### Test of indirect effects
We applied a mediation effect analysis in AMOS using a path analysis, examined the standardized correlation coefficient of the direct path with and without mediators, and

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Age | 32.35 | 9.06 | | | | | | | |
| 2. Tenure | 2.60 | 1.27 | 0.72** | | | | | | |
| 3. Change experiences | 1.53 | 0.64 | −0.61 | 0.12* | | | | | |
| 4. Emotions | 2.01 | 0.96 | −0.26** | −0.29** | 0.14* | | | | |
| 5. Commitment | 3.71 | 0.96 | −0.52 | −0.08 | −0.04 | −0.07 | | | |
| 6. Efficacy | 5.74 | 0.99 | −0.11 | −0.12* | −0.01 | 0.07 | 0.61** | | |
| 7. Expectations | 5.22 | 1.10 | 0.37 | 0.00 | −0.08 | 0.03 | 0.28** | 0.36** | |
| 8. Resistance intention | 14.21 | 25.28 | −0.12 | −0.14* | −0.03 | 0.01 | −0.20** | −0.14* | −0.06 |

**Notes:** $n = 261$. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

compared these two models. In addition, we used bootstrapping to examine the indirect effects and assess the mediation estimates (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). According to the recommendations in the literature, we applied a 95 percent bootstrap confidence interval using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes and Preacher, 2014; Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Because expectations were not significantly related to resistance intention, we did not conduct a mediation analysis on this variable. Table II summarizes the results of the two tests.

The analysis reveals a full mediation of employees' change commitment on the relationship between their emotions and resistance intention. The results on employees' change efficacy suggest that the direct path with the mediator drops in value and significance but remains significant at the 5 percent level, which suggests a partial mediation. Hence, the data support *H7a* and *7b* but not *H7c*. Figure 2 presents the final research model with key empirical figures.

## Discussion

The interplay of employees' cognitive processes and emotional assessments during organizational change have received considerable attention in recent years (Bartunek *et al.*, 2011; Maitlis *et al.*, 2013). However, the model of enacted sensemaking "was basically cool and cognitive" (Weick, 2010, p. 545) when it was introduced and largely ignored individual emotions during times of change. To address this significant gap, we expanded the enacted sensemaking model by integrating employee emotions based on the insights concerning substantive processing provided by the AIM. Further, we applied employee-enacted sensemaking on organizational change by examining

| Path to be tested | Mediation variable | Effect without mediator | Effect with mediator | Indirect effect | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotions → resistance | Commitment | −0.41** | 0.24 | Significant** | Full mediation |
| Emotions → resistance | Efficacy | −0.41** | −0.27** | Significant** | Partial mediation |

**Notes:** Standardized coefficients are provided. 5,000 bootstrap samples. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

**Table II.**
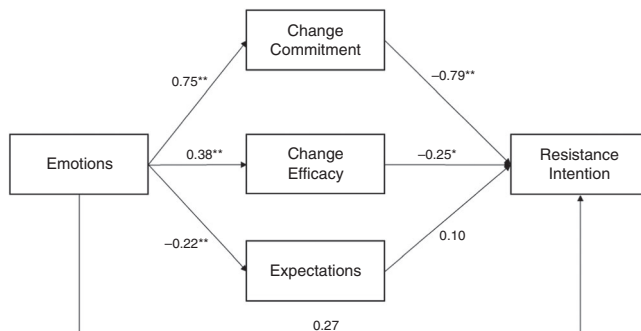Results of mediation analysis



**Figure 2.**
Final research model

**Notes:** Standardized coefficients are provided. *$p<0.05$;
**$p<0.01$ (two-tailed)

employees' resistance intention. Finally, we tested the indirect impact of employees' emotions on their resistance intention via their psychological resources.

The results of this study suggest that the emotional responses of employees are significantly related to change commitment, change efficacy, and expectations involving organizational change. In addition, emotions indirectly affect the level of intentional resistance behavior through change commitment and efficacy. A substantial body of evidence supports the assumption that emotions represent a source of information in complex and novel situations (Clore and Parrott, 1991; Clore et al., 1994; Schwarz, 1990). This study provides support for this argument and transfers it to the sensemaking process. In this sense, negative emotions are more likely to constrain psychological resources because employees will feel lees desire to perform (commitment), believe less in themselves (efficacy), and have more negative predictions (expectations). By contrast, employees' positive emotions in organizational change are more likely to positively influence psychological resources. This relationship suggests an "emotionally primed" enacted sensemaking by these employees. Thus, emotions appear to be a crucial factor in shaping, directing, and priming individual sensemaking. As previous studies indicate, emotions have increasingly been acknowledged to explain important individual developments on a cognitive level and social process in the context of organizations, such as in the revision of beliefs (Hodgkinson and Healey, 2011; Lieberman, 2000), the interpretation of events (Schwarz and Clore, 2007), decision making (Forgas, 1995), and/or strategy implementation (Huy, 2011). This study adds to this growing body of scholarship by offering a nuanced perspective on the role of emotions in enacted sensemaking during times of change.

Furthermore, we examine the sensemaking approach with its psychological resources in its entirety on the change critical aspect of employees' resistance intention. We provided an integrated model by including all three psychological resource variables and by focussing on resistance intention in the context of organizational change. Previous studies either provided theoretical approaches to this relationship or empirically examined the relationship between one of the psychological resource variables, such as commitment and behavioral responses (e.g. Ford et al., 2008; Jimmieson et al., 2004). This study emphasizes the importance of considering sensemaking as an integrated model with different interrelated and mutually influential variables.

Our study reveals that employee change commitment and change efficacy are significantly related to resistance intention, a result that suggests a direct and negative relationship between these variables. Conversely, we found no significant statistical relationship between expectation and intentional resistance. These results provide empirical support for the critical relevance of these variables as levers of sensemaking (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). The relevance of commitment and efficacy in relation to sensemaking in particular has previously been discussed and examined in the literature (Grant et al., 2008). Sonenshein and Dholakia (2012) regard change commitment and efficacy as critical resources for sensemaking in response to change and provide empirical evidence for their impact on employee behavioral responses to change. However, expectations seem particularly important in regard to selecting, framing, and connecting cues to establish sense (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Expectations appear stronger in the interpretative stages and in situations characterized by a discrepancy between current circumstances and expectations and by disruption (Weick et al., 2005). The relationship of a person's expectations to the capacity to derive a specific set of actions is not as clear as the variable between commitment and efficacy. In addition, whereas efficacy and commitment are related to

past events and affect an interpretation of the present moment, the variable expectation, by its very definition, involves the future, which is uncertain and not strongly consolidated.

Overall, this study transforms the theoretical and partially abstract model of enacted sensemaking into an empirical and testable model. Thereby, we apply the model to the context of organizational change and introduce a new methodological approach by using vignette study (Aguinis and Bradley, 2014). Because the current study of sensemaking is predominantly qualitative in nature (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), this study makes the important contribution of a new methodological approach to study and apply the sensemaking theory. Hence, this study successfully expands the model of enacted sensemaking that accounts for employee emotions by integrating the concept of sensemaking with the substantive processing within the AIM.

### Limitations and further research
As scholars have noted, sensemaking is an iterative process, which implies that sensemaking changes over time during organizational change and at different stages in a change process (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). This study focussed on one specific moment in the early stages of a change initiative; therefore, we only considered employee evaluation at one time. However, employees' emotional state and psychological resources are likely to change over the course of time in response to an evolving change, and future studies on sensemaking in response to organizational change must analyze and compare the responses of employees to different stages of a given change initiative. In addition, sensemaking is a process that occurs in a social context and is predicated on interaction with the environment (Aula and Mantere, 2013; Maitlis, 2005). A study of how individual emotions are influenced by the reactions of their surroundings – and how this influence affects sensemaking – is an interesting area for further research.

### References

Aguinis, H. and Bradley, K.J. (2014), "Best practice recommendations for designing and implementing experimental vignette methodology studies", *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 351-371.

Anderson, J.C. and Gerbing, D.W. (1988), "Structural equation modeling in practice: a review and recommended two-step approach", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 103 No. 3, pp. 411-423.

Antonacopoulou, E.P. and Gabriel, Y. (2001), "Emotion, learning and organizational change: towards an integration of psychoanalytic and other perspectives", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 14 No. 5, pp. 435-451.

Ashford, S.J. (1988), "Individual strategies for coping with stress during organizational transitions", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 19-36.

Aula, P. and Mantere, S. (2013), "Making and breaking sense: an inquiry into the reputation change", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 340-352.

Balogun, J. (2001), "Strategic change", *Management Quarterly*, No. 10 No. 1, pp. 2-11.

Balogun, J. and Johnson, G. (2004), "Organizational restructuring and middle manager sensemaking", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 523-549.

Bartunek, J.M., Balogun, J. and Do, B. (2011), "Considering planned change a new: stretching large group interventions strategically, emotionally, and meaningfully", *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 1-52.

Bartunek, J.M., Rousseau, D.M., Rudolph, J.W. and DePalma, J.A. (2006), "On the receiving end: sensemaking, emotion, and assessments of an organizational change initiated by others", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 182-206.

Berelson, B. (1952), *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, Free Press, New York, NY.

Bodenhausen, G.V., Sheppard, L.A. and Kramer, G.P. (1994), "Negative affect and social judgment: the differential impact of anger and sadness", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 45-62.

Bovey, W.H. and Hede, A. (2001), "Resistance to organizational change: the role of cognitive and affective processes", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 22 No. 8, pp. 372-382.

Bower, G.H. (1981), "Mood and memory", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 129-148.

Bower, G.H. (1991), "Mood congruity of social judgments", in Forgas, J.P. (Ed.), *International Series in Experimental Social Psychology: [v. 23]. Emotion and Social Judgments*, 1st ed., Pergamon Press, Oxford, NY, pp. 31-53.

Clore, G.L. and Parrott, W.G. (1991), "Moods and their vicissitudes: thoughts and feelings as information", in Forgas, J.P. (Ed.), *International Series in Experimental Social Psychology: [v. 23]. Emotion and Social Judgments*, 1st ed., Pergamon Press, Oxford, NY, pp. 107-123.

Clore, G.L., Schwarz, N. and Conway, M. (1994), "Affective causes and consequences of social information processing", in Wyer, R.S. and Srull, T.K. (Eds), *Handbook of Social Cognition*, 2nd ed., L. Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 323-418.

Devos, G., Buelens, M. and Bouckenooghe, D. (2007), "Contribution of content, context, and process to understanding openness to organizational change: two experimental simulation studies", *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 147 No. 6, pp. 607-629.

Douglas, E.J. and Shepherd, D.A. (2000), "Entrepreneurship as a utility maximizing response", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 231-251.

Ford, J.D., Ford, L.W. and D'Amelio, A. (2008), "Resistance to change: the rest of the story", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 362-377.

Forgas, J.P. (1990), "Affective influences on individual and group judgments", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 441-453.

Forgas, J.P. (1995), "Mood and judgment: the affect infusion model (AIM)", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 117 No. 1, pp. 39-66.

Forgas, J.P. and George, J.M. (2001), "Affective influences on judgments and behavior in organizations: an information processing perspective", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 3-34.

Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981), "Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 39-50.

George, J.M. and Jones, G.R. (2001), "Towards a process model of individual change in organizations", *Human Relations*, Vol. 54 No. 4, pp. 419-444.

George, J.M. and Zhou, J. (2001), "When openness to experience and conscientiousness are related to creative behavior: an interactional approach", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 513-524.

Gioia, D.A. and Chittipeddi, K. (1991), "Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 6, pp. 433-448.

Gist, M.E. and Mitchell, T.R. (1992), "Self-efficacy: a theoretical analysis of its determinants and malleability", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 183-211.

Grant, A.M., Dutton, J.E. and Rosso, B.D. (2008), "Giving commitment: employee support programs and the prosocial sensemaking process", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 51 No. 5, pp. 898-918.

Haddock, G., Zanna, M.P. and Esses, V.M. (1994), "Mood and the expression of intergroup attitudes: the moderating role of affect intensity", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 189-205.

Hayes, A.F. and Preacher, K.J. (2014), "Statistical mediation analysis with a multicategorical independent variable", *The British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, Vol. 67 No. 3, pp. 451-470.

Helpap, S. (2016), "The impact of power distance orientation on recipients' reactions to participatory versus programmatic change communication", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 5-34.

Herscovitch, L. and Meyer, J.P. (2002), "Commitment to organizational change: extension of a three-component model", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 3, pp. 474-487.

Hodgkinson, G.P. and Healey, M.P. (2011), "Psychological foundations of dynamic capabilities: reflexion and reflection in strategic management", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 13, pp. 1500-1516.

Huy, Q.N. (2002), "Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: the contribution of middle managers", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 47 No. 1, p. 31.

Huy, Q.N. (2011), "How middle managers' group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 13, pp. 1387-1410.

Jimmieson, N.L., Terry, D.J. and Callan, V.J. (2004), "A longitudinal study of employee adaptation to organizational change: the role of change-related information and change-related self-efficacy", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 11-27.

Kiefer, T. (2005), "Feeling bad: antecedents and consequences of negative emotions in ongoing change", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 8, pp. 875-897.

Lau, C.M. and Woodman, R. (1995), "Understanding organizational change: a schematic perspective", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 537-554.

Lerner, J.S. and Keltner, D. (2000), "Beyond valence: toward a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice", *Cognition & Emotion*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 473-493.

Lieberman, M.D. (2000), "Intuition: a social cognitive neuroscience approach", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 126 No. 1, p. 109.

Liu, Y. and Perrewe, P.L. (2005), "Another look at the role of emotion in the organizational change: a process model", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 263-280.

Lundberg, C.C. and Young, C.A. (2001), "A note on emotions and consultancy", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 14 No. 6, pp. 530-538.

Madsen, S.R., Miller, D.M. and John, C.R. (2005), "Readiness for organizational change: do organizational commitment and social relationships in the workplace make a difference?", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 213-233.

Maitlis, S. (2005), "The social process of organizational sensemaking", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 21-49.

Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M. (2014), "Sensemaking in organizations: taking stock and moving forward", *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 57-125.

Maitlis, S. and Sonenshein, S. (2010), "Sensemaking in crisis and change: inspiration and insights from Weick (1988)", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 551-580.

Maitlis, S., Vogus, T.J. and Lawrence, T.B. (2013), "Sensemaking and emotion in organizations", *Organizational Psychology Review*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 222-247.

Mantere, S., Schildt, H.A. and Sillince, J.A. (2012), "Reversal of strategic change", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 55 No. 1, pp. 172-196.

Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J.A. (1974), *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge.

Meyer, J.P. and Herscovitch, L. (2001), "Commitment in the workplace: toward a general model", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 299-326.

Mossholder, K.W., Settoon, R.P., Armenakis, A.A. and Harris, S.G. (2000), "Emotion during organizational transformations: an interactive model of survivor reactions", *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 220-243.

Myer, J.P., Becker, T.E. and Vandenberghe, C. (2004), "Employee commitment and motivation: a conceptual analysis and integrative model", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 89 No. 6, pp. 991-1007.

Oreg, S. (2006), "Personality, context, and resistance to organizational change", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 73-101.

Oreg, S., Vakola, M. and Armenakis, A. (2011), "Change recipients' reactions to organizational change: a 60-year review of quantitative studies", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 47 No. 4, pp. 461-524.

Pardo del Val, M. and Martínez Fuentes, C.M. (2003), "Resistance to change: a literature review and empirical study", *Management Decision*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 148-155.

Paterson, J.M. and Cary, J. (2002), "Organizational justice, change anxiety, and acceptance of downsizing: preliminary tests of an AET-based model", *Motivation and Emotion*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 83-103.

Preacher, K.J. and Hayes, A.F. (2008), "Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models", *Behavior Research Methods*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 879-891.

Russ, T.L. (2008), "Communicating change: a review and critical analysis of programmatic and participatory implementation approaches", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 8 Nos 3-4, pp. 199-211.

Schwarz, N. (1990), "Feelings as information. Informational and motivational functions of affective states", in Higgins, E.T. and Sorrentino, R.M. (Eds), *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition*, Guilford, New York, NY, pp. 527-561.

Schwarz, N. and Clore, G.L. (2007), "Feelings and phenomenal experiences", in Kruglanski, A.W. and Higgins, E.T. (Eds), *Social Psychology. Handbook of Basic Principles*, 2nd ed., Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 385-407.

Singer, J.A. and Salovey, P. (1988), "Mood and memory: evaluating the network theory of affect", *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 211-251.

Sonenshein, S. and Dholakia, U. (2012), "Explaining employee engagement with strategic change implementation: a meaning-making approach", *Organization Science*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 1-23.

Stanley, D.J., Meyer, J.P. and Topolnytsky, L. (2005), "Employee cynicism and resistance to organizational change", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 429-459.

Steigenberger, N. (2015), "Emotions in sensemaking: a change management perspective", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 432-451.

Thomas, J.B., Clark, S.M. and Gioia, D.A. (1993), "Strategic sensemaking and organizational performance: linkages among scanning, interpretation, action, and outcomes", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 239-270.

Vuori, T. and Virtaharju, J. (2012), "On the role of emotional arousal in sensegiving", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 48-66.

Wanberg, C.R. and Banas, J.T. (2000), "Predictors and outcomes of openness to changes in a reorganizing workplace", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 85 No. 1, pp. 132-142.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A. and Tellegen, A. (1988), "Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 54 No. 6, pp. 1063-1070.

Weick, K.E. (1988), "Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 305-317.

Weick, K.E. (1995), *Sensemaking in Organizations. Foundations for Organizational Science*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Weick, K.E. (2010), "Reflections on enacted sensemaking in the Bhopal disaster", *Journal of Management Studies,*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 537-550.

Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M. and Obstfeld, D. (2005), "Organizing and the process of sensemaking", *Organization Science*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 409-421.

## Further reading

Allen, J., Jimmieson, N.L., Bordia, P. and Irmer, B.E. (2007), "Uncertainty during organizational change: managing perceptions through communication", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 187-210.

Forgas, J.P. (2000), "Affect and information processing strategies: an interactive relationship", in Forgas, J.P. (Ed.), *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, pp. 253-280.

**About the authors**

Sevda Helpap is a Research Assistant and a PhD Candidate at the Leuphana University Lüneburg. Her research interests include organizational change, change communication, personal and cultural values, emotions at work and sensemaking. Sevda Helpap is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: helpap@leuphana.de

Dr Sigrid Bekmeier-Feuerhahn is a Professor of Communications and Cultural Management at the Leuphana University in Lüneburg. She received her PhD in Consumer Behavior from the University of Paderborn. Her areas of expertise include topics about organizational change and communication, entrepreneurial communication, corporate social responsibility and cultural organizations.