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# Resistance to organizational change: the role of cognitive and affective processes

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## Keywords

Organizational change, Resistance, Individual behaviour, Organizational behaviour

## Abstract

Most previous studies of organizational change and resistance take an organizational perspective as opposed to an individual perspective. This paper investigates the relationship between irrational ideas, emotion and resistance to change. Nine organizations implementing major change were surveyed providing data from 615 respondents. The analysis showed that irrational ideas are positively correlated with behavioural intentions to resist change. Irrational ideas and emotion together explain 44 percent of the variance in intentions to resist. Also outlines an intervention strategy to guide management in developing a method for approaching resistance when implementing major change.

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## Introduction

Organizational change causes individuals to experience a reaction process (Kyle, 1993). Scott and Jaffe (1988) describe the process as consisting of four phases, namely: initial denial, resistance, gradual exploration, and eventual commitment. Resistance is a natural and normal response to change because change often involves going from the known to the unknown (Coghlan, 1993; Steinburg, 1992; Myers and Robbins, 1991; Nadler, 1981; Zaltman and Duncan, 1977). Not only do individuals experience change in different ways (Carnall, 1986), they also differ in their ability and willingness to adapt to change (Darling, 1993). This paper investigates whether a relationship exists between an individual's cognitive and affective processes and their willingness to adapt to major organizational change.

This topic is important because the failure of many corporate change programs is often directly attributable to employee resistance (Maurer, 1997; Spiker and Lesser, 1995; Regar *et al.*, 1994; Martin, 1975). For example, a longitudinal study of 500 large organizations found employee resistance was the most frequently cited problem encountered by management when implementing change (Waldersee and Griffiths, 1997). More than half the organizations in that survey experienced difficulties with employee resistance. Successfully managing resistance is a major challenge for change initiators and is arguably of greater importance than any other aspect of the change process (O'Connor, 1993).

Management usually focuses on the technical elements of change with a tendency to neglect the equally important human element which is often crucial to the successful implementation of change

(Levine, 1997; Huston, 1992; Steier, 1989; Arendt *et al.*, 1995; Tessler, 1989; New and Singer, 1983). As Nord and Jermier (1994) express it, resistance is resisted rather than being purposively managed.

Therefore, in order to successfully lead an organization through major change it is important for management to balance both human and organization needs (Spiker and Lesser, 1995; Ackerman, 1986). Organizational change is driven by personal change (Band, 1995; Steinburg, 1992; Dunphy and Dick, 1989). Individual change is needed in order for organizational change to succeed (Evans, 1994). This paper reports on a study that aimed to identify, measure and evaluate how human elements including cognitive and affective processes are associated with an individual's level of resistance to organizational change.

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## Conceptual framework

The conceptual model developed for this paper is illustrated in Figure 1. It provides a framework for empirical testing and consists of four constructs (in bold type) namely perception, cognitions, affect and resistance. The operationalized variable for each construct is also included in the model (in italic type).

Figure 1 is an illustration of human processes described in the literature. For example, Schlesinger (1982) in his psychoanalytic paper entitled "Resistance as process", outlines classical theory favouring the sequence: interpretation, cognition, affect and action. Ellis and Harper (1975) state that humans have four basic processes, namely, to perceive or sense, to reason or think, to feel or emote, and to move or act. Both of these sources argue that individuals do not experience basic processes in isolation or

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**Submitted and accepted  
July 2001**

Leadership & Organization  
Development Journal  
22/8 [2001] 372-382

© MCB University Press  
[ISSN 0143-7739]

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separately. Rather, humans function holistically and experience perceiving, thinking, emoting and moving simultaneously with the various processes overlapping (Schlesinger, 1982; Ellis and Harper, 1975).

According to the A-B-C theory of personality, which is central to rational-emotive behaviour therapy, "A" (the activating event) does not cause "C" (the emotional and behavioural consequence); instead, it is "B" (an individual's belief) about "A" that largely causes "C" (Corey, 1996; Ellis and Harper, 1975). This interaction between human processes is illustrated by the direction of each arrow in the present conceptual model that links the variables for empirical testing (see Figure 1).

### Operationalizing variables and hypothesis development

The four constructs illustrated in Figure 1 were each operationalized to derive variables for measurement. Hypotheses were developed to test the relationship between the various operationalized variables.

#### Operationalizing perception

The construct perception illustrated in Figure 1 was operationalized as the variable impact of change. Dunphy and Stace (1991) have defined a scale of change that increases from fine-tuning, to incremental adjustment, through to modular transformation, and finally to corporate transformation. This research targeted organizations implementing high impact change (i.e., modular and corporate transformation). Kyle (1993) claims resistance is dependent upon two related factors. First, the degree of control an individual has over change and their ability to start, modify and stop the change: as control of change increases, resistance decreases. Second, is the degree of impact the change has on individuals: the higher the impact the greater the resistance. In other words, change with low impact and high individual control will produce least resistance whereas change with high impact and low individual control will create highest resistance. The findings of this study are expected to be more

informative by measuring the relationship between cognitions and resistance during high impact change.

#### Operationalizing cognitions

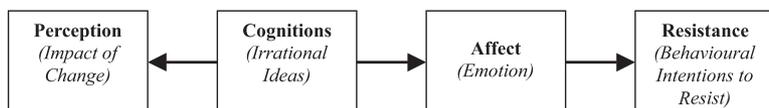
Illustrated in Figure 1, the construct cognitions is operationalized as the independent variable irrational ideas. The basic philosophy of the cognitive approach is that individuals tend to have automatic thoughts that incorporate what has been described as faulty, irrational or "crooked" thinking (Burns, 1990; Beck, 1988). This internal dialogue is often based on misconceptions and faulty assumptions which lead to emotional and behavioural disturbances (Corey, 1996).

Ellis and Beck are regarded as the pioneers of cognitive approaches and therapy (Corey, 1996; Wade and Tavris, 1996; Matlin, 1995). Ellis founded his cognitive approach in 1955 and during his career became increasingly convinced that an individual's emotions and behaviours depend upon the way they structure their thoughts (Ellis and Harper, 1975). Ellis identified a number of irrational ideas that individuals hold. These are described in Table I.

Beck (1988), on the other hand, suggests that individuals have a tendency to develop a negative self-schema about themselves and their life events that results in an attitude which is consistently pessimistic. These systematic errors in reasoning are described as "cognitive distortions" (Matlin, 1995). According to Beck (1988), individuals are capable of many types of cognitive distortions. These distortions occur automatically and any number of distortions can occur almost simultaneously. Beck (1988) lists and describes 11 cognitive distortions, namely: tunnel vision, selective abstraction, arbitrary inference, overgeneralization, polarized thinking, magnification, biased explanations, negative labelling, personalization, mind reading and subjective reasoning.

The management literature contains little reference to irrational ideas and cognitive distortions and their influence on resistance to organizational change. Coghlan and Rashford (1990) argue that maladaptive thinking abounds in the workplace. These distortions are creations of the mind rather than representations of reality and because they are internalized and not tested, they are perceived as being true, resulting in reality being distorted (Coghlan, 1993). During organizational change individuals create their own interpretations of what is going to happen, how they themselves are perceived and what others are thinking or intending.

**Figure 1**  
 Conceptual framework



**Table I**

The set of irrational ideas proposed by Ellis and Harper

Irrational idea	Description
1. Needs approval	The idea that an individual must have love and approval from all people they find significant in their life
2. Fears failure	The idea that an individual must prove thoroughly competent, adequate and achieving and have talent/competence in some important area
3. Blames self, others or unkind fate	The idea that when people act obnoxiously and unfairly towards an individual, they should be damned and be seen as undesirable people
4. Feels depressed and miserable when frustrated	The idea that individuals have a to view things as awful, terrible, horrible and catastrophic when they get seriously frustrated, treated unfairly or rejected
5. Does not control one's destiny	The idea that an individual's emotional distress comes from external pressures and that they have little or no ability to control or change their feelings
6. Preoccupied with anxiety	The idea that if something appears to be dangerous and fearsome, the individual must pre-occupy and make themselves anxious about it
7. Avoids life's difficulties	The idea that an individual can more easily avoid facing many of life's difficulties and self-responsibilities than to undertake rewarding forms of self-discipline
8. Influenced by personal history	The idea that an individual's past continues to strongly influence and determine an individual's feeling and behaviours today
9. Does not accept reality	The idea that individuals and things should turn out better than they do, and that it is awful and horrible if good solutions are not found to life's grim realities
10. Inert and passive existence	The idea that an individual can achieve maximum human happiness by inertia and inaction and by a passive and uncommitted existence

**Source:** Summarized from Ellis and Harper (1975)

This is particularly true, for example, when there is an absence of adequate information (Coghlan, 1993). Cognitive distortions impair an individual's relationship with the organization (Coghlan and Rashford, 1990). If these dysfunctional cognitive processes or distortions are not corrected, it is claimed by Coghlan (1993) and Miller and Yeager (1993), resistance to change will increase.

The above discussion provides some evidence that cognitive distortions and irrational ideas are as prevalent in the workplace as in life generally. It is expected that there will be a statistical relationship between the independent variable irrational ideas and the dependent variable behavioural intentions to resist (see Figure 1). It is, therefore, hypothesized that individuals with higher levels of irrational ideas will have higher levels of resistance to organizational change.

*H1.* The higher the level of irrational ideas, the higher the level of behavioural resistance to change.

In addition to testing this hypothesis the statistical analysis will also aim to identify and discuss which specific irrational ideas listed in Table I have the strongest relationship with the dependent variable behavioural intentions to resist.

### **Operationalizing affect**

Affective processes are usually operationalized as emotions and feelings that are related to actions (Wrightsmann and Sanford, 1975). Emotion is illustrated as an intervening variable in Figure 1 and can be described as a state of arousal involving facial and bodily changes, brain activation, subjective feelings, cognitive appraisals which can be either conscious or unconscious and rational or irrational, and with a tendency toward action (Wade and Tavis, 1996). Psychology researchers have identified a number of primary emotions experienced by individuals universally. These include fear, anger, sadness, joy, surprise, disgust and contempt (Wade and Tavis, 1996).

These primary emotions are similar to the emotions experienced by an individual during organizational change.

Organizational upheavals lead to feelings of anger, denial, loss and frustration (Spiker and Lesser, 1995). Individuals experience loss and grief when established ways of doing a job are changed. Changes and losses in role identity can lead to feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety and low self-esteem (Sullivan and Guntzelman, 1991) and when individuals fail to adapt emotionally to change then they experience resistance (Spiker, 1994).

Emotion is represented as an intervening variable rather than a moderating variable (Sekaran, 1992) in Figure 1 because it is theorized to influence the relationship between the independent variable irrational ideas and the dependent variable behavioural intentions to resist. It is predicted that emotion, as an intervening variable, will impact upon the strength of the association between irrational ideas and behavioural intentions to resist. As a result the following hypothesis is developed for testing.

*H2.* The level of emotion has an impact upon the association between irrational ideas and the level of behavioural resistance.

### Operationalizing resistance

Behavioural intentions to resist is derived from the construct resistance and is illustrated as the dependent variable in Figure 1. Behaviour has been defined as “physical actions that can be seen or heard” and “also includes mental processes, which cannot be seen or heard” (Matlin, 1995). The construct was operationalized by developing a behavioural intentions matrix based on the overt-covert and active-passive dimensions illustrated in Figure 2.

The dependent variable measures an individual’s intentions to engage in either supportive or resistant behaviour towards organizational change. Keywords were derived for each quadrant of the matrix to describe behavioural intentions towards change. In order to explain the variance of

the dependent variable in the conceptual model (Figure 1), a statistical diagram reporting the coefficient of determination will be constructed as part of the analysis.

### Design and method

The study involved hypothesis testing to examine the strength of relationship between the variables being investigated. It was designed as a correlational field study in a non-contrived setting with minimal researcher involvement and no manipulation of organizational activities. Purposive and judgemental sampling was used to source data from individuals exposed to the resistance phase of major organizational change. The data-collection method was a self-administered questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed to participants at the workplace for completion at their own convenience. There were two primary reasons for choosing a self-administered questionnaire. First, it was an efficient way to collect data for specific variables of interest. Second, it provided anonymity for respondents who were disclosing personal information about themselves and their reactions to change.

### Implementation

Nine separate organizations participated in the research. These organizations consisted of federal government corporations and agencies, state government departments and agencies, local government and large private sector organizations predominantly in Brisbane (state capital of Queensland, Australia). All organizations were implementing major change. The changes involved restructures and realignments of departments/divisions, major reorganization of systems and procedures and/or the introduction of new process technologies.

### Impact of change scale

In order for respondents to focus on the change occurring in their organization they were first asked to briefly describe the change and then complete a single item five-point interval scale developed to measure how much they were affected by the change. The scale ensured that individuals surveyed were experiencing high impact change and would constitute a suitable sample for investigation.

### Irrational ideas scale

The “irrational belief scale” developed by Malouff and Schutte (1986) was evaluated for measuring the independent variable and was

**Figure 2**  
Framework for measuring behavioural intentions

	Overt ←	→ Covert
	(openly expressive behaviour)	(concealed behaviour)
Active (originate action)	<p><i>Elements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppose</li> <li>• Argue</li> <li>• Obstruct</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate</li> <li>• Embrace</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><i>Elements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stall</li> <li>• Dismantle</li> <li>• Undermine</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Co-operate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Passive (not acting, inert)	<p><i>Elements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe</li> <li>• Refrain</li> <li>• Wait</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree</li> <li>• Accept</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><i>Elements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignore</li> <li>• Withdraw</li> <li>• Avoid</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give in</li> <li>• Comply</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

considered suitable for organizational research. The scale is a 20-item self-administered questionnaire developed to measure Ellis' irrational beliefs and consists of two items for each of the ten irrational ideas described in Table I.

Internal consistency of the "irrational belief scale" assessed by Cronbach's alpha has been found to be 0.80 (Malouff and Schutte, 1986). Three separate studies found that scores on the "irrational belief scale" were associated with scores on other measures of irrational beliefs (Malouff and Schutte, 1986) indicating reasonable criterion validity.

### **Emotion scale**

To measure the intervening variable emotion, the "semantic differential mood scale" was sourced from the psychology literature (Lorr and Wunderlich, 1988). This 20-item scale measures both positive and negative moods and was considered to be suitable for an organizational setting. The scale was adapted to measure five mood dimensions namely: elated-depressed; relaxed-anxious; confident-unsure; energetic-fatigued; and good natured-grouchy. Item bipolar adjectives were slightly modified by the researcher to reflect Australian language and culture.

The scale's reliability has been reported to average a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 (Lorr and Wunderlich, 1988). The mood dimensions measured by this scale correspond closely with the dimensions of other mood scales such as the "eight state questionnaire" and "profile of moods states" indicating reasonable construct validity (Lorr and Wunderlich, 1988).

### **Behavioural intentions to resist scale**

A 20 item seven-point interval scale was developed by the researcher to measure the dependent variable behavioural intentions to resist. The scale was designed to measure both supportive and resistant behaviour and was constructed from keywords listed in the behavioural intentions matrix illustrated in Figure 2. Items were listed in random order with eight items requiring recoding to control for response direction effects.

Because this was a newly constructed scale specifically designed for the research, there was no prior evidence of its reliability and validity, but these were assessed using the present data. The scale was satisfactorily trailed during the pre-test of the questionnaire.

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## **Limitations of the methodology**

A number of limitations are acknowledged with this research. First, because the study adopts purposive sampling (non-probability) and not random sampling (probability), the findings from this study cannot be generalized to other organizations. Second, the data collection method used was very structured. This approach did not allow the opportunity to identify, measure and test other significant variables that may be associated with resistance to change. Third, self-reporting on a questionnaire is subjective rather than objective. Finally, respondents may have underestimated their level of resistance producing respondent bias. Despite these limitations which are common in most social research, the design and methodology were considered adequate.

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## **Results**

A total of 615 useable questionnaires were returned at a response rate of 39 percent. A descriptive analysis of the significance of change scale (operationalized from the perception construct in Figure 1) showed that approximately 90 percent of respondents believed the change in their organization was affecting them at least moderately. To be specific, 2.1 percent reported that they were not affected by the change, 8.2 percent were affected by "a small amount", 20.2 percent by "a moderate amount", 32.2 percent by "a large amount", with the remaining 37.3 percent reporting being affected by "a great deal". Thus, the majority of respondents ( $n = 406$ ) were experiencing high impact organizational change when surveyed constituting a suitable sample for analysis.

### **Factorial validity and reliability**

Data gathered from the irrational ideas, emotion and behavioural intentions scales were firstly analysed for factorial validity and reliability with the aim of creating summated scales for hypothesis testing and model development.

#### *Irrational ideas*

The irrational ideas scale was assessed for factorial validity by using factor analysis to analyse and confirm underlying inter-relationships. The results of the factor analysis are presented in Table II.

An examination of Table II shows six factors were identified. The irrational ideas "needs approval" and "fears failure" (ideas 1 and 2 in Table I) loaded on the same factor indicating a similar underlying inter-relationship between the two. An inter-

relationship also exists for “inert/passive existence”, “does not accept reality” and “does not control one’s destiny” (ideas 10, 9 and 5, respectively, in Table I). The factor analysis showed the ideas “influenced by personal history”, “blames self/others”, “avoids life’s difficulties” and “feels depressed when frustrated” (ideas 8, 3, 7 and 4, respectively, in Table I) each loaded on separate factors. Finally, “preoccupied with anxiety” (idea 6) produced low loadings on two factors.

A reliability analysis was conducted on the 15 factor items underlined in Table II. A Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 was calculated which is comparable with the published assessment of 0.80 (Malouff and Schutte, 1986). As a result of the factor and reliability analysis, a summated variable irrational ideas was created for hypothesis testing.

#### *Emotion*

A factor analysis performed on the emotion semantic differential scale identified three factors. The two dimensions “good natured-

**Table II**

Irrational ideas factor analysis

Idea number (from Table I) and item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
4. It is terrible when things do not go the way I would like	0.52					
4. It is awful when something I want to happen does not occur	0.43					
6. If there is a risk that something bad will happen, it makes sense to be upset						
2. To be a worthwhile person, I must be thoroughly competent in everything I do		0.60				
1. To be happy, I must maintain the approval of all the persons I consider significant		0.60				
2. I must keep achieving in order to be satisfied with myself		0.53				
1. To be happy I must be loved by the persons who are important to me		0.36			-0.33	
8. Many events from my past so strongly influence me that it is impossible to change			0.77			
8. Some of my ways of acting are so ingrained that I could never change them			0.62			
3. Individuals who take unfair advantage of me should be punished				0.76		
3. Most people who have been unfair to me are generally bad individuals				0.54		
7. It is better to ignore personal problems than to try to solve them					0.45	
7. It makes more sense to wait than to try to improve a bad life situation					0.32	
10. Life should be easier than it is						0.59
9. I dislike having any uncertainty about my future						0.56
9. I hate it when I cannot eliminate an uncertainty						0.48
10. Things should turn out better than they usually do						0.47
5. My negative emotions are the result of external pressures						0.37
5. I cannot help how I feel when everything is going wrong						
6. When it looks as if something might be wrong, it is reasonable to be quite concerned						

Note: Only loadings >0.3 are reported

grouchy" and "elated-depressed" loaded on the same factor. Also, the two dimensions "confident-unsure" and "relaxed-anxious" loaded on the same factor indicating similarity in the underlying structure. "Energetic-fatigued" was the only dimension to load separately on its own.

A reliability analysis was conducted on 15 of the 20 items (i.e. items loading greater than 0.53). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 was calculated on the composite emotion scale. This was much higher than the published assessment of 0.74 (Lorr and Wunderlich, 1988).

#### *Behavioural intentions to resist*

A factor analysis was also performed on the behavioural intentions to resist scale. Three factors were identified. These were labelled "overt support for change", "covert resistance to change" and "passive neutrality towards change". This newly constructed summated scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 was achievable by eliminating two passive neutrality factor items from the summated scale, however, this was considered unnecessary.

#### **Hypothesis testing**

Before hypothesis testing was conducted, each of the summated scales was assessed for normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. Data transformation was considered unnecessary thus preserving the data in a natural form. In order to test the two hypotheses bivariate analysis using measures of association was performed to determine the strength of the relationship between irrational ideas and behavioural intentions to resist. The results of the correlations, descriptive statistics and reliability are reported in Table III.

*H1* states that: the higher the level of irrational ideas, the higher the level of behavioural resistance to change. The correlation between irrational ideas and behavioural intentions to resist in Table III was found to be 0.36 which is statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). To further test this

result a scatterplot was drawn to graphically illustrate the relationship between these two variables. The line of best fit showed that the higher the level of irrational ideas, the higher the level of behavioural resistance resulting in the hypothesis being substantiated.

*H2* states that: the level of emotion has an impact upon the association between irrational ideas and the level of behavioural resistance. A partial correlation between the independent variable (irrational ideas) and the dependent variable (behavioural intentions to resist) while controlling the intervening variable (emotion) was performed to test this hypothesis. Table III shows a partial correlation of 0.19 ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) which is less than the 0.36 bivariate correlation reported between the independent and dependent variable. This analysis shows that emotion has an influence on the strength of the association between irrational ideas and behavioural intentions to resist, resulting in the hypothesis being confirmed.

In addition to testing two hypotheses, this paper also set out to report which irrational ideas have the strongest association with resistance intentions. A correlation matrix to identify these irrational ideas is presented in Table IV.

The correlation matrix shows that individuals were significantly more likely to resist change if they had a tendency: to blame (irrational idea 3 in Table I); to be inert and passive (idea 10); to avoid life's difficulties (idea 7); and to not take control of their own destiny (idea 5 in Table I) ( $p \leq 0.001$  for each of these correlations).

The final step in the analysis was to build a statistical model showing the relationships among the variables in Figure 1. Figure 3 was developed using hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

Resistance model I (illustrated in Figure 3) was constructed using data from all respondents ( $n = 615$ ). The correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) between variables calculated in Table III have been reported in addition to

**Table III**

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Behavioural intentions to resist</b>	2.85	0.99	0.87		
<b>2. Irrational ideas</b>	3.51	0.79	0.81	0.36***	
<b>3. Emotion</b>	4.08	1.03	0.95	-0.59***	-0.36***
<b>Partial correlation controlling the intervening variable "emotion"</b>					
<b>1. Behavioural intentions to resist</b>					
<b>2. Irrational ideas</b>				0.19***	

Notes: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ ;  $n = 615$

the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for the dependent variable. Together, irrational ideas and emotion explain 38 percent of the variance in behavioural intentions to resist ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ;  $F(2,612) = 184.64$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Figure 4 was developed to investigate statistical changes by modelling high impact organizational change.

Resistance model II (illustrated in Figure 4) analysed only those cases reporting high impact change ( $n = 406$ ). These cases constituted two-thirds (66 percent) of all respondents. Model II shows the higher the impact of the perceived change the more effective the model is in explaining resistance evidenced by an  $R^2$  of 0.44 with model II ( $R^2 = 0.44$ ;  $F(2,403) = 156.33$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ) compared with an  $R^2$  of 0.38 with model I.

### Discussion

This research was carried out in organizations that were implementing major organizational change. Individuals were surveyed during the resistance phase of the change process in order to measure the association between an individual's irrational ideas and their behavioural intentions towards resistance. Each of the scales used to gather data was evaluated and assessed as having satisfactory factorial validity and reliability.

The results of this research show that irrational ideas are associated with resistance to change. Individuals who possess higher levels of irrational ideas are more likely to resist organizational change compared to those who exhibit low levels of irrational thought. The analysis found that emotion increases the association between

irrational ideas and resistance. This analysis provides evidence to support the sequencing of variables in the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1).

A comparison of Figures 3 and 4 shows more of the resistance variance is accounted for by irrational ideas and emotion when change has a higher degree of impact on the individual (44 percent versus 38 percent). While 44 percent of the variance for resistance has been explained in Figure 4, this still leaves 56 percent unexplained indicating that there are other factors contributing to resistance which are not accounted for by irrational ideas and emotion alone. Research reported by Bovey and Hede (2001) found that the construct unconscious processes when operationalized as maladaptive defence mechanisms were also significantly associated with an individual's intentions to resist organizational change.

The irrational ideas which were found to have the strongest correlations with resistance intentions were: blaming, being inert and passive, not controlling one's destiny, and avoiding life's difficulties (underlined items in Table IV). Let us consider each of these elements and their implications for change management.

Individuals with a tendency to blame and negatively label themselves, others and events generally do so in absolute terms. Resulting from both innate and conditioned responses, individuals develop a mental schema that is orientated towards either "good" or "bad" and this drives their behaviour (Ellis and Harper, 1975). Beck (1988) believes that grooved or polarized thinking is, in part, a carry-over from categorical thinking typical of childhood.

**Table IV**  
 Behavioural Intentions and Irrational Ideas correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. Behavioural intentions to resist (dependent variable)</b>										
<b>2. Needs approval</b>	0.10*									
<b>3. Fears failure</b>	0.03	0.43***								
<b>4. Blames self, others or unkind fate</b>	0.33***	0.28***	0.16***							
<b>5. Feels depressed and miserable when frustrated</b>	0.22***	0.37***	0.30***	0.38***						
<b>6. Does not control one's destiny</b>	0.26***	0.40***	0.26***	0.37***	0.42***					
<b>7. Preoccupied with anxiety</b>	0.19***	0.25***	0.17***	0.26***	0.40***	0.31***				
<b>8. Avoids life's difficulties</b>	0.27***	0.16***	0.10***	0.25***	0.22***	0.21***	0.22***			
<b>9. Influenced by personal history</b>	0.24***	0.33***	0.14***	0.36***	0.34***	0.40***	0.27***	0.28***		
<b>10. Does not accept reality</b>	0.23***	0.27***	0.16***	0.25***	0.45***	0.39***	0.33***	0.12***	0.26***	
<b>11. Inert and passive existence</b>	0.31***	0.26***	0.20***	0.32***	0.47***	0.47***	0.36***	0.25***	0.29***	0.41***

Notes: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ ;  $n = 615$

Polarized thinking is very common and can be described as all-or-nothing thinking where there is no middle ground. Situations and problems fall into two categories: they are either good or bad, possible or impossible, desirable or undesirable. There are no intermediate points and no shades of grey with this black-and-white thinking (Beck, 1988).

According to Burns (1980), if a situation falls short of perfect the individual is likely to interpret it as a total failure. When individuals condemn themselves, others and events in this manner it reflects perfectionism and grandiosity which tends to perpetuate rather than correct the situation (Ellis and Harper, 1975). Furthermore, people with a tendency to damn themselves will generally forgo experimenting and risk-taking because they feel afraid of making errors (Ellis and Harper, 1975). An analysis of data in this study has shown that individuals conditioned to using blame (see item 4 in Table IV) are unlikely to show a willingness to actively embrace change. In order to minimize this irrational idea it is important for individuals to learn to take responsibility for their actions instead of negatively labelling and blaming (Ellis and Harper, 1975).

This issue of self-responsibility is also applicable to individuals with a tendency to avoid life's difficulties and responsibilities by choosing to adopt an easy approach to life (see item 8 in Table IV). They give up easily on hard tasks and tell themselves that they can continue to do what they have done in the past. However, continued avoidance usually exaggerates the discomfort. Personal confidence is also likely to decline by not

tackling life's challenges (Ellis and Harper, 1975). In order to overcome avoidance, an individual needs to develop self-discipline. By taking responsibility for working through difficulties an individual will develop confidence to face and resolve future tough situations they encounter (Ellis and Harper, 1975), for example, significant organizational change.

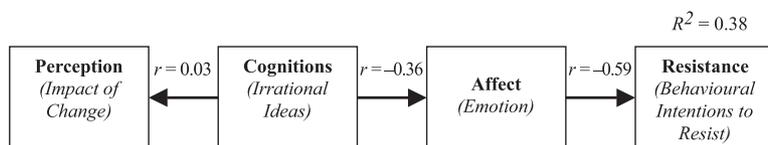
While in pursuit of self-discipline and self-responsibility, it may be necessary for an individual to overcome inertia and inaction (see item 11 in Table IV). People who lead a somewhat lazy and passive existence often view failure with horror and have a tendency to avoid and being involved in activities (Ellis and Harper, 1975). To overcome this inertia the individual will benefit by participating and becoming absorbed in activities that provide a challenge and present an element of risk (Ellis and Harper, 1975).

The irrational ideas factor analysis (Table II) yielded an underlying inter-relationship between an individual's inertia and not taking control of their own destiny. Ellis and Harper (1975) claim that individuals not taking control of their own destiny (see item 6 in Table IV) devote time and energy trying to do the impossible, that is, to change and control the actions of others and believe that they cannot achieve what is normally possible, that is, to change and control their own thoughts and actions. Individuals holding this irrationality believe the causes of distress are external and that they have little control over their own feelings.

Interwoven into this belief are "should", "ought", and "must" statements (Ellis and Harper, 1975). Burns (1990) claims that "should statements" are a form of twisted thinking in which individuals tell themselves that things should turn out the way that was hoped and expected. When directed at self, "should statements" often lead to feelings of guilt and frustration. When directed at others, "should statements" often lead to feelings of anger and frustration (Burns, 1990). These feelings are consistent with those described by Spiker and Lesser (1995) that occur during organizational upheaval. To minimize this irrational idea Ellis and Harper (1975) suggest disputing, challenging, and replacing self-talk based on "should statements" with more realistic preferences.

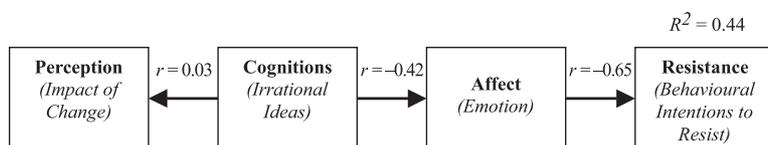
Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) argue that organizational change often meets some form of human resistance and that individuals react to change in different ways. When implementing change, management needs to be aware of how human processes such as irrational ideas and emotion may influence

**Figure 3**  
Resistance model I (all respondents)



Note:  $n = 615$

**Figure 4**  
Resistance mode II (respondents perceiving high impact change)



Note:  $n = 406$

an individual's behaviour towards that change. Ellis (in Corey, 1996) outlines an intervention strategy involving seven steps to minimize irrational beliefs, namely, the individual has to:

- 1 fully acknowledge that they alone are largely responsible for their own emotion and behaviour;
- 2 accept that they have the ability to significantly change their own emotion and behaviour;
- 3 recognize that emotional and behavioural disturbances largely stem from irrational beliefs;
- 4 become aware of his or her commonly used irrational beliefs;
- 5 have the courage and willingness to actively challenge these beliefs;
- 6 acknowledge that in order to change it will be necessary for them to work hard at counteracting their dysfunctional thoughts; and
- 7 practise the previous steps by challenging and acting on irrational thoughts and beliefs on a continual basis.

In conclusion, the findings of this research provide further evidence for using a balanced approach to managing change. Instead of focussing primarily on technical elements, it is equally important for management to address the human elements. This study has found these human elements to include cognitive and affective processes. Management needs to implement intervention strategies and techniques that firstly create self-awareness and secondly develop processes to minimize irrational thoughts. An individual's personal growth and development is likely to alter their perceptions of change thereby reducing the level of resistance to organizational change.

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