Five Motives of Social Survival and their links to Change Management

Social psychology is defined as a “scientific attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of other human beings” (Allport & Lindzey, 1954, p. 5). Susan Fisk (2004) introduced a model of five fundamental core social motives, or underlying psychological processes, that stimulates the way people think, feel, and behave in social situations (Figure 1). The model represents the better survival of the "social animal", whereas all five motives help people to better fit within groups. The motives are interrelated and interdependent in such a way as to suggest the whole (social group) is a sum of the parts.

Belonging. Being social animals, people have a desire to form and maintain social bonds. Social connectedness unifies and is stimulated by shared common goals and interests.

Understanding. Understanding is about the need for shared meaning and prediction. A social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behavior of actors that constitutes an object for a social group.

Controlling. Individuals will act in a certain way based on the expectation that the act will be followed by a given outcome.

Trusting. Trust is an individual’s willingness to be vulnerable to others. Trustworthiness reduces employee uncertainty related to change.

Self-enhancing. Human beings strive for internal consistency in order to function mentally in the real world.

When reviewing the research and literature of change management founders such as Lewin, Schein, Argyris, Weick, and Oreg one can see the fundamental relationships to social psychology in areas such as leadership, communication, employee behavior, and organizational development. Have, et al. (2018) created a model based on this literature, represented in Figure 2, using a lemniscate shape as a mnemonic device and one that exemplifies the nonlinear and dynamic interactions of both change management and social psychological adaptation. The vertical axis, change vision, coalesces the rationale and effects as key factors to connection. The
horizontal axis, change competency, also fuses focus and energy as key factors in connection.

As we move through this module on the importance of social psychology within organizational change management, we will begin to build an overlay lemniscate model that highlights important social psychology theories and their connection to change management competencies. Rather than unpacking a complete model the building process will allow the learner time to digest each component’s linkages to and obtain a better grasp of the relevant theory. Let’s begin with belonging and connection.

Belonging is the fundamental core for strong stable relationships (Fiske, 2004, 2010). The perceived presence (or absence) may influence loyalty, solidarity, and cooperation in organizations helping to mold a strong or weak (if absent) organizational climate. Humans desire to form and maintain positive social bonds represented by shared goals and interests. Belongingness is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation among groups of people in just about any setting (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Having even the smallest sense of social connection can lead people to acceptance or even internalization of goals and drives of other people within the group (Walton, et al., 2012).

What does a sense of belongingness mean in OCM? Every organization has a culture and a key challenge is setting a culture that is empowering using the vision (Belasco, 1990). Building a culture that meets the intrinsic need to belong is paramount to creating the cohesiveness necessary to withstand the shock of change. When people feel disconnected from the culture or perhaps not part of the groupthink that inevitably exists in every organization, they may be the very ones who are, or become part of, the resistance to the change. Perhaps the vision and espoused culture is not being actualized, this too can create a sense of not belonging through a dichotomy of goals.

Getting people on the “same page” may seem like a well-worn cliché but it is entirely applicable when it comes to a sense of belonging. Creating a culture of inclusiveness, where everyone feels a real sense of connection and fairness, will enhance helping behaviors (Kyei-Poku, 2013), which are so very crucial for those who are not quite grasping all the parameters of the organizational change.

Figure 3 highlights some of the other theories that support belongingness, their relevance to OCM and some practical applications.

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<tr>
<th>Relevant Social Psychology theories to Belongingness</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Relevance to OCM</th>
<th>Practicality to OCM</th>
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<td>Social Cohesion</td>
<td>Perceived cohesion influences the behavior of the individual and the group. It has two dimensions: a sense of belonging and feelings of morale (Chan, Teng, &amp; Wang, 2009).</td>
<td>culture, change vision, teams and team development, cooperation, and goal-setting performance</td>
<td>organizational citizenship behavior (extra-role performance), distributive justice, affective commitment, new product performance, job satisfaction, participation, team morale, social support, team effectiveness and communication</td>
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<td><strong>Conformity</strong></td>
<td>Conformity is the convergence of individuals’ thoughts, feelings or behavior toward a social or group norm (Allen, 1965).</td>
<td>People want to belong to a group and by ‘conforming’ they change their behavior so they optimally fit in and stay in the group; people go along with the norms/behavior in the group; they change their behavior or beliefs in order to fit in with a group.</td>
<td>Be aware of risk factors associated with groupthink. Try interventions such as devil’s advocate, using a critical reviewer, planning open sessions to reconsider alternatives and discussing group ideas with people outside the group.</td>
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<td><strong>Social Identity</strong> (three stages: categorization, identification, &amp; comparison)</td>
<td>Individual self-concept is partly derived from knowledge of his/her membership in a social group(s) and the personal value or emotional significance attached to group membership (Tajfel &amp; Turner, 1986).</td>
<td>Helps in understanding how organizations form, develop, and work. It is related to the concepts of culture and leadership. May help explain how engagement, cooperation, commitment, and resistance to change develop.</td>
<td>Create environments where employees can identify with their teams and the organization’s overall mission and vision. (Avanzi, et al., 2014) In mergers, create conditions for intergroup contact, officially encouraging members to interact and ensure that premerger differences are acknowledged. (Avanzi, et al., 2014)</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Categorization</strong></td>
<td>People have both a personal and social identity. Psychological depersonalization of the self produces ‘group behavior’ and emergent group processes such as influence, cooperation, and cohesiveness (Turner, et al., 1987). In essence, what is happening to others is also happening to me.</td>
<td>Self-categorization has the potential to increase job satisfaction, productivity and ultimately, performance.</td>
<td>It can be applied to topics such as group cohesion, group polarization, social influence and collective action, leadership and personality.</td>
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<td><strong>Pro-social Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Living (and working) in cooperative and highly interdependent groups</td>
<td>Prosocial behavior of leaders or group members in general,</td>
<td>Use expressions of gratitude Increase procedural</td>
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results in significant fitness benefits (Leaky & Lewin, 1977). Also, people care more for in-group members as opposed to out-group people and are more likely to promote helping behaviors (Levin & Tompson, 2004). with its inclusive character and the focus on ‘us or we’ as opposed to ‘you’, can contribute to better and more humane social change processes. justice Be aware that social comparison might decrease prosocial behavior but can also be helpful. Create a learning environment with managerial support for employees using constructive forms of feedback

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<th>Terror Management Theory</th>
<th>People function securely if they believe they are contributing to a meaningful change or mission. (Solomon, Greenberg, &amp; Pyszczynski, 1991)</th>
<th>Change leaders articulate external threats related to competitors, other ‘cultures’, or economic developments creating a sense of urgency as an impetus for change.</th>
<th>While using the potential death of the organization as an impetus for change may seem as ‘overkill’, the negative motivation leads to stronger reactions with regard to fairness, contributes to the escalation of commitment, and results in leaders being described increasingly in more agentic terms.</th>
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<td>Broaden and Build Theory</td>
<td>As an alternative to terror management theory, the broaden and build theory suggests using positive emotions and feelings to more self-efficacy and action control in changes (Fredrickson, 1998)</td>
<td>Frequent experiences with positive affect encourage individuals to engage with their environments, to learn more, and add new skills that will continue the positive affections.</td>
<td>Positive emotions can literally energize a person, increasing individual and team performance, decision-making, motivation and leadership development. Furthermore, it also benefits customer relations and it relates positively to health and well-being.</td>
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Figure 3 - Other Related Social Psychology Theories to Organizational Change, adapted from Have, Rijsman, Have, & Westhof (2018).
References


