

**THE COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE QUESTIONNAIRE:  
DEVELOPMENT, RESULTS, AND APPLICATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Communication is increasingly being recognized as a critical factor in organizational change processes. Organizational communication (OC) theory stresses that communication is a central means for organizations. However, organizational change gets relatively little attention in OC theory. Organization development (OD) theory traditionally focuses on the process of change, yet it does not specifically address the role of communication. Combining insights from OC and OD theory can teach us more about the different aspects of communication during organizational change and provide ways for improving change communication. This is important because research shows that poor communication is a major barrier to change. We developed the Communication and Organizational Change Questionnaire to assess change communication. The questionnaire measures how forms of change communication and the communicative behavior of change agents are evaluated. In addition, it measures uncertainty, readiness for change, and support for change. The reliability of the questionnaire's scales was satisfactory and the results proved helpful for the participating organizations. Results obtained from two organizations showed different assessments of communication. In one organization, all forms of communication seemed problematic, whereas the communicative behavior of change agents was evaluated positively. In the other organization, results were more positive, except for the communicative behavior of the consultants. Feeding back the results to the teams helped people to understand change communication and to develop ideas for improvement. We suggest using the questionnaire as part of a survey feedback because this intervention makes it possible to simultaneously assess the change communication and to change communication in organizations.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of effective communication during organizational change is becoming more and more clear. The reasons for change have to be clear to the people involved, and they must have a vision of the direction or goals of the change in order to know where they need to go (Kotter, 1996). Managers and change agents are usually seen as the ones who have to explain why change is needed and which improvements are intended (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Klein, 1996). Communication is often discussed as a factor that determines the attitude towards change. For instance, Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) argue that readiness for change can be created through effective communication of the message for change. A study by Chawla and Kelloway (2004) showed that openness to change is directly and indirectly influenced by communication. Many studies have investigated the extent to which information and communication decrease uncertainty about change (e.g., Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Kramer, Dougherty, & Pierce, 2004). Finally, communication has been presented as a strategy for dealing with resistance to change (Kirkpatrick, 1985).

Recent research indicates that poor communication is a major barrier to change. Elving (2004) conducted three case studies to investigate the relationship between communication and readiness for change. He found that lack of information and high uncertainty were important predictors of low readiness for change. Survey results from a study with over a hundred participating organizations showed that both the frequency and the quality of the information provided about the impending change was a problem in three-quarters of the cases (Bennebroek Gravenhorst, Werkman, & Boonstra, 2003). A multiple case study with six organizations showed that insufficient information and communication about the change and the communicative behavior of top managers were major problems in organizations involved in constructive change aimed at the improvement of strategic, structural, cultural, and work issues (Bennebroek Gravenhorst, 2002). Interviews with change

managers have shown that they are aware of the importance of communication but lack the time and tools to use it strategically (Rensen, 2004; Wiggers, 2004). These studies suggest that it is difficult to put the necessary communication effectively into practice. Still, we need to know precisely which aspects of communication are problematic and how the communicative behavior of change agents can be evaluated if we want to develop ideas for improving change communication.

In OC theory, communication is usually treated as an organizational process (e.g., Hargie & Tourish, 2000). The literature focuses on communication structures in organizations and interaction between hierarchical levels, departments, and groups. Communication media and their effects get ample attention (e.g., Kellerman, 1991; Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon, & Sunnafrank, 2002). Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987) suggests that complex messages are best transmitted by rich media, which means that verbal communication is preferred for messages about change (cf. Klein, 1996). Recently, change communication was given a prominent place on the OC agenda. In a special issue on the state of the art in communication theory and research, Jones, Watson, Gardner, and Gallois (2004) explain that understanding the communication of organizational change is one of the challenges for the new century. They plea for research on communication during the implementation of changes because this “offers the chance for organizations to manage the change process better” (Jones et al., 2004: 737). Improving change processes requires a detailed insight in the forms of change communication and the communicative behavior of change agents. The prevailing idea that change communication equals top-down information dissemination needs to be reconsidered. OD theory can be helpful in this because of its focus on creating opportunities for dialogue and interaction in a context of organizational change (Cummings, 2004).

Key issues in OD theory are attention for the process aspects of change and interventions. Planned change is structured by phasing OD programs (Burke, 1994; French & Bell, 1999) or the step-by-step fulfillment of sets of activities (Cummings & Worley, 1997). Many interventions can be used in the different phases of change. The scope of OD interventions is so broad that even the lists that classify them tend to become long. For instance, French and Bell (1999) distinguish fourteen major families of OD interventions and they need two pages for their brief description. The focus of OD on the progression of events and interventions stresses the importance of the 'how' of the change (Pettigrew, 1987), a necessary addition to the dominant focus on the 'why' and the 'what' questions. Interestingly, OD pays relatively little attention to change communication. In well-known textbooks the term communication is either not listed in the subject index (e.g., French & Bell, 1999) or it refers to a small, special section (e.g., Cummings & Worley, 1997). Activities for communication improvement are not an intervention category. Communication is of course part of the OD vocabulary, but usually it is used as a general term.

More specific attention to forms of change communication and to the communicative behavior of change agents is needed. Combining insights from OC and OD can provide an opportunity for better understanding the communicative aspects of change and the importance of communication for effective change. In this paper we first discuss the theoretical background of the Communication and Organizational Change Questionnaire (COCQ) and its construction. Initial results from two field studies show (1) how forms of communication are evaluated by employees, (2) how they assess the communicative behavior of the change agents, and (3) how they feel about the change. Subsequently, we present ideas for using the questionnaire in changing organizations. Survey feedback is an intervention that stimulates interaction and communication. This is important for making change and development a collaborative effort of all people involved (Bennebroek Gravenhorst & In 't Veld, 2004).

Therefore, we argue that discussing questionnaire results in feedback sessions is desirable if organizations want to use the outcomes of the questionnaire effectively.

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE COCQ**

The COCQ is based on four main topics that are relevant from a communication perspective on organizational change. Each topic has received thorough attention in either the OC or OD literature and from practitioners. First, planned change is a deliberate effort to improve organizational functioning (cf. Cummings, 2004; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977). Therefore, we need to pay attention to the reasoning behind the change. Second, different aspects of communication should be considered, which means we need to focus on more than just the availability and quality of information (Jones et al., 2004). Third, change agents play an important role in planned change (Buchanan & Boddy, 1992; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Thus, we need to assess the communicative behavior of top managers, change managers, and line managers. Fourth, the attitude of people in organizations towards change is seen as a key factor that influences the outcome of change (Elving, 2003; Piderit, 2000; Robertson, Roberts, & Porras 1993). While negative effects such as uncertainty and resistance dominate the literature, we believe it is equally important to assess whether employees support the change and contribute to it.

The reasoning behind a change involves questions as: ‘Why change?’, ‘What are the goals?’, and ‘How can they be attained?’ Pettigrew (1987) argues that an integrated approach to change needs to pay attention to the continuous interplay of context, content, and process. Planned change efforts are directed at the improvement, development, and change of organizations (French & Bell, 1999; Weick & Quinn, 1999). This means that the reasoning typically starts with defining an unwanted, undesirable, or problematic situation. During the diagnostic phase, information is collected about the subsystems that make up an organization

and organizational processes (Beckhard & Harris, 1987). Diagnosis should focus both on the internal functioning of the organization and the interaction with external parties such as customers and suppliers (Harrison & Shirom, 1999; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1985). The diagnostic phase usually ends with analyzing the collected information. Relationships, causes, and effects become clear during the synthesis, and conclusions are formulated in terms of main problems (Kubr, 1986). Next, the goals for the change are set. In general terms, the goals are to solve the problems that have been identified during the diagnosis (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990). In the action-planning phase, solutions are developed, and the implementation is prepared. A realistic and feasible plan for the implementation of proposals shows both what to change and how to do it (Kubr, 1986). In the COCQ, the reasoning behind the change is measured by assessing how employees perceive the necessity of the change and if they are familiar with the goals and the direction of the change.

Forms of change communication become clear by answering questions such as: ‘How is the change communication organized?’ and ‘Which communication strategy is being used?’ The common perspective on the function of communication during change is that employees need to be informed about the reasons for the change, the goals, and the plans for implementation. Many studies focus on the content of the messages and the communication media. For instance, Armenakis and Harris (2002) described the five key message components for effectively informing and influencing employees. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) studied the effects of a newsletter, telephone hotline, and meetings on variables as stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In such studies, the question is often how employees can effectively be informed about the change and persuaded to take the point of view of the management. The dominance of the management perspective in change is an important reason for the difficult progress of change processes because it limits learning and excludes other relevant actors (Argyris, 1999, 2004; Bennebroek Gravenhorst & In 't Veld,

2004). Therefore, a broader view of the function of communication needs consideration. Van Ruler (1998, 2004) distinguishes four communication strategies for the creation of meaning: information, dialogue, persuasion, and consensus-building. In addition to the strategy of top-down information transfer, the dialogue strategy recognizes the two-way or interactive aspect of communication. The persuasion and consensus-building strategies point out that meaning about the change can be created about the change both by influencing people and by letting people exchange and share ideas. Van Ruler (2004) calls for more attention for the dialogue and consensus-building strategies because they are related to organizational learning. Thus, the COCQ assesses how employees value the information supply, if the change process allows for two-way communication, and if there is room for a diversity of ideas.

The communicative behavior of change agents is related to questions such as: ‘Who are the change agents?’ and ‘What are they communicating about?’ Change agents play a central role in planned change. According to a classical definition, the term change agent refers to “the person or group who is attempting to effect change” (Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1961: 5). In general, managers and consultants initiate change and are responsible for the progress and implementation. Kanter et al. (1992: 370) state that: “Three basic groups must be coordinated if change is to be effectively implemented: change strategists, change ‘implementors’, and change recipients”. Strategists are usually CEOs, top managers, and consultants. Strategists identify the need for change, create a vision, and initiate change. Research on communicative behavior focuses mainly on the informative and persuasive capacities of CEOs and top managers. They have difficulty communicating their ideas effectively (Kotter, 1996) and discussing them with others in the organization (Bennebroek Gravenhorst & In 't Veld, 2004). Without proper communication, their vision, values, and strategy remain just words (Beer et al., 1990). Implementors are usually line managers and consultants. Implementors manage the day-to-day process of change; they translate the vision

and solutions to problems into units in an organization. Face-to-face communication with the recipients of the change is most effective (Klein, 1996). Communication and interaction between implementors and recipients is needed for real change to take place. Together they discuss the practical consequences and efforts necessary for realizing change. According to Tenkasi and Chesmore (2003), effective change implies both this local learning and an organization-wide implementation of change. The COCQ therefore assesses how employees evaluate the communicative behavior of top managers, line managers, and consultants.

The importance of the employees' reception of and responses to change for a successful implementation is much discussed in the literature (e.g., Kanter et al., 1992; Piderit, 2000; Porras & Silvers, 1991). Uncertainty and resistance are traditionally seen as standard and according to some authors natural reactions to organizational change (e.g., Coch & French, 1948; Conner, 1998; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Psychological and organizational mechanisms are held responsible for these reactions, which seem to apply to any kind of change, ranging from modest improvements to fundamental change and organizational transformation. Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that we need to abandon the mental model in which change implies resistance and managers must overcome it. There is a parallel between this model and the previously discussed informative and persuasive communication strategies. In this model, managers need to inform and influence employees who oppose change and want to keep things as they are. Bennebroek Gravenhorst and In 't Veld (2004) suggest that exclusion from the change process causes negative reactions rather than psychological mechanisms like the need for stability. If managers and employees work together in realizing change, attention is drawn to the dialogue and consensus-building strategies. Collaboration in change can lead to positive responses (e.g., Beer & Walton, 1987; Senge, 1990; Weick & Quinn, 1999) and people can become enthusiastic and committed to change (Bennebroek Gravenhorst et al., 2003; Chawla & Kelloway, 2004). Involvement of

employees stimulates the exchange of ideas and creates meaningful interaction about the change. Therefore, the COCQ assesses the degree of uncertainty as well as support for change and contribution to change.

### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE COCQ**

Spector (1992) proposes five steps for questionnaire development: (1) an expert meeting, (2) a focus-group evaluation, (3) a pilot test, (4) the first full administration, and (5) the validation. We describe steps 1 through 4 in the development of the COCQ here. The validation of the questionnaire will be discussed briefly in the final section of this paper.

In an expert meeting, consultants and communication professionals formulated 124 items for the 11 subjects that the COCQ addresses. A first sorting of these items showed that many could be put together in sets of two or three rather similar items. Comparing the items from the expert meeting with the ones we derived from our literature research resulted in an additional 37 items. In a focus group we evaluated the total of 161 items with two colleagues. To control the length of the questionnaire, we chose the five best items for each subject. A description of the eleven subjects in the COCQ and example items are listed in Table 1. Items are formulated as statements. Respondents are asked to indicate what they think of each statement on 5-point Likert scales, with the categories ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘do not agree or disagree’, ‘agree’, and ‘strongly agree’.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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A first version of the COCQ was tested in a pilot study. A small survey was conducted at a children's hospital. Thirty questionnaires were filled in by two teams. The purpose of the pilot study was to test for clarity in the formulation of the statements and for the usefulness of the questionnaire results for the organization. Most of the 55 statements were clear to the respondents. Six statements needed improvement. The reliability of nine scales was satisfactory, ranging from .71 to .90. Two scales needed improvement because Cronbach's alpha was below .60. The results were useful for the organization. Team members discussed the results with their manager and together they developed ideas for improving the communication about the change.

### **FIRST RESULTS**

The COCQ was fully administered for the first time in a division of a homecare organization and in a private nursing home. The changes in both organizations were directed at offering clients more professional care and improving the organizational processes. In the homecare organization, the top management made a plan indicating the goals of the change, the phases, and the activities needed for professionalization and improvement. The plan was presented at a large meeting for all personnel. About every three months a follow-up meeting was scheduled. For most activities, the participation of personnel was needed. A similar approach was followed in the nursing home. One difference was that the management made the plan together with a consultant, and throughout the first year and the beginning of the second, two consultants were hired to assist the management with the implementation of the plan. Another difference was that the plan was discussed in team meetings; no large meetings were organized. We are limiting our discussion of the organizations where we administered the COCQ because this paper focuses on the construction of the questionnaire. The presentation and discussion of the results is meant to give an impression of the outcomes. In

future projects we will need to study the situation in an organization more thoroughly. This will help us to interpret the results and to facilitate feedback sessions.

From the homecare organization we received 68 questionnaires, which is a response rate of 73%. Most respondents were relatively old: 3% was younger than 25 years, 23% was between 30 and 40 years, and 74% was older than 40 years. The tenure of most respondents was quite long: 30% had worked less than 5 years for the organization, 10% between 5 and 15 years, and 60% more than 15 years. To assess the impact of the change on people's work, we asked two additional questions. Respondents indicated that the changes had little or no effect on their work (48%), a moderate effect (19%), or a large or very large effect (33%). The experience of this effect was negative (22%), neutral (49%), or positive (29%).

From the nursing home we received 97 questionnaires, which is a response rate of 68%. Age categories were represented equally: 35% was younger than 25 years, 33% was between 25 and 30 years, and 32% was older than 30 years. The tenure of the respondents was relatively short: 50% had worked less than 5 years for the organization, 28% between 5 and 15 years, and 22% more than 15 years. Respondents indicated that the changes had little or no effect on their work (32%), a moderate effect (35%), or a large or very large effect (23%). The experience of this effect was negative (3%), neutral (32%), or positive (65%).

Reliabilities of the scales were satisfactory in both organizations and reliabilities of the combined samples were somewhat higher (see Table 2). Compared to the pilot study, most alphas increased. The scales with alphas below .60 increased to around .70.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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The results from the COCQ are presented in Figures 1 and 2. A graphical presentation of the results is easy to read and preferable for feedback purposes. Contrary to the standard way of presenting mean scores and standard deviations (e.g., Gray & Laidlaw, 2004), we have chosen to present percentages in the figures. For each respondent we computed the mean score per subject in the questionnaire. Next, we recoded the means into five equal categories, corresponding to the five categories in the Likert scale we used in the questionnaire. Thus, the five categories in the figures represent very negative (black), negative (dark gray), in between negative and positive (white), positive (lighter gray), and very positive (lightest gray) averaged evaluations of the statements for each subject in the questionnaire. A first advantage of this way of presenting the results is that all information is summarized in a single figure. A second advantage is that the figure contains detailed information: the distribution from negative to positive evaluations is fully represented. A third advantage is that percentages have more meaning for most people in organizations than mean scores. Percentages are easily translated to a number of team members, whereas mean scores are not. We would have preferred to recode the means into four equal categories, omitting the middle one. We feel this is justified when scores in the middle category are less than 30% for a majority of the items. In both organizations, however, more than 30% of the respondents used the middle category for a large majority of the statements in the questionnaire. Therefore, we decided we needed to include this middle category in the figure. We placed this category exactly on the middle line in the figures to ensure that the distribution of negative and positive evaluations can still easily be seen.

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Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here  
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The most salient result in Figure 1 is that many employees in the homecare organization used the middle category in the questionnaire; for most subjects around 50% of the response was in this category. Interpreting the significance of this finding is rather complicated. Using Likert scales with uneven categories presents difficulties with the middle category (Bishop, 1987; Schuman & Presser, 1981). In the questionnaire we labeled the middle category 'do not agree or disagree'. For this category, it is hard to tell if employees are neutral about the statements, do not know what to answer, or do not want to admit what they really think. During the feedback of the results in the organization people discussed how the large percentage of answers in the middle category should be interpreted. A theme that dominated this discussion was that while many employees know about the change, it does not mean much to them. This is in line with the finding that almost half of the employees indicated that the change will have little or no effect on their work. Our knowledge of the plans for the change suggests that it will have an effect for almost everyone in the organization. Apparently, they do not yet know this. During the sessions someone proposed that the middle category should be placed on the negative side in the figure, maybe even to the left of the most negative evaluation. She argued that not having an opinion about issues that concern everyone should be considered a larger problem than being critical about change communication. Others believed that this was too radical and suggested leaving the middle category in the middle of the figure.

For our subsequent interpretation of the results, we used the 50% border to demarcate positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side we see that more than 50% of the employees know why the change is needed, are familiar with the goals and direction, value the communicative behavior of the top managers and their line managers, and support the change. An important remark made was that the high score in the middle category for the

communicative behavior of top managers could be interpreted as a lack of communication. If 60% of the employees do not really know what to say about the change strategists, this means that they have not really been heard yet. On the negative side we see that more than 50% of the employees negatively evaluated the information, communication, and room for diversity. In addition, a majority feels uncertain because of the change and is not contributing to the change. The conclusions we formulated with the people from the organization were that the general idea about the change was clear, that line managers were doing their best to communicate and interact, but that the design of the change process did not provide many opportunities for communication and interaction. Many ideas for improvement were discussed during the feedback sessions, including inviting top managers for a special team meeting and making the change a standard item on the agenda of regular team meetings.

Figure 2 shows that the response percentage in the middle category was smaller in the nursing home. Even so, it was still 40% for five of the eleven subjects and 50% for two. During the feedback of the results, this finding was interpreted in the same way as in the homecare organization. It indicates that a large percentage of the personnel feels that the change doesn't really affect them, and they respond rather indifferently when asked what they think about it. In the nursing home, the percentage of negative responses is very small compared to the positive responses, except with regard to information and the role of the consultants. Negative scores for information were the result of the problems part of the personnel had with using the shared team computer for accessing the intranet. In addition, the two consultants were not very visible. This was in line with their role of assisting the managers in the background, yet people felt that they could at least have attended one or two team meetings in which the change was discussed. In general, people were pleased with the positive results. The idea was that regularly discussing the change in team meetings contributed to these findings. Due to the continuous workflow, meetings could not be

scheduled so that all team members could attend. Evening and night personnel were hardly ever present at teams meetings. People felt that this should change and that communication with this group needed special attention. One solution that was proposed was that evening and night personnel should be able to attend meetings in work time and not have to attend in their free time.

In both organizations the COCQ proved to be a valuable instrument for assessing change communication and for changing communication. The assessment of the change communication showed different results for the two organizations. In one organization, all three forms of communication were problematic. The communication of the change agents was evaluated more positively, but is considered insufficient if the design of the change does not allow for much interaction. In the other organization, results were more positive. Even so, a large number of employees in both organizations were rather indifferent in response to many of the statements in the questionnaire. During the feedback sessions we learned that although many employees were familiar with the changes, they did not feel that they were part of it. At the same time, the success of the changes depended on their support and contribution. Improving care would not be possible without the personnel. Changes in the communication started when the results were discussed in feedback sessions. For many employees, this was the first time that they took time to sit down, think, and discuss the change with their manager and fellow team members. During the sessions, people focused mainly on how they could work together to bring about the changes. The changes themselves were discussed less; for most people these were clear and there was substantial support for the changes. Thus, the feedback of the COCQ results helped people discuss how they communicate and interact about the change, and how they can play an active role in bringing about the necessary improvements in their organizations.

## PREFERRED APPLICATION

In the pilot study and during the first administration of the COCQ in two organizations, we focused on data collection in order to improve the questionnaire and to get an impression of the results. We agreed with the participating organizations that, in return for their cooperation, we would provide both the data in readable form and a brief written report. Both organizations decided to discuss the results in the teams and we were invited to attend these discussions. During the feedback sessions we experienced that the feedback resulted in: (1) a systematic examination of change communication with all team members, (2) focused discussions about the questions of what went well and what did not, through the exchange of different perspectives and the interaction between team members, (3) the formation of a shared idea about communication problems and possibilities for improvement, and (4) the commitment of managers and employees to bring about improvement. The positive reactions to feedback sessions reveal a need for a more methodical approach to working with the COCQ. Literature on survey feedback is helpful for a better planning and facilitation of the intervention.

The two main elements of survey feedback are (1) systematically collecting data about the situation in an organization by using questionnaires and (2) feeding back the data to individuals and groups at all levels of the organization (French & Bell, 1999). Contrary to the common use of surveys in organizations (e.g., Fowler, 1984), survey feedback is “an active two-way process of information acquisition and knowledge dissemination, with the explicit purpose of serving as a basis for action by the surveyed population itself” (Kuhnert, 1993: 459). Thus, collected data form the basis of the intervention. Then, people work together in analyzing and interpreting the meaning of these data, and they develop ideas for solutions to problems and the improvement of the situation. The methodology demands the active engagement of the members of an organization (cf. Cummings, 2004). The results of normal

surveys are usually reported to top managers, together with interpretation and advice from a consultant or researcher. In survey feedback, the results are fed back to top managers, middle managers, and employees who do their own interpretation and develop ideas for improvement themselves. This process of collective reflection (cf. Levin, 2004) on problems and interaction about solutions is usually facilitated by a consultant or researcher.

Generally, the intervention consists of five steps that were initially developed by Mann (cf. Cummings & Worley, 1997; French & Bell, 1999; Mann, 1961). In the first step, the relevant stakeholders are involved in the preliminary planning of the survey feedback. In the second step, data are collected from all organization members. In the third step, these data are analyzed, tabulated, and prepared for feedback, and client members are trained to lead the feedback meetings in the organization. In the fourth step, the data are fed back to the top of the organization and then down through the hierarchy in functional teams. Mann calls this an “interlocking chain of conferences” (p. 609). In the fifth step, the data are discussed in feedback meetings of teams where people interpret the data and make plans for improvement and change. Over the course of time, different steps and ways of structuring feedback meetings have been developed (e.g., Nadler, 1977).

The degree to which survey feedback creates energy and motivates people to take action depends on the following conditions (Nadler, 1977, 1996; Neff, 1965): (1) Stakeholders accept the data as valid. Although people produced the survey data themselves it usually takes some time before discussions focus on their meaning instead of on challenging the survey; (2) They accept responsibility for the part they play in the problems that were identified. People can contend that data do not apply to their team, especially when general data are reported. A sense of ownership and ‘model’ behavior of team members helps to get people started working on interpretation and solutions; (3) They commit themselves to solving the problems. When the first two conditions are met, people can focus their energy on

determining the implications for their organization or team; (4) The data collection itself is already a way of making change a collaborative effort. It stimulates people to think about the subjects that are addressed in the questionnaire; (5) The survey is of good quality. People need to feel that the subjects it addresses are relevant and accurately measured; and (6) People know that action will be taken after the data collection. It is important that people know that powerful stakeholders will take outcomes seriously and that answering the questions is not a waste of time.

We believe that survey feedback is a desirable way of working with questionnaires in changing organizations. Using questionnaires as a measuring tool only to provide management with information ignores the learning potential for everyone involved in the change. During feedback sessions, team members work together in interpreting outcomes and developing solutions for negative results. The intervention stimulates interaction about the change and collaboration. In addition, we feel that researchers have to make sure that managers are committed to returning the data to the people who filled in the questionnaire. In our experience, this is not the standard with organizational surveys. Still, if managers decide to ask employees what they think about change communication, it seems foolish not to communicate and interact about the results. In both care organizations, a few managers complained about the extra efforts organizing the feedback sessions took during the already time-consuming change process. In hindsight, however, they told us they were satisfied because the sessions provided a valuable opportunity for exchanging ideas with their teams, they were able to obtain useful input from their teams, employees felt they were being taken seriously, and even the more critical team members saw that their contribution was valued.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The first use of the COCQ in two organizations showed that the quality of the questionnaire is sufficient and that this instrument produces useful results. Statistical analysis showed that the reliability of the scales is satisfactory, and discussing the outcomes proved valuable for practice. Nevertheless, we want to continue improving the questionnaire. More data are needed to perform a factor analysis to see if the eleven subjects load on different factors and to investigate a four-factor solution with reasoning about the change, forms of communication, communicative behavior of change agents, and attitudes to change. In addition, validation of the questionnaire is desirable, for instance through correlating the scales with outcome variables. The most important indicator for the utility of a measure of change communication is its capacity to predict outcomes such as the effectiveness of change agents and the attainment of the goals of a change process.

We have presented the eleven subjects as relevant aspects for communication and change without paying much attention to their relationships. The theoretical model we assume in the text is rather straightforward. We see forms of change communication and the communicative behavior of change agents as determinants of the attitude towards change. We have not yet included necessity and goals in our implicit model. Again, a larger data set is necessary to test such a model and to refine it. Naturally, there is a clear theoretical and practical importance to knowing to what degree the forms of change communication and the communicative behavior of change agents explains the attitude towards change. The larger this influence is, the stronger our argument holds for paying more specific attention to change communication. Refinement of the model can reveal which forms of communication are most important and whether we should focus on improving communication skills of top managers, line managers, or both.

Results from other studies will also be helpful for comparing change communication in organizations. Benchmarking is currently quite fashionable, at least for Dutch managers. The availability of results from other organizations or other divisions or teams from the same organization is also useful for researchers and facilitators who want to know if others are performing better or less well. Still, a disadvantage of benchmarking is that it makes people forget to think about their own ambitions. Since effective communication during change seems rather difficult, why would you be satisfied if you know that you do it less poorly than others? In addition, adequately comparing organizations involved in change is rather difficult. Every change is different, requires specific communication, and is characterized by local possibilities and limitations. Nevertheless, results from other organizations or other organizational units can be used as rough indicators to assist interpretation. However, we prefer that people compare their results with realistic ambitions that do justice to the specific situation in their organization.

More experience with survey feedback can teach us how to use the intervention more effectively and how the role of the facilitator or researcher in the feedback sessions can be improved. In the care organizations where we first used the COCQ, line managers discussed the results with their teams. As researchers, we were present to answer technical questions about the questionnaire and the results, and to see what happened during the sessions. In most literature on survey feedback, a consultant facilitates the feedback sessions. More knowledge about the different dynamics related to the person and function of the facilitator can help in making a choice. Therefore, we need to study the advantages and disadvantages of using line managers and consultants as facilitators of feedback sessions. In addition, many variations are possible in design of feedback sessions. In the sessions we attended, it was difficult to separate the interpretation of the results, the drawing of conclusions, and the discussion of ideas for improvement. It may be better to plan two sessions: one for interpretation and

conclusions and one to discuss ideas for improvement and formulate actions. That way, we can prevent people from starting to think about improvements before they have finished interpreting and drawing conclusions.

Both collecting more data with the COCQ and gaining more practical experience with survey feedback will help to improve change communication in organizations. Research is needed to know more about the specific aspects of change communication, to understand its effects, and to obtain results for academic use. Practical experience in using the questionnaire as an intervention will contribute to local learning and improve change communication in organizations that decide to invest in discussing the subject with everyone involved in the change. Ultimately, understanding change communication and knowing how to improve it can lead to more effective change, an ambition that is articulated in both OC and OD theory.

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**TABLE 1****The Communication and Organizational Change Questionnaire<sup>a</sup>**

1	Necessity of the change	Indicates to what extent employees know why the change is needed <i>Example: I know why we are changing.</i>
2	Goals and direction of the change	Indicates to what extent employees are familiar with the goals and direction of the change <i>Example: I am familiar with the goals of the change.</i>
3	Information about the change	Indicates how employees assess the information supply <i>Example: The information about the change is good.</i>
4	Communication about the change	Indicates how employees assess the communication and interactions about the change <i>Example: Everyone can give his or her opinion about the change.</i>
5	Room for diversity	Indicates how employees assess the opportunities for having a different opinion <i>Example: Constructive criticism about the change is valued.</i>
6	Role of top managers	Indicates how employees assess the communicative behavior of top managers <i>Example: Top managers communicate the change in an appealing way.</i>
7	Role of line managers	Indicates how employees assess the communicative behavior of line managers <i>Example: I can discuss the changes with my manager to my satisfaction.</i>
8	Role of consultants	Indicates how employees assess the communicative behavior of consultants <i>Example: The consultants help to explain what is happening during the changes.</i>
9	Uncertainty	Indicates to what extent the change causes uncertainty <i>Example: The change makes me feel insecure about my future in the organization.</i>
10	Support for the change	Indicates to what extent employees support the change <i>Example: I believe the changes are necessary.</i>
11	Contribution to the change	Indicates to what extent employees contribute to the change <i>Example: I make a noticeable contribution to the change.</i>

<sup>a</sup>Example items have been translated into English by the authors.

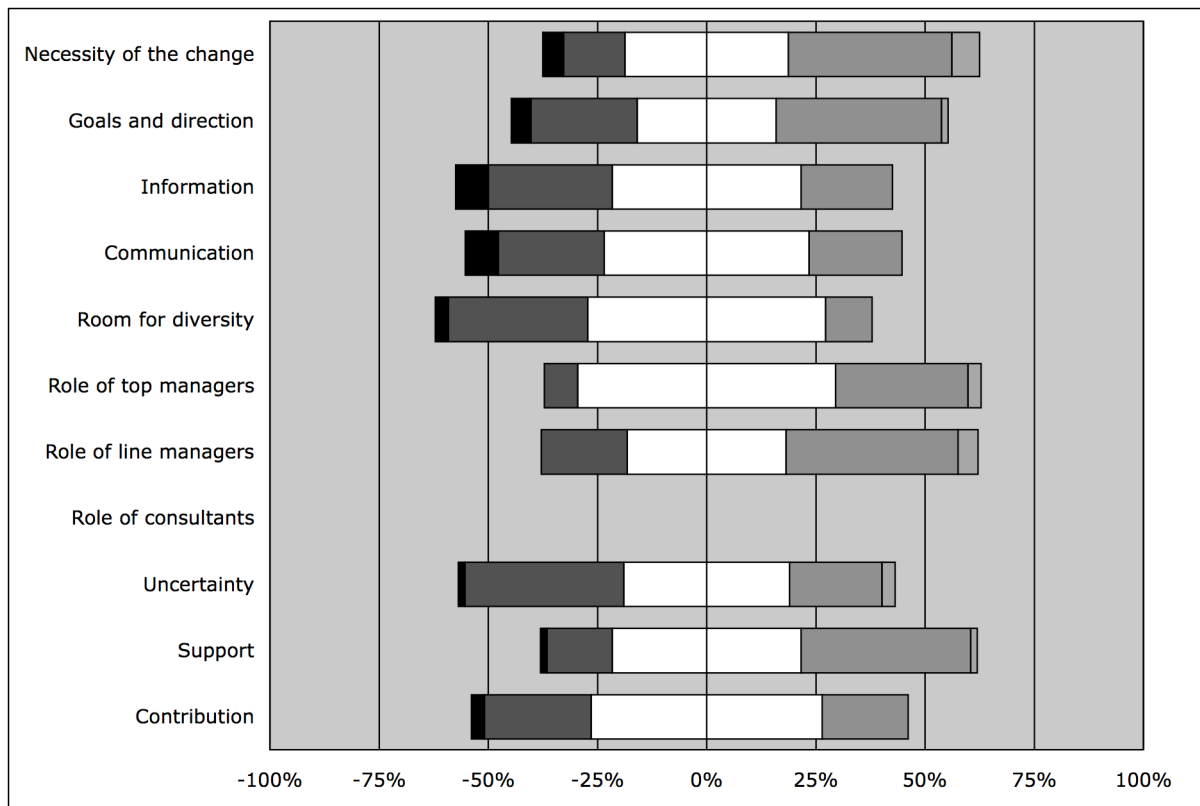
**TABLE 2**  
**Scale reliabilities of the COCQ<sup>a</sup>**

Organization	Scale number										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Homecare organization	.76	.82	.77	.73	.63	.72	.83	n.a. <sup>b</sup>	.64	.83	.76
Nursing home	.80	.78	.78	.68	.76	.78	.87	.84	.77	.81	.78
Combined sample	.81	.82	.76	.77	.74	.76	.86	.84	.75	.86	.86

<sup>a</sup>Values are Cronbach's alpha. Scale numbers refer to the questionnaire subjects listed in Table 1.

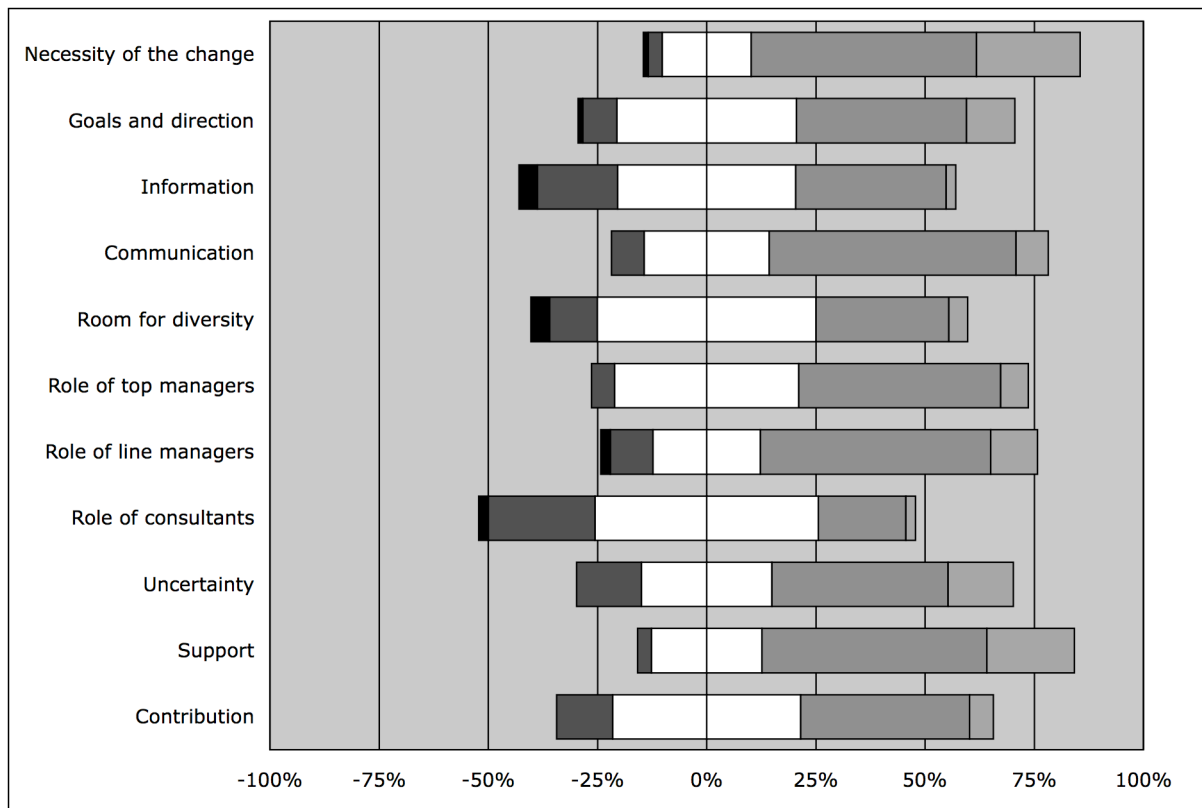
<sup>b</sup>Chronbach's alpha for *Role of consultants* is not available because they were not hired in this case; questions about their role were removed from the COCQ.

FIGURE 1

Results from the homecare organization<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The axis starts at -100% and ends at 100% so that negative and positive results can be read easily. To prevent double negation and inconsistent reading, results for *Uncertainty* on the negative side of the figure indicate uncertainty. No scores are available for *Role of consultants* because they were not hired in this case.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Results from the nursing home<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup>The axis starts at -100% and ends at 100% so that negative and positive results can be read easily. To prevent double negation and inconsistent reading, results for *Uncertainty* on the negative side of the figure indicate uncertainty.