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Managing Positive Change: Emotions and Communication Following Acquisitions¹

Riikka Harikkala-Laihinén

Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

This article takes a positive organizational scholarship lens to change management and explores what is the relationship between emotions and communication in managing positive change. Through an abductive study, it suggests a framework of positive post-acquisition change, which centres on interaction in the generation of positive emotions. The framework is built based on a Finnish – German merger completed in late 2013 and substantiated through a German – Finnish acquisition completed in early 2017. Based on the findings, positive emotions can enhance employee identification with the post-acquisition organization as well as increase motivation and engagement in change. Conversely, negative emotions are likely to cause protectionist, change-resistant behaviour. Whereas top-down communication is essential in ensuring day-to-day functions, interaction enables the creation of positive emotions and thereby engages employees in change-congruent behaviour.

MAD statement

Generating positive emotions rather than merely alleviating negative emotions can significantly enhance change outcomes. Practitioners have the ability to encourage the emergence of positive emotions through different communication means. Traditional communication, i.e. ‘information sharing’, ensures day-to-day functionality and can help alleviate worries, but does not engage employees in change. Instead, participation and interaction create a sense of ownership, generating positive emotions and motivating employees to work toward change.

KEYWORDS

Change; positive emotions; communication; interaction; mergers and acquisitions