

## A Micro-Level Perspective in Organizational Change: Cognitive Dissonance, Sense-Making and Attitude Change<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study seeks to explore how individuals make sense of an upcoming educational change after they experience a cognitive dissonance state. The data of this study included reflective essays of fifty-two prospective teachers about an impending educational change initiative. The results of the qualitative data analysis revealed that three change related dynamics shaped the perspectives of the participants such as; individual side of change, organizational side of change and management of change. The participants found the change plan substantially beneficial in terms of individual and organizational matters while they shared their concerns about the appropriate implementation of the change by the responsible administrative units. This research contributed to the change literature by combining cognitive dissonance theory and individual sense-making process in examining their role in how people react to a planned educational change initiative. Conclusions, implications and recommendations are discussed.

**Keywords:** Educational change, readiness for organizational change, cognitive dissonance, sense-making, prospective teachers.

Received: 02.04.2020 / Revision received: 25.09.2020 / Approved: 03.10.2020

- 1 This study is a part of the PhD thesis entitled, "Experimental exploration of attitude change: A path model of cognitive dissonance, resilience, and readiness for organizational change among prospective teachers" conducted at Middle East Technical University under the supervision of the second author.
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### Atıf için/Please cite as:

Çalışkan, Ö., & Gökalp, G. (2020). A micro-level perspective in organizational change: cognitive dissonance, sense-making and attitude change. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Yönetimi*, 26(4), 719-742 doi: 10.14527/kuey.2020.016.

## Introduction

In terms of educational change or reform initiatives, history of Turkish Education System (TES) is so vibrant with recurring cycles of educational changes (Erdođdu, 1996). Scholars criticized change attempts in TES by underscoring the following matters: change efforts are mostly related with the quantity side of change rather than quality issues (Erdođan, 2014); the planning and implementation of changes are weak since it lacks pilot studies (Arap, 2010; Ekici & Yılmaz, 2013); there exists a considerable amount of discontent about educational changes among teachers (Toprak, 2018) and prospective teachers (Duman, Kural-Baykan, Korođlu, Yılmaz, & Erdođan, 2014). Likewise, in the broader organizational change literature pertaining to the educational and business organizations, the most repeated question posed by scholars studying change is why failing change attempts are much more prevalent than the successes (Akřit, 2007; Cuban, 1990; Gaziel, 2010; Lewis, 2019; Vakola, 2014).

With respect to the sources of failures in change initiatives, a number of issues are reported in the literature. Some of these are related with process of change such as not employing a participatory decision-making process, unsatisfactory track of change attempts (Toprak, 2018), ineffective change management (Probst & Raisch, 2005) and neglecting the complexity of educational change containing sub-components (Eđitim Reformu Giriřimi, 2013). Others are related with human side of change such as paying more attention to content of change by disregarding organizational members (Clegg & Walsh, 2004), disregarding the emotional, moral, and political aspects of change (Hargreaves, 2005) and negligence in managing culture construct (Burke, 2017).

Of all the respective arguments, ignoring the micro level of understanding in change or human side of change is especially highlighted (Clegg & Walsh, 2004; Ford & Ford, 1995; Orlikowski, 1996). What makes individuals so important in change process is their varying individual attitudes (as positive or negative) during the change process. With respect to the individuals' attitudes, readiness for organizational change (RFOC) is mentioned as one of the most renowned constructs (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Weiner, Clary, Klamann, Turner, & Alishahi-Tabriz, 2020) to explore human attitudes in change attempts.

In describing RFOC, Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) state "readiness is reflected in organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully make those changes in the environment" (p. 681). In addition, RFOC was associated with the internal or cognitive orientation of people towards change (Clarke, Ellett, Bateman, & Rugutt, 1996). The respective definitions suggest that RFOC pertains to a cognitive state rather than behavioral

acts within a given change process. Supporting the respective argument, Bernerth (2004) associates readiness with the initial step (unfreeze) of three-stage change model (unfreeze, change and refreeze) suggested by Lewin (1947). In brief, RFOC attitude can be associated with the alteration of cognitions and cognitive schemas in the mindsets (Armenakis et al., 1993).

In relation to the role of human cognition in attitude change from the perspective of cognitive researchers, it is stated that how change recipients receive, formulate, and make sense of a change in an environment is pivotal to figuring out organizational change (Bartunek, Lacey, & Wood, 1992; Lau & Woodman, 1995; Weber & Manning, 2001). With respect to the formation of attitude change, the social cognition theory (Bandura, 1986; Kezar, 2001; Weick, 1995) pertaining to the organizational change literature suggests some terms like cognitive schema (De Vos, 2002), change schema (Lau & Woodman, 1995), sense-making (Weick, 1995), cognitive cause-mapping (Weber & Manning, 2001), and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Of these, cognitive dissonance theory, known as a disharmony state resulting from opposing conditions (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, or thoughts) among cognitive elements in mind (Festinger, 1957), may provide important insights about how desirable attitude change or RFOC can be achieved prior to the implementation of a planned organizational change. The manipulative force of cognitive dissonance in desirable attitude change has been much utilized to influence human attitudes and orientations in various fields including politics, marketing, health, and so on (Cooper, 2007; Gbadamosi, 2009; Lindsey-Mullikin, 2003; Sweeney & Gruber, 1984). In that sense, individual attitudes, the most emphasized side of organizational change, can also be influenced through cognitive dissonance approach. In addition to this, by utilizing the manipulating force of cognitive dissonance in attitude change, the cognitive processes underlying people's attitudinal reactions or variations towards change can be explored through analyzing their reflections or sense-making processes (Weber & Manning, 2001) about a target change. That is, the process of making sense of a change may shed light on the formation of individual attitudes and the direction of that attitude (either positive or negative).

Depending on the assumed theoretical associations among human attitude, in this case RFOC, cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and sense-making (Weick, 1995), this study seeks to explore how individuals make sense of a planned educational change after they experience cognitive dissonance state. What makes this study distinctive from many other change studies is that this study empirically shows the alteration of individual attitudes (RFOC) through manipulation and reflects how people re-construct their new realities (attitudes) in their cognitive schemas. In that sense, with an interdisciplinary approach, this study employs a micro-level perspective in examining organizational change through the utilization of qualitative data.

## Readiness for Organizational Change (RFOC)

As a popular concept in the field of organizational change literature, RFOC has been much studied in both business organizations (Bouckennooghe & Devos, 2008; Shah, 2009; Weiner, 2009) and educational organizations (Khedhiri, 2018; Kondakçı, Beycioglu, Sincar, & Ugurlu, 2017; Nordin, 2011; Zayim & Kondakci, 2015) with different perspectives.

The most comprehensive study regarding the dimensions associated with RFOC was performed by Holt and his colleagues (2007a). In the respective study, the predictors of RFOC are identified with four main facets as; context factors referring to the conditions or the settings in which change happens, process factors referring to how change continues, content factors meaning what change contains, and individual factors meaning personal characteristics of people who experience change. To further the research in RFOC, Holt and his colleagues (2007b) also offered a four-factor RFOC scale with four-dimension as; management support, change efficacy, appropriateness, and personal valence. Along with the research in business organizations, RFOC has been studied to explore educational change initiatives (Caliskan, 2011, 2017; Demir-Erdoğan, 2016; Karacabey & Bozkuş, 2018; Kondakci, Zayim, & Caliskan, 2010; Levent, 2016) along with scale development and adaptation efforts in Turkish context (Caliskan, 2019; Kondakci, Zayim, & Caliskan, 2013). In brief, RFOC has become one of leading constructs studied as individual attitude in organizational change attempts.

## Theoretical Framework: Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance refers to a psychologically uncomfortable state developing as a consequence of contrasting cognitions, the state of having two or more inconsistent attitudes, beliefs, or thoughts in human mind (Festinger, 1957). The theory of cognitive dissonance has gained great popularity in social psychology with a considerable attention of the scholars in the last half century (Cooper, 2007), yielding four main theoretical paradigms explaining different cases of dissonance such as: belief disconfirmation (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956), induced compliance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959), free choice (Brehm, 1956), and effort justification (Aranson & Mills, 1959).

The occurrence of cognitive dissonance or consonance state is explained with the following circumstances. Individuals encounter with new situations along with their former beliefs. If their old beliefs do not have any inconsistency with new information, a sense of supportive feeling occurs because of the reciprocal harmony with the previous knowledge. This condition refers to consonance in which there is no incongruity or contrasting situation between new order and old order. Nevertheless, if this cognitive process results in a reversing state, a sense of disharmony happens between the new condition and previously held beliefs, and thereby causes the increase of discomfort and unpleasant condition

creating contradiction in mind, which is called cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Subsequently, individuals experiencing such an internal inconsistency feel psychologically uncomfortable and look for ways to reduce the cognitive dissonance to regain the comfortable state (consonance). In practice, the reduction of cognitive dissonance can be achieved through two ways; 1) changing the initial cognitions or behavior and accepting new condition or 2) justifying the initial cognition or behavior through denying the new information or neutralizing the effect of it. In brief, the creation of dissonance may serve as a manipulative force by changing individual's existing beliefs and attitudes.

Considering the process of dissonance state summarized above, the presence of dissonance may serve a function in steering individual attitudes towards new conditions. As evident from the extant literature, to manipulate human attitude and behavior, cognitive dissonance has been much utilized in a number of fields such as politics (Beasley & Joslyn, 2001), psychotherapy (Axsom & Cooper, 1985), and consumer behavior (Dickerson, Thibodeau, Aronson, & Miller, 1992).

As mentioned earlier, RFOC is an attitude and cognitive orientation (Armenakis et al., 1993; Clarke et al., 1996). Then, individuals' RFOC state can also be manipulated as it happens in the case of cognitive dissonance process mentioned above. That is, employees with low RFOC towards an organizational change can be manipulated to make them have high RFOC state towards that change. This transformation process through created cognitive dissonance is a kind of cognitive activity or journey in which individuals make sense of the organizational change and try to generate self-justification to accept that change. This sense-making process is re-interpretation of the respective change because low RFOC state is replaced with high RFOC state through manipulation. While the role of cognitive dissonance in attitude change is evident in the literature (Cooper, 2007), the issue of how this transformation (sense-making) in human cognition happens is not much studied. Focusing on this sense-making process may provide a differentiated perspective for understanding human attitudes in change process. The literature may benefit from employing such an approach, surfacing the change dynamics behind individual decision-making processes leading to generation of attitudes in varying degrees.

### **Sense-Making: Interpretation of Change**

Sense-making means the formation of interpretations about the situations (Weick, 1995) or refers to making sense of a change through generated frameworks of understanding (Weber & Manning, 2001). In organizational change literature, individual's interpretation of change or making sense of change has been studied to understand the nature and process of changes (Dutton, 1992; Isabella, 1990; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993; Weber & Manning, 2001). During the course of sense-making process, individuals construct their cognitive schemas/maps, which eventually manifest as attitudes and behaviors about a change. The res-

pective cognitive schemas/maps are also called cause maps (Weber & Manning, 2001), which are comprised of the order and interrelationships of attributed meanings (Gioia & Manz, 1985) and also cause-effect outcome of sense-making process (Weick & Bougon, 1986).

The cause maps, emerged as a result of sense-making, may help us understand the primary dynamics of human reactions toward change. With an inductive manner, individual's cause maps actually show their primary motives or patterns of preferences that shape their attitudes. Hence it can be said that the manipulation of attitudes through cognitive dissonance is a kind of sense-making process which eventually brings about new interpretations about the given change.

### **Educational Change in Turkey: The Case of Novice Teacher Training Program (NTTP)**

Ministry of National Education announced a large-scale nationwide change plan about the training of novice teachers (Novice Teacher Training Program) in the spring of 2016 (Resmi Gazete, 2016). This change attempt includes an orientation program taking six-months of training for teachers who are assigned as novice teachers at K-12 schools. The main motivations behind the respective program relied on two reasons: (a) reducing the early burnout problems of newly assigned teachers with the conduct of orientation and mentoring programs and (b) supporting teachers to get used to the cities at which they will be employed as teachers.

As part of the NTTP, three types of training are given to the participants; 1) 384-hour of training program in the classes and school setting; 2) 90-hour of training program out of the school setting; 3) 168-hour of training program for in-service training. In brief, the NTTP takes 642-hour intensive training, apart from the tasks of film-watching and book-reading out of training time. Although certain program contents display similarity with the courses taught in the undergraduate teacher education programs, the NTTP activities out of school and in-service training have unique attributes with contemporary local practices of the places where teachers will work. Within the training program, a mentor teacher, more experienced teacher in the school, also accompanies novice teachers and grades her/his performance at the end of the NTTP. After all these training processes, the participants are also required to pass a written and oral examination to be assigned as a permanent teacher. The implementation and coordination of program is left to the provincial authorities (Resmi Gazete, 2016).

In the current study, this large-scale change attempt was adopted as a planned educational change in order to explore how prospective teachers make sense of the respective change plan after they experience cognitive dissonance state. The selected participants are the closest prospective members of the impending change, so their sense of awareness and familiarization with the program is acknowledged as quite high. Since this training program was just used as an assessment tool for the research question defined above and the offered

change plan was quite recent, the necessary details of the program were conveyed to the participants during data collection-time. Therefore, the participants were well-informed about the forthcoming change in their professional career. Drawing upon the idea that there may be applicability of cognitive dissonance theory with RFOC as part of an upcoming educational change, this study seeks to explore how individuals make sense of a planned educational change after they experience cognitive dissonance state.

## **Method**

This research employed qualitative case study approach since it reports a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of prospective teachers' perspectives about an impending educational change plan (NTTP) (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The data of this study were comprised of reflective essays of fifty-two prospective teachers about the NTTP. In this particular study, the respective qualitative data actually came from a larger study (doctoral dissertation) in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected within the same context.

In the larger study (see Figure 1), based on the procedures of cognitive dissonance experiments in the literature (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Sastre, 2014), a pretest/posttest quasi-experimental design with non-equivalent groups was employed (Charles & Mertler, 2002) in order to explore whether RFOC levels of 163 participants (three groups) were altered as a result of the created cognitive dissonance setting. For the creation of cognitive dissonance state, first, three groups of the participants were identified at the pre-test stage as negative attitude individuals, positive attitude individuals and control group individuals. The identification of the groups was realized through the calculation of their initial level of RFOC measure. Following this, at the post-test stage (four weeks later), each participant from three groups was individually exposed to one of three instruction types (positive instruction, negative instruction, and no instruction/control condition) which were about the NTTP. The negative and positive instructions included one-page information sheet (either positive or negative information) about the NTTP, created by the researcher based on the mass media speeches of different authorities such as Minister of Education and education unions about the NTTP, including statistical reports about the outcome of organizational change efforts in the extant literature. After the intervention groups (positive attitude group and negative attitude group) read their own sheets, the attitude groups were requested to write an essay through which they either advocated or discredited the proposed change plan. Inducing the treatment groups to read counter-attitudinal information sheets and then to write counter-attitudinal essays about the NTTP served as a cognitive dissonance creation among the participants. Through these counter-attitudinal conditions, each group of the participants were manipulated to change their initial cognitions and to accept the induced condition. As expected, both attitude groups significantly changed their initial attitudes (level of RFOC) while the control group participants' RFOC scores did not change much between pre-test and post-test session.

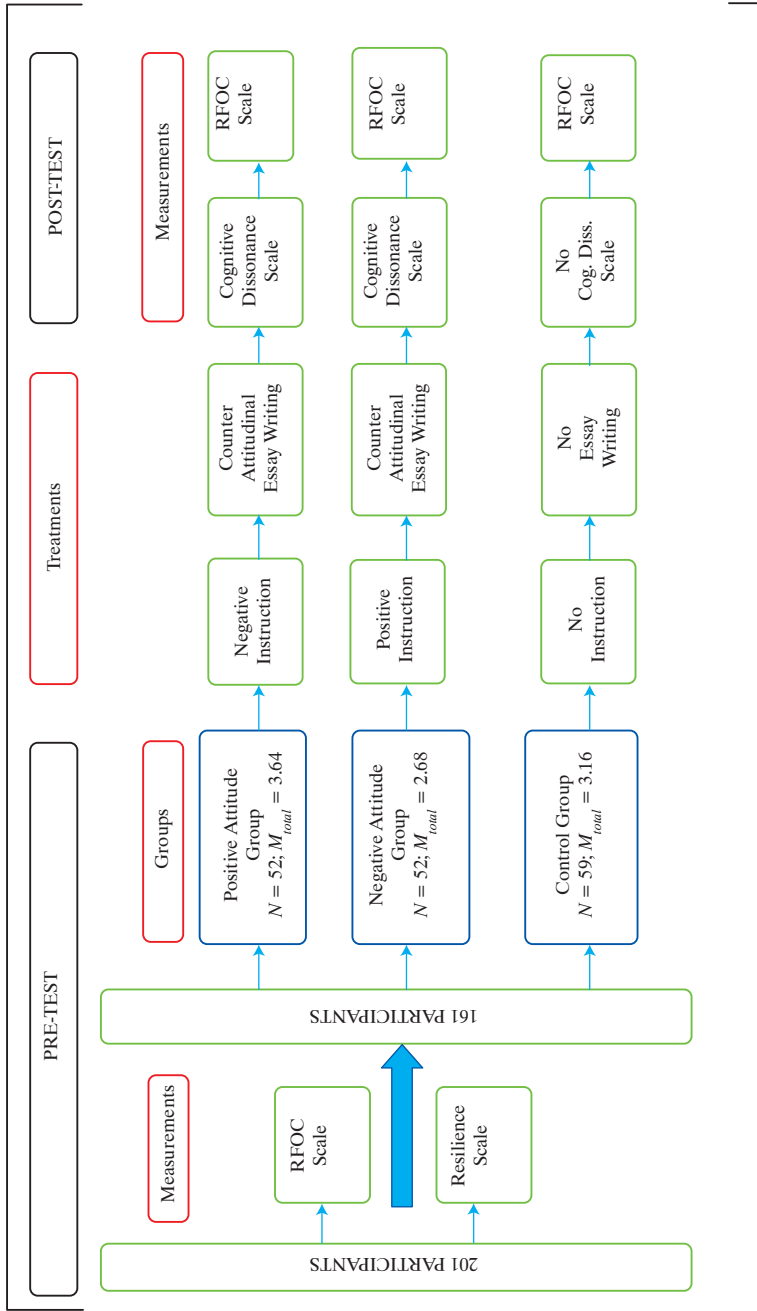


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the Experimental Stages



This particular study, however, focused on the negative attitude group participants who experienced a significant attitude change in the direction of initial negative attitude (RFOC-Mean<sub>total</sub> = 2.68 out of 5.00) toward more positive attitude (RFOC-Mean<sub>total</sub> = 3.17 out of 5.00) over the created experimental session. What makes this group distinctive is that they substantially experienced attitude-change in each RFOC dimension at the post stage as a result of the created dissonance state. However, a closer exploration of how the participants made sense of the change and re-constructed their cognitions in their reflective essays may provide insightful information about the cognitive orientation of the individuals. As mentioned in sense-making section of the literature review, the reflective essays of the participants serve as individual cause maps (Weber & Manning, 2001) about NTT. That is, the systematic content analysis of the reflective essays can uncover individuals' frameworks of understanding (cause maps) about NTT. These cause-maps provided the opportunity to explore how prospective teachers interpreted NTT and created their own rationalizations by accepting the new information.

### *Sampling Procedure and Participants*

The data of this study was collected at a public university, in the spring semester of 2016 academic-term. Located in a metropolitan city, the selected university has five faculties (disciplines) including Faculty of Education, with a total number of almost 20.000 undergraduate and 5.000 graduate students. The Faculty of Education has nine undergraduate programs, with a total number of almost 1400 students. The study participants included undergraduate students of 3rd and 4th grades from a number of departments. The selection of 3rd and 4th grade students depends on the idea that these classes are the closest group to be the organizational member of the NTT after graduation. In the larger study, no statistical difference was observed between the classes upon conducting one-way ANOVA (3rd & 4th), which may affect the results. The proportion of the participating students to the study was almost consistent with the total population of each department of the Faculty of Education. The sample was made up of 44 (84.61%) female and 8 (15.38%) male students. In terms of the proportion of male and female participants in this study, the percentages of the participants were almost consistent with the gender percentages in the total student population as; 75.6% for female students and 24.4% for male students.

### *Data Collection Tool*

In this study, the reflective essays of the participants were used as data source. In the process of collecting the particular reflective essays, first, the participants were individually given a one-page information sheet to read, favoring the necessity of the NTT. This sheet contained information about the proposed change, gathered from the mass media speeches given by the top administrative staff from the MONE [Ministry of National Education], two prominent education unions, and the Minister of Education. After the participants read this sheet, they were

requested to write a one-page essay favoring NTTP. Through these essays, the participants, who were initially quite against the NTTP, were expected to change their existing attitudes and to reinterpret the change in a positive manner.

In preparation of counter-attitudinal information sheet and analysis of reflective essays, the researchers followed a number of steps to warrant validity and reliability issues. First, in theoretical and practical means, typical cognitive dissonance studies (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Elliot & Devine, 1994; Sastre, 2014) guided us to utilize counter-attitudinal information sheet and reflective essay-writing in this research. Second, regarding the content of the information sheets, two scholars from the field of Educational Sciences were kindly requested to provide their views as experts. Depending on the suggestions, necessary corrections were made on the sheets. Afterwards, prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was performed for all the scales used in the larger study, including the information sheets and reflective essays. This enabled the researchers to detect any possible problem about the tools beforehand. In the analysis of the reflective essays, to warrant inter-coder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the researchers kindly requested an expert to code the reflective essays. The expert was an academic staff from the field of Educational Sciences. Checking the consistency of the codes attached by the researchers and the expert, the researchers found that the initial codes and the codes of the expert were highly consistent.

### *Ethical Procedures*

Given that the data of this study came from a larger study in which experimental research design and manipulation as a research technique were adopted to induce the participants' initial thoughts in the intended direction, a number of procedures were followed to satisfy the ethical considerations. Prior to starting data collection, the necessary permission for data collection at the selected university was received from the Human Subjects Ethics Committee of the respective university. Afterwards, taking the responsibility of all data collection process, the first author visited the selected intact classes at a scheduled time. During data collection, the lecturers of the visited classes were kindly requested to leave the class for creating an appropriate data collection environment. The participants were briefly informed about the purpose of the research, total duration of process, and their rights about voluntary participation in the study. Afterwards, each participating student was given a stationery gift card as an incentive for taking part in the study. The participants were requested to identify themselves with a nickname and to write the respective nicknames on the first page of the instrument booklets. Through this approach, confidentiality concern was eliminated and the students were easily detected for data collection at the follow-up session. At the end of data collection process including post-test, necessary debriefing was done in relation to the data collection process.

## Data Analysis

In data analysis, the reflective essays of fifty-two participants were scrutinized to illustrate how the participants made sense of the NTTP and re-constructed their cognitive schemas. Content analysis was used to uncover the interpretations of the participants reflected on their personal essays because content analysis is a technique which allows researchers to explore behavior of humans through the analysis of their communications (e.g., essays, textbooks, novels, speeches, newspapers, etc.) (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2014). In the analysis of the essays, the initially structured themes, but receptive to emerging codes, were adopted, largely depending on the model of Holt et al. (2007a) incorporating individual factor and organizational factors (content, context, process) that impact RFOC. In addition, the study of Weber and Manning (2001) guided us in how to utilize sense-making concept as a tool in analyzing the essays of the participants. Accordingly, we attempted to foreground three main themes: individual side of change, organizational side of change and the management of change. In the presentation of the data in the findings section, identification numbers (e.g., P.7) between one and fifty-two were used to identify the participants.

## Findings

In this study, the data presentation was arranged around three primary themes; 1) individual issues pertaining to the proposed change; 2) organizational issues pertaining to the proposed change; and 3) management of the proposed change. In addition, each theme was presented with two codes as; positive aspects of change and negative aspects of change (see Table 1). As evident from Table 1, the majority of codes were identified with the positive aspects of change ( $n = 49$ ) compared to the negative aspects of change ( $n = 32$ ). In terms of the frequency of themes, the participants reflected their individual matters much more than other issues of the change.

Table 1  
*Distribution of Themes and Codes Obtained*

Themes	Codes	
	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
Individual Side of Change	27	7
Organizational Side of Change	20	6
Management of Change	2	19
Total Number of Codes	49	32

The first theme focuses on the participants' statements about their personal matters (self-issues) regarding the proposed change such as their concerns, expectations, benefits or harms and so on. The second theme concentrates on the participants' opinions about to what extent this proposed change will or will not provide benefit to the organization (MONE) upon the implementation. In the last theme, the prospective management of change, especially the process of change implementation, is assessed by the participants on the basis of their expectations, which are shaped by their former experiences and current knowledge about the success of large-scale education reforms in Turkey.

### *Individual Side of Change*

Examining the codes associated with individual side of change, the individual matters associated with NTTP seemed to be the primary initiator that shaped the sense-making process among the participants. That is, compared to other themes (organizational side of change & management of change), the participants expressed their opinions in personal issues much more, indicating that the personal matters are much more primed than other matters when individuals confront with a change. In the essays, individual matters of change were associated with the individual attributes (i.e., self-efficacy, personal valence) of change recipients, as suggested by Holt et al. (2007b). In relation to individual issues about the upcoming change, the participants especially stated positive feelings as expected while a few of them also shared their concerns about the upcoming change.

One participant (P47), emphasizing that he did not feel ready for teaching in real classrooms and that this training would contribute to his adaptation to the profession at the very beginning through strengthening his self-efficacy, expressed the following;

I think this training program can be really powerful, useful. I am currently a candidate for graduation. I will be an English teacher, and when I think about whether I am ready to be a teacher, I think the answer is no.

With a similar perspective, another participant (P39) expressed her concern that they would not be good at classroom management upon getting into classroom in the first year and found the change program as an opportunity for getting used to the profession. She commented;

This training seems really necessary. As most people agree, it's very difficult to take control of a class as soon as you get into class in the first year. We may be incapable of maintaining both classroom management and academic success.

In change attempts, change recipients are keen on checking extrinsic and intrinsic benefits of the proposed change with the question in their mind "What is in it for me?" (Bernerth, 2004). While this change obliges the organizational members to perform a number of paper-work issues during the training, the par-

ticipants seemed to be convinced that the perceived personal beneficiary sides of those paper-works outweighed the obvious work-load, and one participant (P.9) expressed this;

It is not only useful for classroom management, but also for school management, paper-work issues in terms of learning about the administration of the organization [schools] or meeting with school principals to talk about daily school works, and capturing all details of education before we are fully assigned to the profession.

A few of the participants expressed their negative feelings about the proposed change. For example, one participant (P.13), believing that she was competent enough to take the responsibility of teaching in real classrooms in the first year, criticized the offered change by expressing that they would be urged to adopt the mainstream education traditions imposed by the principals and mentor teachers, with the following quote;

My belief is that a teacher starts the profession with enthusiasm, love, and new ideas, but most of the time, experienced teachers and school principals who do not want to change the order [tradition] will not be open to these fresh ideas. They will be able to adapt new ideas [new teachers] to the system very easily in this way.

Another participant (P.42) negated the offered change by claiming that the years of education taken at university were already preparing them for the profession and expressed his disappointment in this way; “This practice shows that teachers graduating from the faculty of education are not believed to be adequate.”

All in all, a considerable number of the prospective teachers found the proposed change as beneficial for their easy adaptation to the profession, learning daily school functions, and professional development. Also, few of them considered the training process as waste of time on the basis of the idea that they would be fully capable of conducting their profession after graduation without any training programs like the NTTP.

### *Organizational Side of Change*

Organizational side of the change are structured around two codes; 1) positive aspects of the change that provide benefit to the organization (ministry of education, schools, students and all stakeholders), 2) negative aspects of the change that are impractical for the organization. In this theme, based on the suggestion of Holt et al. (2007b), the organizational valence of the change and the perceived discrepancy between old and new condition (after change occurs) were assessed from the perspectives of the prospective teachers. The advantages and disadvantages of the proposed change especially associated with the organization rather than individuals (prospective teachers) were substantially articulated by the participants, being the second most emphasized issue after the individual

side of the organizational change. Overall, two-third of the participants found the change beneficial for the organization (MONE) while the rest questioned the change as waste of resources (time, money, human capital) for the organization.

Implying that teaching profession is more than class-room practice, one participant (P.36) expressed that the content of the change released to them had positive aspects that would contribute to the effectiveness of education in a number of issues with the following quote; “It is essential to recognize cultural characteristics (of the places where we are teaching), to better understand and recognize children. In this way, the effectiveness of teaching and education can increase.” With a similar perspective, while the training program urges novice teachers to learn the culture, history and tradition of the places that they would work as teachers, almost all participants seemed to consider these practices as an affirmative action for the organization. In relation to this, one participant (P.16) shared her feelings by noting;

Teaching is a profession of interaction. In order to be able to interact with students, parents and teacher colleagues, it is essential that teachers know the history, culture and distinctive features of the place where they work. For this reason, teachers who are going to start the profession should know these skills and knowledge in the first year. Given today’s needs, this training seems necessary and important opportunity [for the MONE].

Apart from these issues, some participants stated that they needed to learn how this organization as a big system works in order to be able to be good teachers. Compared with the existing training program for novice teachers, currently implemented at the weekends by MONE, this training program (the NTTP) contains much more topics to be learned, practiced or observed by the novice teachers. Although this means that the new training program puts more pressure on new teachers, they seemed to be persuaded. In relation to this, one participant (P.2) expressed;

We will also receive certain training in the administrative departments and the places associated with the Ministry of Education. These trainings will enable us to understand the system better. I think it is a very successful training for teachers to increase their intellectual knowledge, as well.

With respect to the negative sides of the proposed change associated with the organizational valence, just a few participants criticized the training in the way that the content of the change would not provide novel and unknown knowledge that could not be learned at formal education institutions, by implying that the top decision makers seemed to believe that the undergraduate education could not provide necessary credentials for being a teacher at schools. One participant (P.44) shared the following comments; “The application of novice teacher training program is to acknowledge (by the top decision-makers) that the necessary teacher training is not provided to the candidates at high school and especially at the university.”

Another participant (P.43) criticized the top decision-makers by mentioning that Ministry of Education needed more teachers at certain cities of the country and thereby questioned this training by complaining about having to wait for one extra year to get into the classrooms, with the following expression; “I don’t know how reasonable it is to put teachers on hold for a year instead of assigning them to cover this gap [lack of teachers at schools] when there is an urgent need for more teachers [in certain cities]. One other negative comment shared by the participants is again the content of the change and its expected benefit for the organization. One participant (P.18) stated this with the following;

Getting used to teaching, socializing with students, getting to know them better cannot be achieved through observation, but through one-to-one communication. The films and books suggested to the prospective teacher would have been read and watched previously if the teacher had taken interest in those books and films. So, I think it will be boring to them.

### **Management of Change**

This dimension refers to the perspectives of the change recipients in terms of the procedural matters and management styles pertaining to the proposed change. Unlike the organizational and individual side of the change, the participants articulated a lot more negative comments than positive ones. Very few of the participants shared positive comments about the prospective management of the change. This indicates that the change itself contains favorable topics associated with personal and organizational matters, but the participants seemed to lower their positive expectations about the management of the change, especially based on the unsatisfactory history of change attempts in Turkish Education System and their observations about how the bureaucracy functions in typical Turkish institutions.

One of the most prominent concerns regarding the management of the change was whether the proposed change would be implemented as written or shared to them. The participants believed that the change itself was good, but were unsure whether the actual implementation would provide the assumed good. It seems that the participants had some mistrust against the authorities who were responsible for implementing this change. One participant (P.46) explained this with the following comment;

The training program seems to be very effective and necessary in theory [on paper], but I am almost sure that this effectiveness will be reduced by half in terms of the applications under Turkish approach [Turkish management style]. Because, it is certain by the common experience that the administrative institutions responsible for teacher evaluation and orientation are not fair enough [in their practices].

Supporting this statement, another participant (P.35) shared his hesitation about the righteous application of the proposed change plan as uttered by the

authorities publicized in the media, with the following comment; “If this training is implemented within the frameworks of rights and law, I think it will be an effective practice.” Besides the mistrust towards the respective authorities, the participants shared their concerns regarding the planning and coordination of the change process in an appropriate manner and timing. One participant (P.23) noted her concern with the following comment;

I still doubt that this application will be implemented with full success or will bring complete success. Because I believe that there may be big problems [in the NTTP process] in finding appropriate mentor teachers, pairing the respective mentors with prospective teachers, and true assessment of prospective teachers by their mentors.

In relation to very limited positive comments of the participants about the change process, the participants shared their satisfaction about the payment of the standard salary to them even if they were not teaching in classes. One participant shared her satisfaction with the following comment; “It is also important that the novice teachers receive a normal teacher salary during this period. I think this will encourage candidates.” Another participant (P.2) commented that he changed his initial negative thoughts about the program after reading the speech of General Director of Teacher Training and Development, which was shared in the instructions. The respective participant noted;

Before I had the detailed knowledge of various authorities and scientific research, I had had a feeling that teaching training program would be a burden for us. But now, especially after reading explanations of General Director of Teacher Training and Development, I realized that it is so comprehensive and culturally enriching.

In brief, given the frequency of codes associated with three themes, the findings revealed that the overall perspectives of the participants were largely shaped by individual side of change, closely associated with the personal valence of the change. To a lesser extent, the participants’ interpretation of the change was affected by organizational side of change and management of change respectively.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how prospective teachers made sense of an educational change attempt after they were exposed to cognitive dissonance state. Through cognitive dissonance, the initial negative attitude group substantially changed their attitude into the direction of positive side as expected. However, as suggested by Lau and Woodman (1995), when people are confronted with changes in their organizations, change recipients generate several interpretations of and expectations for the respective change. In that sense, through this particular study, what kind of change related dynamics shaped their cognitive schemas may provide us insightful ideas in understanding how negative attitudes (resistance) can be transformed in a change process.



The findings of the study revealed that the participants' interpretations of the change were predominantly shaped by the individual side of change, meaning that the prospective teachers especially focused on the question "What's in it [the change plan] for me?" (Bernerth, 2004) while making sense of the proposed educational change. This type of approach by the participants is consistent with the literature because individuals seek for intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of a change (Armenakis et al., 1993). As the core operators of the change, individuals naturally want to check how the respective change is beneficial for them before the organizational valence of it. Individuals' putting their personal gains at the center of the respective change also reaffirms the extant literature, in that human side of change is stressed as one of the most important dynamics having an impact on the success of change attempts (Clegg & Walsh, 2004). In this particular change, prospective teachers especially favored this change as an opportunity for gaining self-efficacy in their profession by mentioning that they might not be ready to teach in the classes in their first year because the training program provided them the opportunity to conduct classroom observations and micro teaching under the supervision of the mentor teachers. The respective gain through the training seemed to outweigh the obvious work load among the participants, leading them to regard this component of change as an individual advantage.

Regarding the organizational side of change from the perspectives of the participants, two-third of the participants thought that this change would provide benefit to the MONE. After reading the information sheet (change message) about the NTTP, the participants seemed to be persuaded about "why this change is needed" (Bernerth, 2004). The difference between the current teacher training and the envisioned state (the content of NTTP) for the organization creates a discrepancy in their minds, which is an important component of the change message (Armenakis et al., 1993). In their comments, the participants expressed that the training program would help them to observe different cultures, traditions of the place they would work at, and learnt administrative processes in schooling, which ultimately increase the effectiveness of the education. As for the negative side of the change, the participants thought that the training would be waste of resources (time, money, and human capital) while the MONE experienced lack of teachers in various cities of the country. Also, some participants commented that they were already being educated at the university and questioned the need for this change.

In relation to the management of change, almost all of the participants shared their concerns about the proper application of the training program. What made them think so can be associated with their former experiences or observations from such change attempts, history of change (Bernerth, 2004; Bouckenoghe & Devos, 2008). In Turkey, the management of change is one of the most criticized issues (Arap, 2010; Ekici & Yılmaz, 2013), especially in areas of unsatisfactory track of change attempts perceived by Turkish teachers (Toprak, 2018) and prospective teachers (Duman et al., 2014). Therefore, it is reasonable

to conclude that the prospective teachers cannot be sure about the outcome of the change in spite of the envisioned state claimed by the MONE.

### **Implications, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study offer theoretical and practical implications for organizational change and educational change literature. The findings provided a rich amount of insight into the sense-making process of prospective teachers about a planned educational change. The obtained data and respective findings may guide change implementers in creating different communication and training tools before launching a change attempt. As reported in the findings, the primary motivating force in attitude change seems to be the personal matters associated with a change while the most concerning part is change process (management of change). Thus, change implementers need to pay more attention to the respective dynamics for the sake of successful change results. Also, the order of preferences emerged from the personal essays suggest that the content of persuasive change messages conveyed to people prior to the change should be cautiously prepared and presented.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study empirically revealed the sequence of individual attitude-change through utilizing the assumptions of cognitive dissonance theory and sense-making approach with an interdisciplinary perspective. By doing so, the study showed how people experienced shift in their cognitions and thereby re-interpreted the change plan, which yielded attitude change. This approach proves the practical application of individual attitude change, which is much discussed in the organizational change literature.

In relation to the limitation of this study and recommendations for future research, this study was exploratory in nature. The reflective essays were collected once, as a component of cognitive dissonance experiment. However, the reflective essays could have been collected at the pre-test and post-test sessions, which might have provided different insight about the changing interpretations of the participants over time. Also, the sample of the study was prospective teachers who were not actual teachers working at schools and were far away from real school and classroom environment. Therefore, a replication study with teachers working at schools can be conducted. The application of cognitive dissonance, sense-making approach and attitude change can be further validated through new studies.

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