

The Effect of Affective Commitment, Communication and Participation on Resistance to Change: The Role of Change Readiness

Kali McKay, *Consultant Advisor at OPRA Group Ltd*

Joana R.C. Kuntz, *University of Canterbury*

Katharina Näswall, *University of Canterbury*

The considerable rate of change implementation failure reported by organisations worldwide has led researchers to scrutinize key individual and contextual factors contributing to the success and sustainability of organisational transformations. In view of this, the present study aimed to uncover whether and how the adequacy of change-related communications, the opportunity for participation in change, and the level of affective commitment to a changing organisation, related to readiness and resistance attitudes. In addition, this study sought to explore the largely under-investigated role of readiness for change as a precursor to change-resistant attitudes, and its role as a mediator of the relationship between contextual antecedents and change resistance. Survey responses collected from a sample of 102 employees affiliated to changing organisations in New Zealand and Australia suggest unique relationships between the contextual antecedents measured, and change readiness and resistance. Moreover, the results indicate that readiness for change may mediate the relationship between these contextual antecedents and intent to resist change. The implications and applications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Readiness for Change, Resistance to Change, Communication, Affective Commitment

Increasing globalisation, technological innovation, changing government laws and regulations, political events, and workforce characteristics constitute the foremost triggers of organisational flexibility (Pfeffer, 1994), and require ongoing, often major changes in organisations. Although change has become commonplace in modern organisations, the reported failure rates of change implementation range from 40% to as high as 70% (By, 2005; Isern & Pung, 2007). These statistics have prompted researchers and practitioners alike to investigate the causes underlying change failure.

While a myriad of factors can be ascribed to unsuccessful transformations, including pressures from the business environment and inadequate organisational infrastructure, employee resistance has been identified as a primary source of change

implementation failure across a range of organisations and industries worldwide (Erwin & Garman, 2010; Maurer, 1996; Reger et al., 1994; Spiker & Lesser, 1995; Waldersee & Griffiths, 1996). The extant literature suggests that employee resistance may be the upshot of managerial failure to acknowledge or value employee input, to manage change-related attitudes, and to consider the impact of workforce involvement on change planning, implementation and sustainability (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; George & Jones, 2001; Lau & Woodman, 1995). Importantly, recent research has suggested that resistance to change may add strategic value to change planning and implementation, and should therefore be carefully discerned and managed (Downs, 2012; Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008; Ford & Ford, 2010).

On the other hand, the potential for change readiness to facilitate the implementation of organisational transformations has also been underscored (Armenakis et al., 1993). Change readiness reflects the process wherein employees, influenced by information received from change drivers, peers, and other contextual clues, perceive the change as necessary and achievable (Armenakis et al., 1993), and display willingness to support change efforts (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Although change resistance and readiness have often been positioned at different ends of the same spectrum (Armenakis et al., 1993) and presumed to share similar dispositional and contextual antecedents (Oreg, 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), they may represent distinct constructs. In fact, readiness for change has been proposed as “the cognitive precursor to the behaviours of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort” (Armenakis et al., 1993, pp. 681-682), though this link has merited little attention in the extant literature. Hence, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, the study aims to explore whether and how variables commonly advanced as contextual antecedents of change readiness and resistance, namely perceptions regarding change-related communications, the opportunity for participation in change planning and implementation, and the degree of affective commitment to the changing organisation, relate to readiness and resistance attitudes. Second, in line with the premise suggesting that readiness for change is a precursor to change resistance (Armenakis et al., 1993),

readiness for change will be investigated as a mediator of the relationship between contextual antecedents and resistance to change.

Resistance to change

Employee reactions to change can be positive (e.g., expressions of commitment and receptivity to the change), or negative (e.g., expressions of resistance, stress, or cynicism regarding the change) (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Moreover, it is also not entirely uncommon for employees to feel ambivalent, holding conflicting emotions and cognitions about the change (Piderit, 2000), and for the attitudes toward change to vary over time, across different stages of change implementation.

Resistance to change has been defined as “an adherence to any attitudes or behaviours that thwart organisational change goals” (Chawla & Kelloway, 2004, p. 485), and “any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to alter the status quo” (Zaltman & Duncan 1977, p. 63). Resistance behaviours can be manifested both overtly (e.g., sabotage and vocal opposition), and covertly (e.g., reducing output and withholding information) (Giangreco & Peccei, 2005; Recardo, 1995). Frequently observed negative behaviours toward change include ridicule of the change among subordinates and peer groups, boycotting change discussions, and sabotage (Lines, 2005). While overt resistance behaviours are easily recognised by change drivers, covert resistance may be more difficult to discern, and is only identified through its detrimental impact on worker attitudes, behaviours and organisational outcomes (Recardo, 1995).

Change drivers often focus on the resistant conduct stemming from negative attitudes toward an organisational transformation, disregarding the reasons underlying these behaviours or the strategic value a negative stance toward the change may bring forth (Lewis & Russ, 2012). Research investigating emotions in relation to change has consistently shown that any transformation to the status quo, from which employees draw a sense of security in work groups and set routines,

results in an experience of personal loss, especially when routines are valued and familiar (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2008; Diamond, 2003). By dismissing the impact of change on individuals’ sense of security and trust in the organisation, change drivers risk exacerbating negative attitudes, and compromising successful implementation. In addition, resistance to change is usually viewed as a force detrimental to organisational functioning, something that clashes with regular work operations, and should therefore be circumvented or eliminated (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). However, the focus on countering resistance to change may overshadow the potential opportunities it presents, particularly the identification of gaps and flaws in the proposed strategy, the addition of key steps and interventions to the original implementation plan, and the general value that discussions surrounding resistance may hold in the process of ensuring buy-in and building trust in leadership (Courpasson et al., 2012; Ford & Ford, 2010; Lines, 2004; Mabin, Forgeson, & Green, 2001; Piderit, 2000; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). In essence, individuals are likely to resist change not merely as a function of their dispositional stance toward perceived discrepancies from the status quo, but also on ethical and strategic grounds, when change is not perceived as beneficial to the organisation and its stakeholders (Agocs, 1997; Oreg 2006; Piderit, 2000). Consequently, misconstruing change resistance as obstruction to organisational functioning, innovation and survival may prove detrimental, as change managers will likely fail to collect and integrate information provided by employees at the change planning stage (Maurer, 1996).

The degree to which employees are able to offer informed input into the change strategy is largely contingent on whether organisations share information through a variety of communication media, and enable workforce participation at the planning and implementation stages (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Elving, 2005; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Lines, 2004), which allows employees to understand the scope and strategy underlying change plans, and provides opportunities to

raise issues they find concerning. There is ample consensus in the literature with respect to the role of appropriate communication and opportunity for participation and involvement in change planning in managing change resistance (Elving, 2005; Ford, Ford & D’Amelio, 2008; Frahm & Brown, 2007; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008; Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers, & Goodman, 1994; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008).

At the outset of any organisational change, uncertainty due to lack of information regarding the process and intended outcomes can be more stressful to employees than the practical aspects of the change (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991; Schweiger & Walsh, 1990). The timely and adequate provision of information regarding upcoming changes reduces those levels of anxiety. In practice, when employees receive useful and timely information about a change, they tend to evaluate the change more positively and exhibit greater willingness to cooperate (Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Whilst change communication is seen as a good way to overcome resistance, providing opportunity for participation in a change has also been commended as a way to help reduce these negative attitudes toward transformations to the work setting. Employee participation in an organisational change is thought to make the realities of the transformation clearer, while also benefiting the change managers by gaining more information regarding employee perspectives and change-oriented skills (Lines, 2004). Not only do employees feel involved and able to provide helpful input, but change drivers receive valuable information that can assist with change-related decision-making (Courpasson et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Overall, employees who feel like they have an opportunity to participate in change planning tend to exhibit greater engagement with, and often more support for the change (Jimmieson et al., 2008; Lines, 2004; Marchington et al., 1994; Van Dam et al., 2008). In view of the literature outlined, the following is hypothesized:

H1a: Perceived adequacy of the

communication received about the change will be negatively related to resistance to change.

H1b: Perceived opportunities for participation in the change will be negatively related to resistance to change.

Most of the research into antecedents of resistance to change has focused on organisational context variables, including communication and participation; with much less attention devoted to the role of attitudes toward peers and organisation at the outset of a major transformation. In particular, affective commitment, defined as a kind of bond or link that an employee has to an organisation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), or an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990), has been recognized as one of the most common attitudinal consequences of organisational change (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993; Holt et al., 2007; Judge et al., 1999; Oreg, 2006; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). However, this variable has only recently been explored as a potential antecedent of negative attitudes toward a change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei, Giangreco, & Sebastiano, 2011). When employees are affectively committed to an organisation and identify with its values and goals, they are more likely to engage in in-role and discretionary behaviours that are advantageous to an organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Even if change involves transformation or removal of valued organisational features, it is plausible that individuals exhibiting greater affective commitment to the organisation will continue to engage in positive discretionary behaviours, and express less intention to react negatively toward a proposed change. As preliminary evidence seems to indicate a negative effect of affective commitment on change resistance (Peccei et al., 2011), the following is hypothesised:

H1c: Affective organisational commitment will be negatively related to resistance to change.

Readiness for change

The concept of readiness for change has largely emerged from the fields of health psychology and medical studies (e.g. Block & Keller, 1998), and later extrapolated to organisational settings. In the latter realm, it describes employee belief in the benefits of a change to the organisation and work processes, and that these changes have a high likelihood of being successfully implemented (Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000; Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007; Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005). A current perspective of readiness for change introduces it as a multidimensional construct rooted on four components: appropriateness (employees perceive that the change is appropriate to the organisation, given its characteristics), managerial support (employees perceive that managers are supportive of the change), self-efficacy (employees perceive that they possess the skills and competencies to successfully cope with the change), and personal valence (employees believe the change will be personally beneficial) (Holt et al., 2007).

Armenakis et al. (1993) describe two necessary courses of action for creating readiness for change in an organisation. The first is to communicate a clear message of discrepancy between the status quo and the desired end change state. Employees who are change-ready hold a sound understanding of the change and why it is important to the organisation (Madsen, Miller, & John, 2005). The second course of action is to build confidence in employees that they have the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to cope with the requirements imposed by this discrepancy. Employees embrace change to the extent that they deem their skills and abilities to match those needed to succeed in new roles (Chreim, 2006), which increases their willingness to accept and participate in change planning (Cunningham et al., 2002). Overall, a sound communication strategy allays employees' fears regarding the unfavourable impact of the change on valued features of the organisation and job, educates employees about the purposes and value of the change, and, combined with consultation and developmental interventions, empowers employees and

fosters confidence in their ability to cope with new job demands (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Walinga, 2008).

With respect to participation, employees who are invited to take part in the planning and implementation of a change are more likely to understand and accept the underlying reasons and proposed objectives (Holt et al., 2007). Active participation in change may entail activities aimed at a) increasing knowledge about the change while critically analysing its guiding principles, and b) increasing competency to cope with change requirements, namely the provision of a vicarious learning experience consistent with new tasks and responsibilities (e.g., training) (Armenakis et al., 1993). In essence, participation should facilitate a sense of ownership of the change process, where employees perceive that they are integral to the change process, clearly understand its strategic purpose and benefits, and experience a sense of efficacy with respect to the new challenges posed by the change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Bouckennooghe, Devos, & Van den Broeck, 2009).

H2a: Perceived adequacy of the communication received about the change will be positively related to readiness for change (appropriateness, management support, self-efficacy and personal valence).

H2b: Perceived opportunities to participate in the change will be positively related to readiness for change (appropriateness, management support, self-efficacy and personal valence).

Research on organisational commitment as an antecedent to change reactions is scarce, but there is some evidence suggesting that affective commitment may play an important role in organisational change acceptance (Iverson, 1996; Yousef, 2000) and positive attitudes and reactions toward organisational change (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Studies to date suggests that employees report greater readiness for change when they feel committed to their organisations

(Madsen et al., 2005), though this may be contingent on the extent to which the change is seen as not imposing drastic transformations to values and features they identify with (Bennett & Durkin, 2000; Yousef, 2000). Hence, the following is hypothesized:

H2c: Affective organisational commitment will be positively related to readiness for change (appropriateness, management support, self-efficacy and personal valence).

The present study also seeks to explore the unique impact of communication, participation, and affective organisational commitment on change readiness and resistance outcomes. In addition, considering the largely under-investigated premise that readiness for change is a precursor to change-resistant behaviours (Armenakis et al., 1993), the present study examines the mediating role of readiness for change on the relationship between attitudinal and contextual factors (i.e., adequacy of communication, opportunity for participation, and affective commitment) and intent to exhibit change-resistant behaviours. Hence, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H3a: Organisational commitment and change-related communication and participation will independently predict readiness for change.

H3b: Organisational commitment and change-related communication and participation will independently predict resistance to change.

H4: The relationship between change communication, change participation and organisational commitment and resistance to change will be mediated by readiness for change dimensions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A group of 21 governmental organisations were identified as fulfilling the necessary criteria for this study, as they were about to undergo or were currently going through large-scale

change (i.e., restructuring or change in leadership). Information about these organisations was primarily obtained via media reports. The Human Resource Departments of eligible organisations received an email describing the primary aims of the study, and those that agreed to participate were asked to distribute the survey link to their employees. Most participants received study information and the survey link via email, while others were notified of the study through a message posted on their work intranet. The invitation to participate notice was sent by either the HR department or change drivers.

The first page of the survey provided information about the study objectives and conditions of participation (e.g., confidentiality). Participants indicated their consent to participate by ticking the “yes” box on the information page before proceeding to complete the questionnaire. Survey completion took approximately ten minutes.

Out of the 21 organisations approached, 6 agreed to participate. The final sample was comprised of 102 employees from 6 organisations that were about to undergo or were currently going through a large-scale change. The final sample was comprised of 29.4% males and 70.6% females. The mean age was 39.62 years (SD = 9.90) and mean tenure 5.75 years (SD = 6.00).

Measures

Affective Commitment. The 9-item version of the Affective Commitment scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) was used to assess employee levels of organisational commitment. Previous coefficient alphas for this scale ranged from .77 to .88 (Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994; Meyer & Allen, 1997). The alpha obtained in this study was .88. A sample question to measure affective commitment is, “This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me”. Responses were obtained on a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Communication Adequacy. The quality of communication about the change process was measured using a four item scale adapted by Wanberg and Banas (2000) based on a six item

scale originally developed by Miller et al. (1994). The coefficient alpha for the six item version was .86 (Miller et al., 1994). In the present study, the alpha obtained was .93. A sample question that measures information is, “I have received adequate information about the forthcoming changes”. Responses are obtained on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Participation. Participation was assessed with four items developed by Wanberg and Banas (2000), measuring the extent to which employees perceived that they had input into a change process. A sample question is, “I have some control over the changes that have been proposed”. Responses are obtained on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. It should be noted that no reliability information was provided on the scale development study by Wanberg and Banas (2000). The present study’s alpha was .80.

Readiness for change. Readiness for change was measured using Holt, Armenakis, Field, & Harris’ (2007) scale, which assessed readiness along four dimensions: appropriateness (10 items), managerial support (6 items), self-efficacy (6 items), and personal valence (6 items). A sample question for the appropriateness subscale is: “I think that the organisation will benefit from this change”; for the management support subscale: “Our senior leaders have encouraged all of us to embrace this change”; for change efficacy: “When we implement this change, I feel I can handle it with ease”; and for personal valence: “My future in this job will be limited because of this change”. Responses were obtained on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The coefficient alphas reported are as follows: appropriateness (.94), managerial support (.87), change efficacy (.82), and personal valence (.66) (Holt et al., 2007). The present study’s findings are consistent with these alpha values: appropriateness (.93), managerial support (.80), change efficacy (.94), and personal valence (.72). Although the alpha obtained for the personal valence surpasses the adequate .70 threshold (Cortina, 1993),

further item analyses were conducted to ascertain whether removal of specific items would improve the scale's reliability, but none of the items in the measure seemed to contribute to the lower coefficient.

Resistance to Change. Originally developed by Piderit (1999), the resistance to change scale adopted in this study used measured individual's behavioural intentions to resist the proposed change using 4 items. In Piderit's (1999) study, the alpha obtained for intentional reaction to change was .86. In the present study, the alpha obtained was .90. A sample question for negative intentional response subscale is: "I intend to encourage others to resist implementing this change". Responses were obtained on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to examine the dimensionality of the scales. Findings indicated that "communication" and "participation" items load on two separate factors, confirming that they measure different constructs. Regarding the affective commitment scale, a single item loaded on a second, separate factor ("I think that I could easily become attached to another organisation as I am to this one"). This item was excluded from further analyses.

With regards to readiness for change, two cross-loadings were noted. Items 7 and 8 from the "appropriateness" subscale loaded on the same factor as the items for "personal valence" subscale. Both items seemed to refer to personal outcomes of change (e.g., item 7: "This change makes my job easier"). Upon exclusion of these items, the original four factor solution was found. Finally, the four items for intentional resistance to change loaded on a single factor. One item exhibiting low communality (< .40) was excluded, increasing the coefficient alpha from .74 to .90.

Hypotheses Testing – Correlations

The descriptive statistics, coefficient alphas and intercorrelations for the variables of interest are presented in Table 1.

As illustrated, and in support of hypothesis 1a, the perceived adequacy of communication received about the change was negatively correlated with resistance

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alphas and Correlations for all Variables

	N	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Communication	100	4.06	1.53	(.93)								
2. Participation	100	3.66	1.33	.62**	(.80)							
3. Affective Commitment	98	4.49	1.24	.30**	.26**	(.88)						
4. Appropriateness	102	4.45	1.40	.48**	.36**	.24*	(.94)					
5. Management Support	100	5.01	1.37	.28**	.23*	.01	.02	(.85)				
6. Change Self-efficacy	100	4.98	1.09	.42**	.20	.23*	.58**	.06	(.86)			
7. Personally Beneficial	101	4.06	1.50	.52**	.26**	.32**	.55**	.02	.56**	(.72)		
8. Resistance to Change	98	2.29	1.13	.30**	.24*	.33**	.56**	.12	.42**	.37**	(.90)	
9. Tenure (years)	101	5.77	6.02	.26**	.11	.09	.20*	-.14	.03	.10	.16	
10. Age (years)	85	39.62	9.90	.20	.10	.04	.13	.04	-.02	.02	.05	.49**

Note: *p < .05 **p < .01 (two-tailed)

Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regressions: Dependent Variables (DV) – Appropriateness, Managerial Support, Self-Efficacy, and Personal Valence

Step	Variables	DV: Appropriateness			DV: Managerial Support			DV: Self-Efficacy			DV: Personal Valence		
		β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2	β	ΔF	ΔR^2
3	Communication	.397**	27.597**	.223									
	Participation	.074	.585	.005									
	Aff. Commitment	.103	1.168	.009									
3	Communication				.227*	6.905*	.068						
	Participation				.100	.497	.005						
	Aff. Commitment				-.084	.630	.006						
3	Communication							.455**	19.854**	.173			
	Participation							-.129	.906	.008			
	Aff. Commitment							.129	1.714	.015			
3	Communication										.530**	34.043**	.262
	Participation										-.124	.882	.006
	Aff. Commitment										.191*	4.396*	.033

Note: N=102; *= $p < .05$, **= $p < .01$.

to change ($r = -.30, p < .01$). Likewise, perceived opportunity for participation in the change was negatively and significantly correlated with resistance to change, supporting hypothesis 1b ($r = -.24, p < .05$). Finally, consistent with hypothesis 1c, affective commitment was negatively and significantly related to resistance to change ($r = -.33, p < .01$).

Regarding the second set of hypotheses, proposing positive relationships between change communication, participation, and affective commitment, the perceived adequacy of communication received about a change was positively and significantly related with perceived appropriateness of the change to the organisation ($r = .48, p < .01$), perceived managerial support for the change ($r = .28, p < .01$), self-efficacy regarding the change ($r = .42, p < .01$), and positive personal valence of the change ($r = .52, p < .01$). In addition, perceived opportunity for participation in the change was significantly and positively related with appropriateness of the change ($r = .36, p < .01$), perceived management support ($r = .23, p < .05$), and positive personal valence of the change ($r = .26, p < .01$). Finally, affective commitment was significantly positively related with perceptions of change as appropriate to the organisation ($r = .24, p < .05$), change self-efficacy ($r = .23, p < .05$), and positive personal valence of the change ($r = .32, p < .01$). Overall, these findings lend support to hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c. However, it should be noted that opportunity for participation in the change process was not significantly related with change self-efficacy. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between perceptions of managerial support for change and affective commitment to the organisation.

Hypotheses Testing – Hierarchical Multiple Regressions

The third set of hypotheses advanced proposed that affective commitment and change-related communication and participation would independently predict readiness for change dimensions (hypothesis 3a) and resistance to change (hypothesis 3b). In order to test these claims, a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted. Table 2 illustrates the findings obtained for the

multiple regression analyses conducted for the readiness for change dimensions (hypothesis 3a).

Perceptions regarding the appropriateness of change-related communications emerged as the main predictor of perceptions of appropriateness of the change to the organisation ($\Delta F = 27.59, p < .01$), perceptions of managerial support for that change ($\Delta F = 6.90, p < .05$), self-efficacy regarding the change ($\Delta F = 19.85, p < .01$), and feelings of positive personal valence toward the change ($\Delta F = 34.04, p < .01$), explaining between 7% and 26% of the variance in these readiness for change dimensions. In particular, employees deeming change-related communications to be informative and delivered in a timely manner exhibited significantly more positive perceptions of the appropriateness of change to the organisation ($\beta = .40, p < .01$), of managerial support for and involvement with the change ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), of their self-efficacy or ability to cope with change requirements ($\beta = .46, p < .01$), and of personal valence of the change ($\beta = .53, p < .01$). Despite the positive, significant relationships found between opportunity to participate in the change and readiness for change dimensions, the multiple regressions failed to identify any significant impact of participation on readiness for change, suggesting that participation effects may have been subsumed in the quality of change-related communications. Finally, affective commitment only emerged as a significant, albeit modest, predictor of feelings of personal valence regarding the change ($\Delta F = 4.40, p < .05$), explaining an additional 3.3% of the variance in this dependent variable

when communication and participation were considered. In essence, individuals reporting greater affective commitment to their organisations also perceived the upcoming or current changes to hold positive personal valence ($\beta = .19, p < .05$). Overall, adequacy of change-related communications, and to some extent affective commitment to the organisation, independently predicted readiness for change dimensions, conferring partial support to hypothesis 3a.

Table 3 depicts findings relative to hypothesis 3b, suggesting that communication, participation and affective commitment to the organisation would independently predict intentions to resist the change.

As illustrated in the table, the adequacy of change-related communication emerged as a significant predictor of intent to resist the change ($\Delta F = 9.40, p < .01$), explaining 9% of the variance. Participants who reported that the change-related communications delivered by the organisation were appropriate expressed lower intent to resist the change ($\beta = -.30, p < .01$). Although the addition of the variable “opportunity to participate” did not significantly add to the prediction of change resistance, the inclusion of affective commitment in the model contributed to the prediction of this dependent variable ($\Delta F = 6.46, p < .01$), and explained an additional 6% of the variance. Similar to the findings obtained for communication, participants exhibiting higher levels of affective commitment to their respective organisations also reported lower intent to resist the change ($\beta = -.26, p < .01$). Notably, the addition

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Resistance to Change

Step	Variables	β	ΔF	ΔR^2
3				
	Communication	-.189	9.398**	.090
	Participation	-.059	.534	.005
	Aff. Commitment	-.255**	6.463**	.059

Note: N=102; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

of affective commitment to the model including communication and participation rendered the contribution of communication to change resistance non-significant ($\beta = -.19, ns$). These findings provide partial support for hypothesis 3b and will be further elaborated on in the discussion section.

Hypotheses Testing – Mediation Analysis

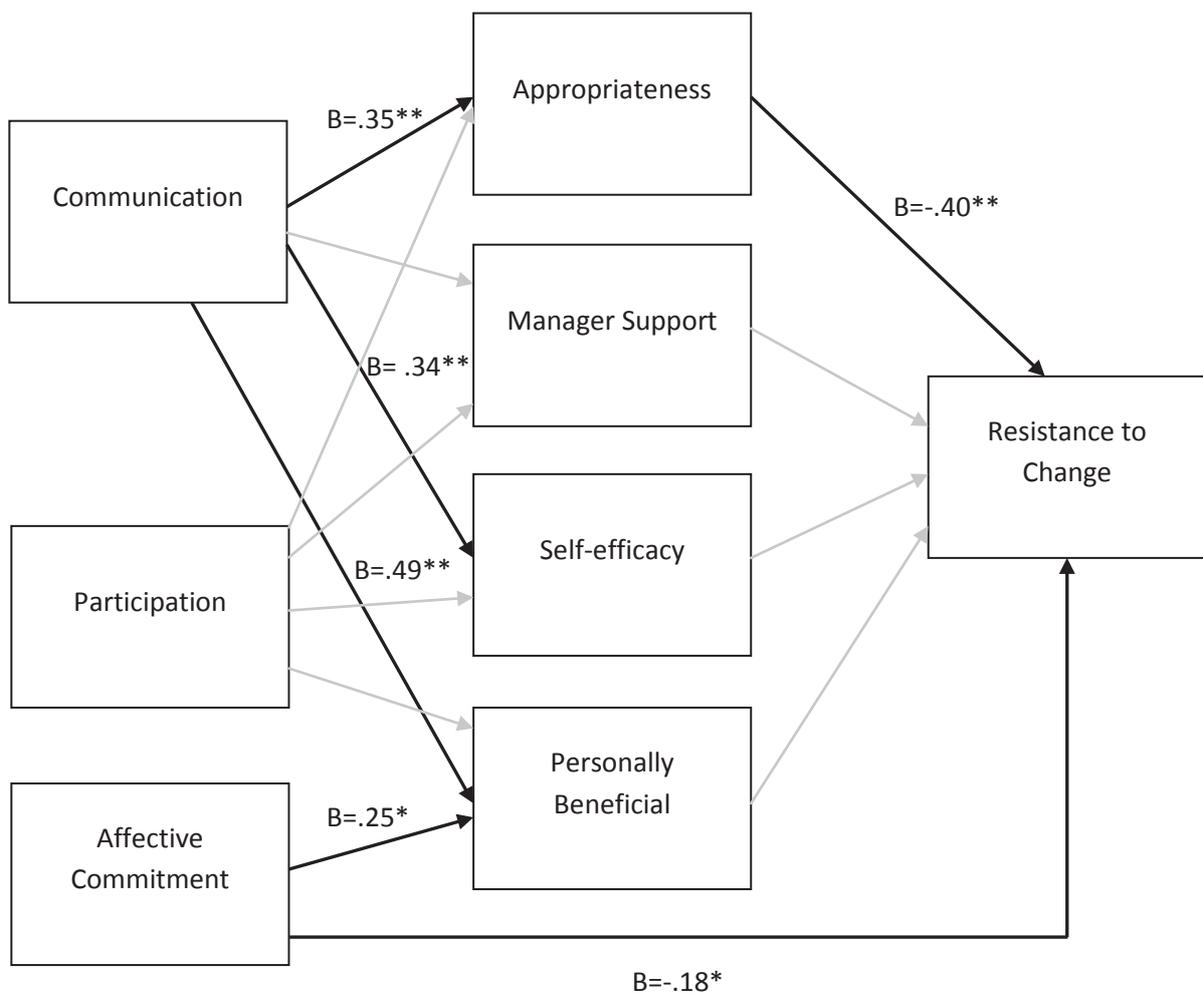
The final hypothesis proposed that the relationship between adequacy of change-related communication, opportunity for participation in the change, affective commitment, and resistance to change would be mediated by readiness for change dimensions

(i.e., appropriateness, management support, self-efficacy and personal valence). To test this hypothesis, the Mediation Macro developed by Hayes and Preacher (2011) was used, which involved the simultaneous inclusion of all predictors, mediators and the outcome variable in the same model.

Figure 1 shows the results of the mediation analysis. Consistent with the results obtained in previous analyses, participation did not emerge as a significant predictor of readiness and resistance to change variables, and communication was the main predictor of readiness for change, significantly related to perceived appropriateness to the organisation ($B = .35, p < .01$),

self-efficacy regarding the change ($B = .34, p < .01$), and perceived positive valence of the change to the respondent ($B = .49, p < .01$). It should be noted that the significant relationship between adequacy of change-related communication and perceptions of managerial support for change found in the previous hierarchical regression analysis was not detected in the mediation model. Affective commitment also emerged as a significant predictor of personal valence regarding the change ($B = .25, p < .05$), and, consistent with previous analyses, as a predictor of intent to resist the change ($B = -.18, p < .05$). With respect to mediation findings, the readiness for

Figure 1. Results of mediation analysis (faded arrows indicate non-significant paths).



* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

change dimension “appropriateness” emerged as the sole mediator of the relationship between the hypothesized predictors and resistance to change. The results displayed a significant indirect effect between communication and resistance to change, where the relationship between communication and intentional resistance to change dropped in direct path ($B = -.14, p < .01$) when the readiness dimension of appropriateness was controlled for. In practice, adequacy of communication impacted resistance to change through perceived appropriateness of the change to the organisation.

Discussion

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The present study sought to investigate the unique relationships between perceptions of change-related communication, opportunity for participation in change planning and implementation, and degree of affective commitment to the changing organisation; and change readiness and resistance. Furthermore, the study aimed at exploring the largely under-researched role of readiness for change as a mediator of the relationship between the contextual antecedents outlined and resistance to change.

In accordance with previous research, the perceived adequacy of change-related communication was associated with participants’ account of readiness for change and lower intentions of reacting negatively to the change (Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Even though the analyses conducted in the present study confer strong support for the role of communication on change readiness, results from the mediation analysis suggest that communication may not directly impact intent to engage in change-resistant behaviours. In essence, the only linkage identified between communication and intent to resist change was mediated by perceptions of change as appropriate to the organisation. From a practical standpoint, it appears that change-related communications that fail to convey the aims and projected outcomes of the change in a timely fashion will not effectively mitigate resistance attitudes.

Although participation in change planning and implementation processes has been extolled for its positive impact on change readiness and potential to decrease resistance (Jimmieson et al., 2008; Lines, 2004; Marchington et al., 1994; Van Dam et al., 2008), the present study found only contingent support for these relationships. In practice, while the correlation analyses uncovered significant relationships between participation and change readiness and resistance, findings from hierarchical multiple regressions showed that these relationships were rendered non-significant when perceptions of change communication adequacy were considered. This finding holds important implications suggesting that, in specific contexts, timely and comprehensive communications regarding a change process may serve as a proxy for participation in change-related decisions at the outset of organisational transformations. Quantitative and qualitative information drawn from the questionnaire indicates that the changes in the organisations surveyed in this study (e.g., restructuring) were mainly communicated and implemented in a top-down fashion, allowing little opportunity for participation across all organisational levels. Moreover, the vast majority of respondents were either middle-managers or did not hold a managerial position, and were not identified as change drivers. The occupational characteristics of the sample surveyed could also explain the weak relationship between change-related communications and perceived managerial support for the change, in that non-managers may not be privy to senior managers’ attitudes toward the change. Under these circumstances, adequate communication regarding the change may have proven sufficient to elicit change readiness at the outset of the transformation, and to mitigate the intent to display change-resistant behaviours.

It was also expected that affective commitment would be positively related to readiness for change dimensions and negatively related to change resistance. The findings obtained from the regression analyses indicate that affective commitment may play an important role as antecedent to both

change readiness and change resistance. In fact, affective commitment emerged as a significant predictor of resistance to change, above and beyond the influence of change communication adequacy, highlighting the importance of employee emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation as a factor contributing to intent to display positive, change-oriented behaviours for the benefit of the company. This finding is aligned with recent research underscoring the role of affective commitment as an antecedent of resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei et al., 2011).

Affective commitment was also greater among employees who viewed the change as holding positive personal valence, beyond the impact of adequate communication. Individuals experiencing greater affective commitment to their respective organisations may be more likely to trust that transformations endorsed by the organisation will entail benefits to all stakeholders.

Overall, the results from this study suggest that: a) the adequacy of change-related communication is the main predictor across readiness for change dimensions, and in some segments of the workforce (i.e., non-leaders) adequate and timely communication may compensate for lack of participation in decision-making at the outset of an organisational transformation; b) perceived appropriateness of the change to an organisation mediates the relationship between communication adequacy and intent to engage in change-resistant behaviours; and c) affective commitment to the organisation elicits positive perceptions of change valence, even if it does not influence other change readiness factors, and is directly related to lower intent to resist the change.

Research limitations

Notwithstanding its contributions to advancing research across several under-investigated topics in organisational change, this study holds a number of limitations that merit reflection. The principal limitations of the study pertain to the cross-sectional nature of the study and the self-report measures employed, restricting the dependability of causal inferences made herein, particularly with respect to the mediation analysis.

Despite this, it should be noted that findings from the factor analyses conducted suggest that common-method variance did not have a substantial influence in the results of this study.

Another limitation is the recruitment strategy employed in this study, allowing employees from multiple organisations to state their attitudes toward upcoming and ongoing change processes. Hence, the effect of organisation-specific factors (e.g., climate, change leadership) on readiness and resistance attitudes could not be ascertained and only individual-level inferences may be drawn from this study.

Finally, a larger sample size might have enabled the identification of a greater number of significant effects. The sample of 102 participants from six different organisations was likely insufficient to uncover significant results pertaining to some of the hypothesised relationships, particularly in regression analyses. Further research employing larger samples is needed to establish the mediating role of readiness for change on the relationship between individual and contextual antecedents, and change resistance.

Implications for Research and Practice

Findings from this study stress the influence of sound communication strategies on organisational change attitudes, particularly readiness for change. These results suggest that future research would benefit from exploring elements of communication (e.g., timeliness, media, and sources) that contribute to its criticality to organisational change attitudes. While previous studies have examined the importance of communication as a way to reduce uncertainty regarding change (Allen et al., 2007), in-depth investigation of communication elements used to convey change messages would likely further our understanding of how the message framing and media impact the manner in which employees conceptualise change. Moreover, the value inherent in these elements of communication should be examined at different stages of change – planning, early communication, implementation, and evaluation – as it is plausible that the amount and

quality of information required will differ throughout the change process. This knowledge would benefit the development and implementation of communication strategies in changing organisations.

While the current study has examined the impact of formal organisational communications in relation to readiness and resistance attitudes, past research has underscored the role of informal communications, which can develop from exchanges among co-workers and supervisor-supervisee dyads or groups across a variety of media (Armenakis et al., 1993; Lok & Crawford, 1999). Employees gauge reactions and informal communications from each other to determine the meaning behind formal change messages communicated by the organisation. Furthermore, members of specific organisational networks, in virtue of their position and status, may have a better grasp of the change plan and role expectations than other employees (Miller et al., 1994), which explains the varying attitudes toward change along different social networks (Madsen et al., 2005). Hence, future research should expand the scope of communication variables by investigating the impact of informal change-related communications on experienced readiness and resistance.

Future research should also address change participation in relation to formal position in the organisation (e.g., managerial role) and individual expectations of involvement. It is plausible that the relationship between participation, readiness and resistance will be contingent on the extent to which individuals are involved in the change from its inception, as it is typically the case for change drivers, and on the degree to which individuals expect to have an opportunity to be consulted or actively participate in the development of the change strategy, given their position in the organisation and its culture. Regarding the latter, it is reasonable to assume that individuals employed in an organisation characterised by a participative culture will hold higher expectations of involvement in decision-making. Failure to involve employees holding these expectations will have a more detrimental impact on readiness and resistance attitudes than failure to

elicit participation from individuals with low or no expectations of decision-making input. The interplay of culture, expectations, and change attitudes should be further explored in subsequent research.

Finally, the results of this study substantiate the importance of investigating affective commitment as an antecedent of change readiness and resistance, particularly given the dynamic and continuous nature of organisational transformations. The present study has examined the relationship between current affective commitment and readiness and resistance attitudes in episodic, reactive changes, wherein transformations were driven by external pressures in otherwise stable organisations (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In this instance, the relationship between organisational commitment and change attitudes may be weakened by perceived threats to a valued status quo. However, as modern organisations are shifting to a model of proactive change, fostering a climate of ongoing transformation (Ford & Ford, 1994; Orlikowski, 1996; Weick & Quinn, 1999), this may bring forth stronger linkages between affective commitment to the organisation and positive attitudes toward the change, including intent to engage in prescribed and discretionary behaviours consistent with the change strategy.

References

- Agocs, C. (1997). Institutionalized resistance to organizational change: Denial, inaction and repression. *Journal of Business Ethics, 16*(9), 917-931.
- Allen, J., Jimmieson, N. L., Bordia, P., & Irmer, B. E. (2007). Uncertainty during organizational change: Managing perceptions through communication. *Journal of Change Management, 7*(2), 187-210.
- Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 63*(1), 1-18.
- Armenakis, A. A., & Bedeian, A. G. (1999). Organizational change: A review of theory and research in the 1990s. *Journal of Management, 25*(3), 293-315.
- Armenakis, A. A., & Harris, S. G. (2002).

- Crafting a change message to create transformational readiness. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15(2), 169-183.
- Armenakis, A. A., Harris, S. G., & Mossholder, K. W. (1993). Creating readiness for organizational change. *Human Relations*, 46(6), 681.
- Bennett, H., & Durkin, M. (2000). The effects of organisational change on employee psychological attachment: An exploratory study. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 15(2), 126-146.
- Block, L. G., & Keller, P. A. (1998). Beyond protection motivation: An integrative theory of health appeals. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 28(17), 1584-1608.
- Bouckennooghe, D., Devos, G., & Van den Broeck, H. (2009). Organizational change Questionnaire—Climate of change, processes, and readiness: Development of a new instrument. *The Journal of Psychology*, 143(6), 559-599.
- Burke, W. W., Lake, D. G., & Paine, J. W. (2008). *Organization change: a comprehensive reader*. Jossey-Bass.
- By, R. T. (2005). Organisational change management: A critical review. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(4), 369-380.
- Cartwright, S., & Cooper, C. L. (1992). *Mergers and acquisitions: The human factor*. Butterworth-Heinemann Oxford.
- Cartwright, S., & Cooper, C. L. (1993). The psychological impact of merger and acquisition on the individual: A study of building society managers. *Human Relations*, 46(3), 327-347.
- Chawla, A., & Kelloway, E. K. (2004). Predicting openness and commitment to change. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(5/6), 485.
- Chreim, S. (2006). Managerial frames and institutional discourses of change: employee appropriation and resistance. *Organization Studies*, 27(9), 1261-1287.
- Coch, L., & French, J. (1948). Overcoming resistance to change. *Human Relations*, 1, 512-532.
- Cortina, J. (1993). What is coefficient alpha? An examination of theory and applications. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(1), 98-104.
- Courpasson, D., Dany, F., & Clegg, S. (2012). Resisters at work: Generating productive resistance in the workplace. *Organization Science*, 23(3), 801-819.
- Cunningham, C. E., Woodward, C. A., Shannon, H. S., MacIntosh, J., Lendrum, B., Rosenbloom, D., et al. (2002). Readiness for organizational change: A longitudinal study of workplace, psychological and behavioural correlates. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 75(4), 377-392.
- del Val, M. P., & Fuentes, C. M. (2003). Resistance to change: a literature review and empirical study. *Management Decision*, 41(2), 148-155.
- Diamond, M. A. (2003). Organizational Immersion and Diagnosis: The Work of Harry Levinson. *Organisational and Social Dynamics: An International Journal of Psychoanalytic, Systemic and Group Relations Perspectives*, 3(1), 1-18.
- Downs, A. (2012). "Resistance to change as a positive influencer: An introduction". *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25 (6), 784
- Eby, L. T., Adams, D. M., Russell, J. E. A., & Gaby, S. H. (2000). Perceptions of organizational readiness for change: Factors related to employees' reactions to the implementation of team-based selling. *Human Relations*, 53(3), 419-442.
- Elving, W. J. L. (2005). The role of communication in organisational change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10(2), 129-138.
- Erwin, D. G., & Garman, A. N. (2010). Resistance to organizational change: linking research and practice. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 31(1), 39-56.
- Ford, J., & Ford, L. W. (2010). Stop Blaming Resistance to Change and Start Using It. *Organizational Dynamics*, 39(1), 24-36.
- Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (1994). Logics of identity, contradiction, and attraction in change. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(4), 756-785.
- Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & D'Amelio, A. (2008). Resistance to change: The rest of the story. *The Academy of Management Review* (AMR), 33(2), 362-377.
- Frahm, J., & Brown, K. (2007). First steps: linking change communication to change receptivity. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(3), 370-387.
- George, J. M., & Jones, G. R. (2001). Towards a process model of individual change in organizations. *Human Relations*, 54(4), 419-444.
- Giangreco, A., & Peccei, R. (2005). The nature and antecedents of middle manager resistance to change: Evidence from an Italian context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(10), 1812-1829.
- Goodman, J., & Truss, C. (2004). The medium and the message: communicating effectively during a major change initiative. *Journal of Change Management*, 4(3), 217-228.
- Hackett, R. D., Bycio, P., & Hausdorf, P. A. (1994). Further assessments of Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of organizational commitment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(1), 15-23.
- Hayes, A. F., & Preacher, K. J. (2011). Indirect and direct effects of a multicategorical causal agent in statistical mediation analysis. *Manuscript under review*.
- Holt, D. T., Armenakis, A. A., Feild, H. S., & Harris, S. G. (2007). Readiness for organizational change. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 43(2), 232.
- Isern, J., & Pung, C. (2007). Harnessing energy to drive organizational change. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 1, 1-4.
- Iverson, R. D. (1996). Employee acceptance of organizational change: the role of organizational commitment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(1), 122-149.
- Jimmieson, N. L., Peach, M., & White, K. M. (2008). Utilizing the theory of planned behavior to inform change management. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 44(2), 237.
- Jones, R. A., Jimmieson, N. L., & Griffiths, A. (2005). The impact of organizational culture and reshaping capabilities on change implementation success: The mediating role of readiness for change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(2), 361-386.
- Judge, T. A., Thoresen, C. J., Pucik, V., & Welbourne, T. M. (1999). Managerial coping with organizational change: A dispositional perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(1), 107.
- Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Harvard Business Press.
- Lau, C. M., & Woodman, R. W. (1995). Understanding organizational change: A schematic perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), 537-554.
- Levinson, H. (1972). Easing the pain of personal loss. *Harvard Business Review*, 50, 80-82.
- Lewis, L., & Russ, T. (2012). Soliciting and using input during organizational change initiatives: What are the practitioners doing? *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26(2), 267-294.
- Lines, R. (2004). Influence of participation in strategic change: resistance, organizational commitment and change goal achievement. *Journal of Change Management*, 4(3), 193-215.
- Lines, R. (2005). The structure and function of attitudes toward organizational change. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4(1), 8.
- Lok, P., & Crawford, J. (1999). The relationship between commitment and organizational culture, subculture,

- leadership style and job satisfaction in organizational change and development. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 20(7), 365-374.
- Mabin, V. J., Forgeson, S., & Green, L. (2001). Harnessing resistance: using the theory of constraints to assist change management. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 25(2/3/4), 168-191.
- Madsen, S. R., Miller, D., & John, C. R. (2005). Readiness for organizational change: Do organizational commitment and social relationships in the workplace make a difference? *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 16(2), 213-234.
- Marchington, M., Wilkinson, A., Ackers, P., & Goodman, J. (1994). Understanding the meaning of participation: views from the workplace. *Human Relations*, 47(8), 867-894.
- Martin, A. J., Jones, E. S., & Callan, V. J. (2006). Status differences in employee adjustment during organizational change. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(2), 145-162.
- Mathieu, J. E., & Zajac, D. M. (1990). A review and meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organizational commitment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 171.
- Maurer, R. (1996). Using resistance to build support for change. *Journal for Quality and Participation*, 56-63.
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 709-734.
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1997). *Commitment in the workplace: Theory, research, and application*: Sage publications, inc.
- Meyer, J. P., Stanley, D. J., Herscovitch, L., & Topolnytsky, L. (2002). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: A meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates, and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 61(1), 20-52.
- Miller, V. D., Johnson, J. R., & Grau, J. (1994). Antecedents to willingness to participate in a planned organizational change. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 22(1), 59-80.
- Oreg, S. (2006). Personality, context, and resistance to organizational change. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 15(1), 73.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (1996). Improvising organizational transformation over time: A situated change perspective. *Information Systems Research*, 7, 63-92.
- Peccei, R., Giangreco, A., & Sebastiano, A. (2011). The role of organisational commitment in the analysis of resistance to change: Co-predictor and moderator effects. *Personnel Review*, 40(2), 185-204.
- Pfeffer, J. (1994). *Competitive Advantage through People - Unleashing the Power of the Workforce*: Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Piderit, K. (1999). *Navigating relationships with coworkers: Understanding employees' attitudes toward an organizational change*: University of Michigan.
- Piderit, S. K. (2000). Rethinking resistance and recognizing ambivalence: A multidimensional view of attitudes toward an organizational change. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), 783-794.
- Recardo, R. J. (1995). Overcoming resistance to change. *National Productivity Review*, 14(2), 5-12.
- Reger, R. K., Mullane, J. V., Gustafson, L. T., DeMarie, S. M., Berry, J., & Grillo, C. (1994). Creating Earthquakes to Change Organizational Mindsets [and Executive Commentary]. *The Academy of Management Executive* (1993-2005), 31-46.
- Schweiger, D. M., & Denisi, A. S. (1991). Communication with employees following a merger: A longitudinal field experiment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 110-135.
- Schweiger, D. M., & Walsh, J. P. (1990). Mergers and acquisitions: An interdisciplinary view. *Research in personnel and human resources management*, 8, 41-107.
- Spiker, B. K., & Lesser, E. (1995). Change Management: We Have Met the Enemy.... *Journal of Business Strategy*, 16(2), 17-21.
- Van Dam, K., Oreg, S., & Schyns, B. (2008). Daily work contexts and resistance to organisational change: The role of leader-member exchange, development climate, and change process characteristics. *Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 313-334.
- Waddell, D., & Sohal, A. S. (1998). Resistance: a constructive tool for change management. *Management Decision*, 36(8), 543-548.
- Waldersee, R., & Griffiths, A. (1996). *The changing face of organisational change*: Center for Corporate Change, Australian Graduate School of Management University of New South Wales.
- Walinga, J. (2008). Toward a Theory of Change Readiness. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 44(3), 315.
- Wanberg, C. R., & Banas, J. T. (2000). Predictors and outcomes of openness to changes in a reorganizing workplace. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), 132-132.
- Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1), 361-386.
- Yousef, D. A. (2000). Organizational commitment and job satisfaction as predictors of attitudes toward organizational change in a non-western setting. *Personnel Review*, 29(5), 567-592.
- Zaltman, G., & Duncan, R. (1977). *Strategies for planned change*: Wiley New York.

Corresponding Author:

Joana R.C. Kuntz
Department of Psychology
University of Canterbury
20 Kirkwood Ave,
Ilam
Christchurch 8041
New Zealand
joana.kuntz@canterbury.ac.nz

© This material is copyright to the New Zealand Psychological Society. Publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the Society.