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Exploring the implications of vision, appropriateness, and execution of organizational change

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper was to examine the interaction effects of managers' perceptions of the supporting vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution of a major organizational change on their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and role ambiguity.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from upper and middle-level managers of a *Fortune* 500 US manufacturer and maker of consumer goods involved in a large organizational change initiative. A survey was completed by 217 managers, for a response rate of 89 percent. Change attitudes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, role ambiguity, and control variables were all assessed.

Findings – A three-way interaction between change vision clarity, change appropriateness, and change execution was found to predict managers' job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and role ambiguity.

Research limitations/implications – The study relied on self-reports collected at one point in time, allowing for the possibility of common method bias. The complex, nonlinear relationships indicate that method bias cannot fully account for the reported relationships.

Practical implications – Study results illustrate that the individual experience of major change is multifaceted and that simultaneously considering the combined effects of individual's change attitudes including readiness (in the form of believing a change is needed and appropriate) and the perceived effectiveness of the change execution on key job-related outcomes can help practitioners understand more fully the implications of organizational change.

Originality/value – The findings lend support to the notion that individual's sentiments concerning organizational change are interactive and should not be ignored.

Keywords Organizational change, Job satisfaction, Corporate identity, Employee turnover, Role ambiguity

Paper type Research paper

Organizations are being challenged to retain their competitive edge more than ever before. In order to compete, organizations have been forced to implement large-scale change and quality improvement initiatives, which include reengineering, rightsizing, mergers, job relocations, and management restructuring (Kets de Vries and Balazs, 1997). As a part of such change initiatives, it is common for the company's executives

to persuasively argue that specific changes are needed, even vital, if the company wishes to survive. And yet, enthusiasm is often in short supply from those lower in the management ranks (Strebel, 1996). In part, the lack of enthusiasm can be explained if one considers the growing body of literature that suggests organizational change places demands not only on the organization, but also on the individual employees, both physiologically and psychologically (Grunberg *et al.*, 2001; Pfeffer, 1998; Sverke *et al.*, 2002).

Interestingly, individuals respond differently to organizational change (e.g. Barger and Kirby, 1995). For some, change may bring increased satisfaction as they perceive the change as a chance to grow and learn; others, however, may react negatively to the smallest change. In their review of the change literature, Armenakis and Bedeian (1999, p. 307) noted that “as open systems, organizations depend on human direction to succeed”, and called for a more person-centered investigation of organizational change. In spite of the recent empirical studies that have suggested individuals are an appropriate level of analysis when exploring organizational change (e.g. Judge *et al.*, 1999; Oreg, 2003), an implicit assumption in much of the organizational change literature is that change initiatives either succeed or fail uniformly across the organization (Wanberg and Banas, 2000) and therefore the organization is deemed the appropriate unit of analysis. In line with Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), we contend that organizational change begins with the individual, as resistance or support are ultimately individual decisions and behaviors.

Armenakis and colleagues (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993, 1999, Holt *et al.*, 2006) and, more recently Bernerth (2004), have asserted the primary mechanism for creating individual change readiness, acceptance, and institutionalization is the “change message” as perceived from direct communication and symbolic evidence as the change unfolds. Armenakis *et al.* (1999) argued, for example, that the message creates core sentiments in individuals that they use to guide decisions about their level of support for the change initiative.

Although scholars have stressed the importance of employees’ beliefs with regard to organizational changes (Armenakis *et al.*, 1999; Kotter, 1995), few empirical studies have investigated the linkage between individuals’ perceptions of the organizational change and job-relevant outcomes (for an exception see Wanberg and Banas, 2000). The present study examined the extent to which a sample of upper and middle-level managers’ sentiments regarding an organizational change were associated with four relevant affective outcomes – their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and role ambiguity. Moreover, we focused on sentiments regarding three aspects of the change: the clarity of the vision driving change, the appropriateness of the change, and the quality of the change execution. Finally, our review of the literature has revealed that past research has focused primarily on simple relationships between change perceptions and outcomes, thereby overlooking more complex models. It is likely, however, that individual perceptions of organizational change interact in their influence on employee affective outcomes. Therefore, we investigated the interaction effects of the three change process perceptions on the outcomes. To the extent relationships are found between management’s change sentiments and outcomes, the findings might help explain why some change efforts fail while others are accepted and even championed (see Lau and Woodman, 1995).

Conceptual framework and study hypotheses

Many models of how to successfully initiate organizational change have been proposed. In their review of change management literature, Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) suggested that approaches to change have two main foci: change content and change process. In the present study, we focus on two content issues – the clarity of the vision supporting the change and the appropriateness of the change. We also look at an overall assessment of the change process, a rating of the quality of the change execution.

Change sentiments

Vision clarity. One of the most consistent features across diverse change models is the ascribed importance of vision and its effective communication (e.g. Kotter, 1995; McAdam, 2003). One of the key sentiments to creating change readiness and supporting institutionalization according to Armenakis *et al.* (1993, 1999) is the sense that change is needed. Vision provides much of the justification for such a sentiment. Nutt and Backoff (1997) similarly argued that vision is the trigger for radical, transformational change. Creating a vision and communicating it account for two of Kotter's (1995) eight key steps in organizational transformation. For instance, Kotter argued that the content of the vision must be sensible and clearly understood by organizational members; content without clarity is ineffective. Likewise, Collins and Porras (1996, p. 74) advised leaders that they "must translate the vision from words to pictures with a vivid description of what it will be like to achieve your goal". We therefore expect that changes that are supported by a clear vision will encourage positive affective outcomes.

Appropriateness. A second key change sentiment emphasized by Armenakis *et al.* (1993, 1999) is the sense that the change is appropriate – is the specific change being introduced an appropriate reaction to the need for change and vision? Appropriateness addresses the possibility that individuals may embrace a vision but not agree that a specific change is appropriate to support that vision. If the proposed change is viewed by employees as the incorrect approach to pursuing the vision, change targets may not be willing to "buy-in" to the change or attempt to make it work. Appropriateness is very similar in nature to the transformational change issue tension of "several plans for change" identified by Nutt and Backoff (1997). This issue tension highlights the possibility of multiple changes in support of a particular vision. Organizational members are going to feel much better about changes being implemented when they feel those changes are appropriate.

Execution. Whereas sentiments of vision clarity and appropriateness reflect what individuals think about the change itself, individual's perception of change execution reflects the actual process of introduction and unfolding of the changes within the organization. Therefore, as an evaluative sentiment, change execution reflects an individual's personal experiences with the implementation of the organizational change. Five of Kotter's (1995) eight steps for effective transformation deal with change implementation: form a powerful guiding coalition, empower others to implement change, create opportunities for short-term "wins" and incremental changes, consolidate improvements, and institutionalize new behaviors. Thus, a change that is viewed positively, from a content perspective, can still be perceived by the change target as being executed well or poorly. In general, we expect effective change

implementation to be viewed as a positive. However, as discussed below, effective change implementation may be viewed negatively if the change itself is deemed inappropriate.

Hypotheses

The change literature indicates that negative attitudes towards change can have serious, negative consequences for organizations. For example, Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) found that employees involved in a merger reported decreased levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and increased intentions to quit their organization. Similarly, in Wanberg and Banas' (2000) study, low levels of change acceptance were associated with decreased job satisfaction and stronger intentions to quit. Role ambiguity is also likely to increase when individuals perceive organizational change as not needed, inappropriate, or poorly executed (e.g. Armenakis *et al.*, 1993).

- H1.* Individual's perceptions of vision clarity, change appropriateness, and execution effectiveness will positively correlate with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and negatively correlate with turnover intentions and role ambiguity.

Past research has indeed enhanced our understanding of how organizational change affects individuals' attitudes; however, various organizational change researchers have suggested that an even better understanding may result from the joint consideration of individual's change attitudes on job outcomes (e.g. Armenakis *et al.*, 1999; Hultman, 1998). Bernerth (2004) has argued, for example, that change targets must perceive both the need for and the appropriateness of the change. Taken collectively, we expect the change attitudes of vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution effectiveness to interact in such a way that they counterbalance one another, even acting in a multiplicative way.

Despite calls to examine more complex combinations of change attitudes (e.g. Armenakis *et al.*, 1999), we are unaware of any published study to guide our hypothesis development. Based on past theoretical reviews (e.g. Armenakis *et al.*, 1999; Bernerth, 2004), however, we can speculate on the form of the interactions. First, the most positive outcomes are likely to emerge from change that is supported by a clear vision, appropriate for the organization, and well executed. Other combinations of the three sentiments are more difficult to predict. For example, what are the affective implications for individuals who believe that change is not supported by vision and is inappropriate but was executed masterfully? Effective execution in such an instance is likely to be viewed negatively. On the other hand, if it is perceived that a change lacks vision clarity but is nonetheless appropriated and well executed, the reaction is likely to be generally positive. Finally, what of changes that are not supported by a vision but viewed as appropriate or viewed as being supported by vision but not appropriate? Given these uncertainties, the following hypothesis predicts interaction effects but does not specify their form:

- H2.* Perceptions of change vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution effectiveness will interact to explain incremental variance in individual's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and role ambiguity.

Method

Research setting and change context

The data for the current study were collected as part of a study examining the transformation efforts of a *Fortune* 500 US manufacturer and marketer of consumer goods. Six months prior to the study, the chief executive officer (CEO) retired (age-mandated) and a new CEO was appointed. In response to growing competition, the new CEO continued the process begun by his predecessor to transform the organization into a more dynamic, inventive, and global organization. Although the organization had made gradual progress in response to marketplace changes, the new CEO also initiated four significant and integrated strategic changes to help support the organization's transformation.

The changes can be described as "second-order" or "gamma" changes involving major alterations of an established framework or operating method. The four change initiatives included a corporate-wide restructuring toward a more decentralized business unit approach, an analysis of the value of jobs followed by a 10 percent reduction in the salaried workforce, and modifications to the compensation system to reward individual and group-based performance. At the time of this study, each change was at a different stage in terms of implementation. The restructuring, job analysis, and salaried workforce reduction had already occurred, yet all the ramifications had yet to be dealt with and there was still a lot of uncertainty with regard to how to operate in the new, smaller organization. The new compensation system was in the initial phase of introduction.

Participants

Because of the nature of the corporate transformation, the sample was drawn from the upper echelons in an attempt to survey all corporate executives plus upper and middle-level managers representing all major locations and functions. Hence, corporate-level executives from six corporate-level functional areas, executives and management from four semiautonomous business units and 13 manufacturing plants, and a large technological support group were surveyed. In total, 245 surveys were circulated using the corporate mail system and were returned directly to one of the researcher's university address in the provided envelope. Respondent confidentiality was guaranteed and participation was completely voluntary. Of 245 distributed surveys, 217 respondents completed and returned the survey for a response rate of 88.6 percent. The high response rate was most likely the result of several factors beyond the promise of confidentiality. The CEO provided strong encouragement for participation in the form of a letter attached to the survey and a follow-up memorandum. The CEO also indicated that the data would be used to evaluate the change process. Finally, two years previously, 155 of the participants had participated in a well-received action-research project conducted by one of the authors.

The final sample consisted of officers (18.6 percent), directors (49.6 percent), and managers (31.9 percent). The average age of respondents was 46.7 years ($SD = 6.9$), with an average organizational tenure of 19.8 years ($SD = 9.0$). Time spent in their current position ranged from one month to 22 years ($M = 2.6$ years; $SD = 3.38$ years). Although respondent sex was not collected, consistent with the population in this organization, the sample was overwhelmingly male.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to all measures using a five-point response format (1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”). Scale scores were computed by averaging the items for each individual measure.

Change sentiment measures. Respondents were asked to respond to an identical set of questions for each of the four major changes: restructuring, job value analysis, downsizing, and new compensation plan. Measures of vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution were taken from these questions. Rather than focus on sentiments for each change, the sentiments were averaged across the four changes. Vision clarity consisted of eight items, two for each of the four change activities: “The vision guiding [major change activity] has been clear” and “The purpose of [major change activity] has been well communicated.” Appropriateness consisted of four items, one for each change activity (i.e. “This [major change activity] has been an appropriate thing for the organization to be involved in”). Execution effectiveness was also comprised of four items, one for each change activity: “This [major change activity] has been well executed.” Internal consistency reliabilities for the scales were 0.86, 0.67, and 0.73 respectively.

Outcome variables. Job- and organization-focused affective outcomes were assessed. Each of the four outcomes were chosen because of their use in previous applied research and significance for organizational members’ psychological well-being and motivation to tolerate and even encourage the organization’s transformation efforts (e.g. Kivimaki *et al.*, 1997; Porras and Hargis, 1982; Shapiro and Kirkman, 1999; Sommer and Merritt, 1994).

Two items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ (Cammann *et al.*, 1983)) were used to assess job satisfaction. The items were “All in all, I am satisfied with my job” and “In general, I like my job.” Internal consistency reliability was 0.82.

Organizational commitment was assessed using Mowday *et al.*’s (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (short form). This questionnaire is reported to measure affective or attitudinal commitment to the organization (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). To avoid potential wording confounds, only the nine positively worded items were included in our measure (see Mathieu, 1991). Examples of items include “For me, this organization is the best of all possible organizations for which to work” and “I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.” Internal consistency reliability for this scale was 0.85.

Intent to turnover was measured with two items from the MOAQ (Cammann *et al.*, 1983): “It is likely that I will actively look for a new job in the next year” and “I often think about quitting my job.” Internal consistency reliability was 0.82.

Finally, role ambiguity was assessed with 7 items drawn from Rizzo *et al.* (1970). Example items included: “There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my job” and “I feel certain about how much authority I have.” All items were reversed scored. Respondents who reported being unclear and uncertain regarding their management role scored higher than those respondents who understood their role as manager. Internal consistency reliability was 0.85.

Control variables. We included several control variables in our analyses. First, we controlled for organizational tenure. Second, because our study variables were

attitudinal and collected using a common method, inflation in the relationships due to common method bias and dispositional-based response tendencies becomes a particular concern (Spector and Brannick, 1995). Therefore, two dispositional variables were included as additional controls in the analyses, positive and negative affectivity (PANAS (Watson *et al.*, 1988)). For each item, respondents were asked to indicate the extent they have generally felt a certain way based on a five-point response format (1 = "very slightly or not at all"; 5 = "extremely"). Internal consistency reliability for the positive affectivity (ten items) and negative affectivity (ten items) measures were 0.86 and 0.85, respectively.

Finally, research has reported that managers' strategic involvement relates to their willingness to approve and act on strategic decisions (Steward, 1989) and the salience of strategic visions (Oswald *et al.*, 1994). In addition, Armenakis *et al.* (1993) suggest that strategic involvement can engender sentiments supporting change readiness. Therefore, we felt that our research would benefit from controlling for the level of managers' strategic involvement in the four changes. We created a four-item measure of respondents' strategic involvement in the changes by averaging the responses to the following item: "I have been involved in the decision to initiate [major change activity]" across each of the four changes. Internal consistency reliability for this scale was 0.81.

Analyses

H1 was tested by examining correlations and fourth-order partial correlations among the change measures and outcome variables. *H2* was tested using hierarchical moderated regression analysis. As noted by Cohen and Cohen (1983), hierarchical regression allows causal priority to be defined, spurious relationships to be removed, and incremental validity to be determined. In our four regression models (one for each of the four outcomes), control variables were simultaneously entered into the first step. At the second hierarchical step, change vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution were entered into the equations; the three two-way cross-product terms were entered in step 3; and the three-way cross-product term was entered in step 4. To control for multicollinearity in the interaction terms, we followed Aiken and West's (1991) deviation score procedure. Inspection of the variance inflation factor scores (VIFs) indicated that there were no instances of problematic multicollinearity among any of the variables or interaction terms. Each VIF was less than 3.0, which is far less than the 10.0 threshold suggested by Neter *et al.* (1996).

Results

Table I contains the descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, and internal consistency reliabilities for the variables included in the study. As shown in Table I, the zero-order correlations all support *H1*. That is, each of the three change sentiments positively correlated ($p < 0.01$) with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and negatively correlated ($p < 0.01$) with turnover intention and role ambiguity sentiments.

A more conservative test of *H1* involved examining the fourth-order partial correlations that controlled for respondents' tenure, positive and negative affectivity, and strategic involvement in the change process. Vision clarity was related to increased levels of job satisfaction ($r_{12.3456} = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) and organizational commitment ($r_{12.3456} = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), and lower levels of role ambiguity

Variable name	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Control variables</i>													
1. Organizational tenure	19.6	8.96											
2. Negative affectivity	1.7	0.54	-0.02	(0.85)									
3. Positive affectivity	3.9	0.53	-0.07	-0.44**	(0.86)								
4. Strategic involvement	1.5	0.84	-0.07	-0.07	0.21**	(0.81)							
<i>Major change variables</i>													
5. Vision clarity	2.9	0.85	-0.02	-0.19**	0.37**	0.12	(0.86)						
6. Appropriateness	3.7	0.76	-0.15*	-0.18*	0.35**	0.24**	0.44**	(0.73)					
7. Execution	2.1	0.73	-0.07	-0.31**	0.37**	0.24**	0.63**	0.40**	(0.67)				
<i>Affective criteria</i>													
8. Job satisfaction	3.7	0.92	-0.03	-0.47**	0.53**	0.20**	0.34**	0.29**	0.37**	(0.82)			
9. Organizational commitment	3.6	0.63	-0.05	-0.42*	0.53**	0.24**	0.43**	0.37**	0.50**	0.59**	(0.85)		
10. Turnover intention	2.3	0.99	-0.12	0.48**	-0.41**	-0.28**	-0.25**	-0.24**	-0.35**	-0.66**	-0.52**	(0.82)	
11. Role ambiguity	2.6	0.74	-0.03	0.48**	-0.48**	-0.30**	-0.42**	-0.33**	-0.43**	-0.48**	0.41**	-0.49*	(0.85)
Note: * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed); ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed); Internal consistency reliabilities are reported in parentheses. Due to missing data, correlations ranged from 197 to 217													

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations, and
correlations among study
variables

($r_{12.3456} = -0.32, p < .01$). Appropriateness was found to be associated with increased levels of organizational commitment ($r_{12.3456} = 0.18, p < 0.01$) and lower levels of role ambiguity ($r_{12.3456} = -0.17, p < 0.05$). Finally, execution effectiveness was positively associated with job satisfaction ($r_{12.3456} = 0.14, p < 0.05$) and organizational commitment ($r_{12.3456} = 0.33, p < 0.01$), and negatively associated with intentions to turnover ($r_{12.3456} = -0.15, p < 0.05$) and role ambiguity ($r_{12.3456} = -0.22, p < 0.01$). Even after controlling for tenure, affectivity and strategic involvement, nine of the 12 relationships remained significant and in the predicted direction.

H2 suggested that individuals' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and role ambiguity would be predicted by a three-way interaction (vision clarity $\times$ appropriateness $\times$ execution). Shown in Table II (see Step 4), the three-way interaction cross-product terms for job satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < 0.01$), intent to turnover ($\Delta R^2 = 0.02, p < .05$), and role ambiguity ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$) each accounted for significant incremental variance. No support was found for a three-way interaction effect for organizational commitment (although the two-way interaction step was significant ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.01$)). These results show that change sentiment interactions can influence individuals' affective reactions beyond their main effects, providing support for *H2*. It should be noted that the unique

	Job satisfaction β	Organizational commitment β	Intent to turnover β	Role ambiguity β
<i>Step 1: controls</i>				
Organizational tenure	0.02	0.00	-0.18**	-0.09
Negative affectivity	-0.29**	-0.20**	0.34**	0.33**
Positive affectivity	0.34**	0.29**	-0.20**	-0.22**
Strategic involvement	0.09	0.11	-0.20**	-0.19**
ΔR^2 after step 1	0.36**	0.35**	0.34**	0.37**
<i>Step 2: main effects</i>				
Vision clarity (VC)	0.15	0.06	-0.03	-0.24**
Appropriateness (A)	0.13	0.10	-0.14	-0.17*
Execution (E)	0.11	0.27**	-0.18*	-0.12
ΔR^2 after step 2	0.02	0.09**	0.02	0.06**
<i>Step 3: two-way interactions</i>				
VC $\times$ A	-0.04	0.00	0.04	0.04
VC $\times$ E	0.01	-0.22*	0.03	-0.05
A $\times$ E	0.15	0.06	-0.14	-0.20*
ΔR^2 after step 3	0.01	0.03*	0.01	0.01
<i>Step 4: three-way interaction</i>				
VC $\times$ A $\times$ E	-0.27**	0.00	0.24*	0.31**
ΔR^2 after step 4	0.02**	0.00	0.02*	0.03**
Overall R^2	0.42	0.46	0.38	0.48
Overall adjusted R^2	0.38	0.43	0.35	0.44
Overall F	12.0**	14.5**	10.4**	15.3**

Table II.
Summary of moderated
hierarchical regression
analyses

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; $N = 197$. Only final model results are reported. All tests are two-tailed

variance explained by the interaction terms was found having controlled for a set of covariates and main effects that explained, on average, 36 percent of criterion space.

To explore and better understand the interactions further, we plotted the three-way interactions following Cohen and Cohen (1983). Figures 1-3 illustrate the joint moderating effects of appropriateness and execution on the relationship between change vision clarity and job satisfaction (see Figure 1), intent to turnover (see Figure 2), and role ambiguity (see Figure 3). As Figures 1-3 demonstrate, respondents who believed the changes were supported by vision, appropriate, and well executed reported generally high levels of job satisfaction and lower intention to turnover and role ambiguity. Interestingly, respondents who did not perceive a clear vision behind the changes but believed they were nonetheless appropriate and well executed reported the highest levels of job satisfaction and lowest intentions to turnover. This would

Notes: LowApp. = low appropriateness. LowExec. = low execution. HighApp. = execution high appropriateness. HighExec. = high execution

Figure 1.
Plot of job satisfaction on
change vision clarity $\times$
change appropriateness $\times$
execution excellence
interaction

Notes: LowApp. = low appropriateness. LowExec. = low execution.
HighApp. = high appropriateness. HighExec. = high execution

Figure 2.
Plot of intent to turnover
on change vision clarity $\times$
change appropriateness $\times$
execution excellence
interaction

suggest that job satisfaction and turnover intentions during change may be less associated with strategic vision and more associated with the day-to-day realities of the change appropriateness and execution. However, vision clarity played a larger role for improved job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions and role ambiguity when the change was viewed as appropriate but not well executed, or well executed but not appropriate.

Sentiments that the changes were not supported by clear vision and were inappropriate but nonetheless well-executed, corresponded to the lowest levels of satisfaction and the highest levels of turnover intentions and role ambiguity; it seems that doing a good job implementing a change that is not wanted or justified is the most affectively distressing situation. Interestingly, vision clarity made relatively little difference for job satisfaction or role ambiguity when the change was viewed as inappropriate and poorly executed. Perhaps vision's influence is muted when it is not symbolically reinforced by choosing appropriate changes and implementing them effectively. Finally, the combination of low vision clarity, low appropriateness, and low execution sentiments was related to average satisfaction and role ambiguity levels. While it might be assumed that being low on all sentiments would be the most affectively negative combination, this was not the case. It may be that the poor execution of a change that is not supported by vision or deemed appropriate gives some hope that the change might be revised or short-lived.

Discussion

Armenakis *et al.* (1999) argued extensively that individual's sentiments concerning organizational change are interactive and should not be ignored. Results of this study indicate that employees' change content and process sentiments have direct and interactive relationships with important job-related affective outcomes. While our work is preliminary in nature, the results have interesting implications for the study and practice of change leadership.

First, change content and process as seen through individuals' perceptions of vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution effectiveness were significantly related with

Figure 3.
Plot of role ambiguity (high scores indicate managers were unclear and uncertain regarding their role as manager) on change vision clarity × change appropriateness × execution excellence interaction

Notes: LowApp. = low appropriateness. LowExec. = low execution. HighApp. = high appropriateness. HighExec. = high execution

important, individual affective outcomes (e.g. job satisfaction, turnover intentions). These findings are important inasmuch as while researchers (e.g. Armenakis *et al.*, 1999; Bernerth, 2004) have predicted such effects, to our knowledge, however, this is one of the first empirical studies to substantiate those predictions. These results are particularly interesting given the organizational levels occupied by our respondents.

Second, the change sentiment configuration that seemed most affectively beneficial was appropriateness coupled with effective execution. That is, an appropriate change done well is most welcome. Moreover, when the change was viewed as appropriate and well executed, vision clarity played little role in influencing the affective outcomes. This seems inconsistent with the clarion-calls for leaders to provide vision in order to drive the change initiative. Of course, this interaction only occurred for the three job-focused outcomes: job satisfaction, intention to turnover, and role ambiguity. We suspect that the change itself is likely to be more proximal to a person's job reality than the vision behind it.

Interestingly, a three-way interaction effect was not found for our organization-focused affective outcome, organizational commitment – the only interaction effect was the two-way interaction between vision clarity and execution ($B = -0.22, p < 0.05$). The results suggest that execution is the strongest predictor of organizational commitment. On the surface, it is surprising that vision clarity seems to play a supporting role with regard to organizational commitment. However, it is important to note that our measure of vision clarity is not an assessment of the vision content. Obviously, future research would benefit from greater examination of the relative roles that change sentiments play on organizational commitment. Collins (2001) research suggesting the transformational advantages of “level 5” leaders over “level 4” leaders may offer some insight. For level 4 leaders, articulating a vision is the first priority. For level 5 leaders, vision follows a concern for choosing the right people and building the best leadership team. Concern for sustained execution leads concern for direction.

The present study's results certainly do not discount the importance of vision clarity. As we noted earlier, vision clarity correlated with all of the affective outcomes. Vision clarity also played an important role in ameliorating the negative effects of a lack of change appropriateness or the poor execution of an appropriate change. Vision provided a more distal backdrop against which the more immediate experiences of change appropriateness and execution can be judged. It may provide hope when something about the change is amiss.

Our findings further imply organizations would benefit from explicitly addressing members' content and process perceptions when making major changes. In this study, change sentiments were significantly related to important attitudes, including intentions to turnover, of the very executives, directors, and managers expected to implement them, encourage employee support, and shepherd the changes to institutionalization. If an organization fails to address individual's change sentiments it runs the risk of increased management dissatisfaction and turnover and managers who are unsure of their roles within the organization. Additionally, management's attitudes can have a direct impact on their subordinates' perceptions. Employees typically consider managers to have the most important perspectives on change because they are the main channel through which information flows and, therefore, are perceived as the principal change agents of the organization. For

instance, Leiter and Harvie (1997) reported management's beliefs regarding specific changes as well as their general attitudes towards the organization influenced the perspectives of their staff members.

If change sentiments are important for predicting managers' affective orientations toward their jobs and the organization and for supporting the overall success of change efforts, it becomes important to ask "How can positive change sentiments be created?" Armenakis *et al.* (1993, 1999) argue that empowerment is one important way that positive change sentiments are created. Similarly, work by Oswald *et al.* (1994) suggests that involvement in strategic decisions can create commitment to changes arising from those decisions. Because of this, in the present study we controlled for strategic involvement and found it was positively correlated with appropriateness and execution sentiments. Armenakis *et al.* also identify several other leadership strategies that can be used to build positive change sentiments. For example, they suggest that persuasive communication by a credible leader is important. Both internal and external information can be used to demonstrate change appropriateness and effective execution. Furthermore, symbolic reinforcement can provide more persuasive support for positive change sentiments. While these strategies provide practical suggestions for improving change sentiments, more research is also needed to clarify the best approaches for particular sentiments.

Specifically, future research on the relationship between change sentiments and affective reactions would benefit from a more thorough examination of the role of individual differences. In the present study, we controlled for negative and positive affectivity but did not include them in any mediating or moderating role. Both dispositions were significantly correlated with all the sentiments and affective outcomes. Barger and Kirby (1995) have argued, for example, that dispositional preferences as captured by Jung's psychological types strongly influence reactions to change. Likewise, Kirton (1980) showed that individuals characterized as "innovators" were more accepting of fundamental change while "adaptors" responded better to incremental change. It is highly likely that personal dispositions play an important role in the interpretation of change events as well as the development of change sentiments.

This study is not without certain methodological limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. First, the data were collected using a single, self-report questionnaire. When self-reports are used, concerns regarding common method bias being responsible for the observed relationships often arise. Two points should be made regarding this issue. First, we employed four control variables that should have reduced any such effect (but at the expense of a highly conservative test of our hypotheses). Second, the nature of the interactive effects reported provides us with a moderate level of confidence that method bias was not solely responsible for our findings.

A second limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study. Because our data were collected at a single point in time, we are unable to make causal conclusions. Future research that looks to develop a longitudinal design in order to collect predictor and criterion variables before and after the change would be well served. Third, our analyses were based on a single organization, therefore limiting the generalizability of our findings.

Conclusion

In summary, complex organizational changes are becoming ever more common in today's workplace. Whereas much of the previous research on organizational change has focused on macro-level variables, our results support the view that micro or individual-level variables play an important role in the success of the organizational change. Furthermore, our results suggest the simultaneous consideration of the effects of change vision clarity, appropriateness, and execution sentiments can improve our understanding of organizationally relevant attitudes tied to the change experience.

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