

LEADERS' SUPPORT IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Purpose: As organizations look to the future, many are planning a hybrid working model where employees split their working time between in-office and remote work. The shift to a hybrid workplace is a significant change. While requiring vision, budgets, and talents to produce positive results, every change is particularly dependent on the presence of supportive leaders who build a safe psychological environment to motivate people and ensure their involvement and commitment. The aim of this paper is to review recent empirical studies on key antecedents of employee responses to organizational change through which leaders shape a supportive environment for change.

Design/methodology/approach: The review includes empirical studies from different disciplines, published between 2015 and 2021.

Findings: The analysis shows that trust in leaders is an important enabler of organizational change. Perceived justice, communication, and psychological empowerment also feature prominently in the recent studies, and, together with trust, play an important role between leadership and positive employee responses toward change.

Practical implications: Managers can considerably improve the success rate of their change initiatives by having insight into what key factors have impact on employees' attitudes toward organizational change. They can build on them to create and develop an environment that motivates individuals and ensures their involvement and commitment to change.

Originality/value: This article provides insights into the key factors influencing employee attitudes toward organizational change, which have recently attracted the attention of the scientific community across different disciplines. It also includes a research agenda proposal highlighting opportunities for future studies on leadership in organizational change.

Keywords: Organizational change, antecedents of employee response to change, leader support.

Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a global experiment in work organization, particularly in remote work. Although employees in the remote working model were able to benefit for example from the time savings traditionally spent on commuting or the flexibility of working hours, the Capgemini report (2021) presents other important findings about their condition. While their productivity increased, employees expressed concerns about remote working in the long term. The analysis found that in the remote system they were heavily impacted by the feeling of being permanently available and “always on call”, which can ultimately result in burnout and consequent losses for the employer. The McKinsey report (2021) reaches similar conclusions, with many employees reporting that remote work contributed to fatigue, difficulty in disconnecting from work, deterioration of their social networks, and weakening of their sense of belonging. The same report indicates that nearly three-quarters of the approximately 5,000 employees McKinsey queried globally would like to work from home for two or more days per week, with more than half opting for at least three days of remote work. As a result, changing to a hybrid model seems to be an optimal solution, with several studies showing that hybrid working models will create a new working environment (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021; Capgemini, 2021; Hays 2021; Cisco, 2020; OLX, 2020; Adecco Group, 2020). Nevertheless, this move implies a significant organizational change, both in the organization of work within hybrid teams and the management approach.

Organizational change refers to the transition of an organization from one state of affairs to another (Lewin, 1951). Every company needs to embrace organizational change if they want to remain competitive. When done correctly, organizational change can turn every company into a more competitive, effective business and a better place to work. However, organizational change is not easy. The reality today is that all organizations need to be in a constant state of change. As excessive change is becoming the norm (Johnson, 2016), organizations experience the pressure to increase the frequency, extent, and impact of organizational changes (van den Heuvel et al., 2017), which in turn have a cumulative effect on employees in the organization (Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell, 2007).

Two trends can be noticed in organizational change research. The first aims to uncover the evolution of change and the macro-level factors that shape organizational change and its outcomes. The second considers change from the perspective of the change recipient, focusing mainly on the psychological processes and recipients’ experiences during change, known as responses to change (Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis, 2011; Oreg, and Berson, 2019).

Research on organizational change has been largely dominated by macro- and system-oriented (Xu et al., 2016) or conceptual change models and frameworks. This approach may evoke a rather mechanistic perspective of organizational change management which assumes that just by following the subsequent levels of the organizational change model employees will

automatically respond positively to change. This is obviously not true as the success of coping with change “is increasingly reliant on generating employee support and enthusiasm for proposed changes” (Piderit, 2000, p. 783). Employee attitudes and behaviors toward organizational change represent the most important predictors of its success (Abrell-Vogel, and Rowold, 2014; Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder, 1993). At the heart of events, the main determinant of the extent to which any change can succeed is how change recipients react to organizational change (Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis, 2011). Moreover, while the failure to successfully implement the planned change may be attributed to many factors, few issues are as critical as employee attitudes toward change (Choi, 2011; Eby et al., 2000; Miller, Johnson, and Grau, 1994; Rafferty, Jimmieson, and Armenakis, 2013).

Leadership plays an important role in the world of constant change and it has become an essential component for a successful change in any organization. “Organizational leadership and change go hand in hand, and one is nothing without the other” (Burnes, Hughes, and By, 2016, p. 2).

While there are many definitions of leadership, most of them tend to have one thing in common: putting emphasis on the complex and multi-faceted process of social influence it involves, whereby leaders influence the group toward their goals (McClanahan, 2020; Oreg, and Berson, 2019). “This process [leadership] is essentially a shared experience, a voyage through time, with benefits to be gained and hazards to be surmounted by the parties involved” (Hollander, 1995, p. 55).

Leaders have a significant effect on attitudes and behaviors of change recipients (Lee, A. et al., 2015; Bartunek et al., 2006), and have been shown to undertake a pivotal role in assisting employees to embrace altered organizational arrangements (Aitken, and von Treuer, 2020).

Leader support is critical for organizational change, and even a slight increase in perceived support can have meaningful repercussions for employee attitudes and behaviors (Ford et al., 2021). Managerial support is one of the major antecedents of perceived organizational support (POS), which refers to employees' perception of how much the organization values their contribution and cares about their individual well-being (Eisenberger, Rhoades Shanock, and Wen, 2020; Eisenberger, and Stinglhamber, 2011; Gigliotti et al., 2019; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Leaders support employees by building a culture of trust and a safe psychological environment that motivates people, ensuring their involvement and commitment (Boxall, and Macky, 2009; Travaglione et al., 2017). On a day-to-day basis, leaders' support helps employees cope with the demands of their role (Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke, 2004), producing positive outcomes for the organization such as employee engagement, motivation, and well-being (Breevaart et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2008; Skakon et al., 2010; Van Dierendonck, and Jacobs, 2010). These effects persist in the context of organizational change as supportive relationships lead to more positive employee attitudes toward change (Jimmieson, White, and Zajdlewicz, 2009), which in turn help employees proceed effectively with the tasks of change (Bouckennooghe, Devos, and Van den Broeck, 2009).

This paper focuses on key antecedents of employee responses to change, i.e. “factors which influence employees’ evaluation of whether the change should be supported, viewed with indifference, or opposed” (Miller, Johnson, and Grau, 1994, p. 61), and through which leaders shape their support for change. Attention to factors affecting employees’ reactions to change provides insight into key elements of managerial support required in organizational change.

2. Method

Using the Scopus database, a search was conducted to identify studies for the review. To this end, an electronic search of the abstracts was performed which were then scanned for the terms of organizational change and employees’ reactions to change. To capture the most recent developments in the field, the search focused on the period from 2015 to date. This initial search yielded nearly 300 articles which were examined ‘manually’. The studies included in the final analysis met the following criteria: (1) They were published not earlier than in 2015; (2) They contained a leadership aspect; (3) They included a variable that represented an antecedent of employee responses to organizational change; and (4) They were empirical studies.

3. Review

The analysis specifically revealed four antecedents of employee responses to change through which leaders shape a supportive environment for change: trust, justice, communication, and psychological empowerment.

3.1. Trust

The largest number of articles addressed the importance of a trusting relationship between leaders and change recipients, as well as perceived justice. Both trust and justice appear to be the core constructs in organizational sciences, with highly regarded benefits for the effective functioning of organizations (Holtz, 2013).

Trust in the leader is an important factor for the successful implementation of organizational changes, and it is pivotal to getting people to work toward a common goal, particularly under high levels of perceived uncertainty (Agote, Aramburu, and Lines, 2016). “The level of trust becomes a critical factor in influencing how the employees think, feel and act with respect to the current change” (Smollan, 2013, p. 725).

Trust has been much debated in the literature and, as a subject of interest in many disciplines, it has acquired multiple definitions across different sciences. One of the most influential definitions was provided by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995, p. 712), who see trust as:

“[...] the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.” Trust grows over time where “major events such as organizational changes can bring about a complete reassessment of the trust relationship, either making or breaking the trust bond” (Tucker, Yeow and Viki, 2012, p. 190).

Studies show that there is a positive and significant association between trust and readiness to change (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Heim, and Sardar-Drenda, 2020; Thakur, and Srivastava, 2018). Trust is considered to be an overriding factor, the ultimate determinant of employees' eventual response to organizational change. In other words, even if change is perceived as beneficial by an employee, the lack of trust in the leader might still cause negative employee responses. “Trust in leadership can turn an uncomfortable situation into a comfortable one” (van den Heuvel et al., 2016, p. 36), and assist in decreasing the negative effects of certain leadership behaviors on organizational change capacity (Yasir et al., 2016). Moreover, the already significant effect of trust in management becomes even greater as the change implementation progresses; trust in management built up at previous stages of the change implementation continues to influence the following stages of the change process alleviating the problem of change resistance (Pereira, Maximiano, and Bido, 2019).

The subject of the vast majority of leadership research in the context of organizational change is transformational leadership, a style in which leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate employees to innovate and create change that will help the company to grow and shape its future success (van den Heuvel et al., 2016). “In the context of organizational change, transformational leadership behaviors are thought to empower employees to challenge the status quo and embrace new practices” (Henricks, Young, and Kehoe, 2020, p. 4). Studies reveal a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee trust in the leader (Mittal, 2016; Peng et al., 2020; Yasir et al., 2016), and a direct, long-term positive effect on the change appraisal among the leader followers (Holten, and Brenner, 2015). Transformational leadership behaviors contribute to the trust-building process because transformational leaders understand individual needs of followers; thereby followers tend to trust them (Yasir et al., 2016). Moreover, trust in management increases during organizational change when employees work under transformational leadership style (Busari et al., 2019). Employee trust in transformational leadership has a positive influence on working relationships, which can lead to the enhancement of the leader-employee trust relationship and a stronger commitment to change (Yang, 2016).

Albeit with far less attention than transformational leadership, studies also show moral-based forms of leadership, ethical and authentic, as being inherently linked with the notion of change and the impact on employee response to change. The former, ethical leadership, has been defined in a variety of ways; however, it largely describes the extent to which the conduct of a leader is normatively appropriate and promotes well-being for stakeholders (Banks et al., 2020). Ethical leaders act in harmony with own principles and values, which are characterized by honesty, fairness, and equity as well as respect for the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people (Knights, Grant, and Young, 2020). The latter, authentic leaders, are aware of who they are and what values they hold, and they are able to consistently behave in ways that are in agreement with these beliefs (Anderson et al., 2017). Hoch et al. (2018) found that ethics-rooted leadership approaches, such as the authentic and ethical leadership styles, show similar correlations with transformational leadership with an array of positive employee outcomes, including trust in the leader. Ethical leaders boost employee trust in the long-term fairness of their relationship with the organization, intensifying employee identification with the firm (Myra, and Jerwin, 2020). Authentic leadership elicits trust among employees, alleviating negative emotions such as anxiety and threat, and enhancing the positive ones such as hope and enthusiasm (Agote, Aramburu, and Lines, 2016).

An increasing body of research has been dedicated to a trickle-down model of leadership assuming that leader behaviors and styles are passed from higher-level leaders to lower-level leaders through social learning (Mawritz et al., 2012; Simons et al., 2007; Wo, Ambrose, and Schminke, 2015). This could indicate that trust in top leaders, or lack thereof, translates into comparable levels of trust in direct leaders. However, studies by Fulmer and Ostroff (2017) demonstrate that trust in leaders at different levels does not form independently and it also trickles up across hierarchical levels. One of the mechanisms through which trust trickles upward is direct leader procedural justice.

3.2. Justice

Similarly to trust, organizational justice has also received a lot of attention in organizational journals in the context of change. The likely reason for that recognition is that justice perceptions and trust assessments are consistent predictors of employee attitudes and behaviors. Organizational justice refers to perceptions of fairness in decision-making and resource allocation environments. It is commonly divided into three dimensions: distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Distributive justice is concerned with the fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of social cooperation among people with competing needs and claims. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of decision-making procedures which are evaluated by their level of consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, ethicality, and the degree to which they allow voice and input. Interactional justice describes the fairness of interpersonal treatment during the decision-making procedures. It can be further divided into interpersonal and informational components, whereby interpersonal justice reflects the degree

of respect and decency leaders use when implementing procedures, while informational justice focuses on the degree of justification and truthfulness offered during procedures (Colquitt, and Rodell, 2011).

Justice is one of the key dimensions of leader character in the context of change. Leaders ensure that individuals are treated fairly and that consequences are concurrent with contributions; they provide others with the opportunity to voice their opinions on processes, offer timely and honest explanations for decisions, and “seek to redress wrongdoings inside and outside the organization” (Seijts, and Gandz, 2018, p. 4). When leaders are perceived as being fair and just, the chances are that those who might resist change will be encouraged to support the current change and will be opened for further change initiatives. Justice research posits that when employees perceive that they are being treated fairly they are likely to develop attitudes and behaviors conducive to the successful implementation of change (Georgalis et al., 2015), while leaders perceived as being fair receive assistance, support, and cooperation from their followers (Deschamps et al., 2016). Perceived justice within an organization is a determinant of optimism which partially mediates the relationship between organizational justice and commitment to change (Paolillo et al., 2015).

Research shows that procedural justice not only facilitates employees to accept values and goals pertaining to organizational change but also adapt themselves to pressures of external change (Lee et al., 2017). In turn, informational injustice with respect to change enhances the development of negative workplace emotions. When employees receive limited information about changes taking place in their work environment, their ability to cope with uncertainty diminishes, which then fuels the development of negative feelings. However, the adverse effect of informational injustice is attenuated by the presence of trust. Thus, when trust in managers is low, employees feel more hesitant to share concerns about information shortage or may become distressed by their suspicions about why managers withhold important information, which can make it more difficult to divert the negative energy stemming from the shortage and piling up (De Clercq, and Saridakis, 2015).

While management scholars have historically framed trust as a consequence of organizational justice, arguing that trust develops slowly based on a series of favorable interactions with the exchange partner, theory and empirical research outside of the management literature suggest that trust is present prior to the initiation of exchange relationships (Holtz, 2013). Some research shows dynamic relations between trust and justice, addressing the interplay between justice and trust over time (Kaltiainen, Lipponen, and Holtz, 2017).

Leaders should focus on perceived fairness since organizational justice is considered to have a positive impact on employee trust where expectations are based on perceived motives and treatment (Saunders, and Thornhill, 2004). Studies examining organizational justice have found that fairness perceptions are linked to trust in management. Employees' perceptions of trust toward management in organizations are influenced by the development of close interpersonal

relationships that are based on exchanges perceived as fair (Komodromos, Halkias, and Harkiolakis, 2019).

Research also demonstrates that managers who want to enhance support for change need to pay attention to fair procedures while increasing the perception of fairness. In other words, a climate of justice can help employees be more supportive and, consequently, less resistant to ongoing changes (Arnéguy, Ohana, and Stinglhamber, 2018; Bayraktar, 2019).

Transformational leadership of respondents' immediate supervisors correlates strongly with all aspects of organizational justice, with the relationship between leadership and motivation entirely mediated by justice (Deschamps et al., 2016). Thus, organizational justice helps motivate employees, which leaders use as a leverage to implement changes.

Studies also show that justice perceptions yield either immediate or delayed consequences which can be of short or long duration. People's reactions can depend on their previous experience of fair or unfair treatment, and there can be reciprocal relationships between their justice perceptions and response. As a result, even a single instance of unfair treatment can have repercussions in the future (Fortin et al., 2016). This imposes an obligation on leaders to create the climate of justice that will shape sustainable justice perceptions among employees.

3.3. Communication

While leaders benefit from inducing the perception of justice to increase employee support for change, the former interplays not only with trust. Clear communication throughout the change process also influences the perception of fairness (Bayraktar, 2019) and trust (van den Heuvel, Schalk, and van Assen, 2015).

Leader's effective communication, including the ability to clearly articulate the case for change as well as focus on the style and frequency of communication to ensure it is "fit for purpose", appears to be another key factor that promotes employees' identification during change (Aitken, and von Treuer, 2020). The success of organizational change strongly depends on internal communication. Lack of information and communication prompts uncertainty and anxiety among employees which have a negative effect on employees' readiness to embrace change (Elving, 2005). "Poorly managed change communication results in rumors and resistance to change, exaggerating the negative aspects of the change" (Appelbaum et al., 2017, p. 8). Communication supports the information and willingness to interact with employees during times of uncertainty and ambiguity (Komodromos, Halkias, and Harkiolakis, 2019).

Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that communication by leaders on all aspects and phases of the change process is central to the reduction of uncertainty among employees (Schweiger, and Denisi, 1991), which in turn can foster perceptions of fairness about the change (Brockner, 1994). Confirmation of this finding can be also found in recent research. The more useful, timely, and adequate the information about the change, the more fulfilled the psychological contract, the higher the trust, and the higher the perceived need for change, all of

which are positively related to employees' attitude toward change (van den Heuvel, Schalk, and van Assen, 2015).

Quality change communication contributes significantly to the affective commitment to change (Ouedraogo, and Ouakouak, 2018; Rogiest, Segers, and van Witteloostuijn, 2015), which in turn has a positive impact on the change success (Ouedraogo, and Ouakouak, 2018). Developing an employee interest in the change involves leaders communicating with staff to explain the change process and people's roles in it (Yahaya, 2020). "Reducing employees' inertia and mobilizing their support are principle tasks during an organizational change", while leaders' communication addressing the psychological needs of employees elicits their positive response to change (Endrejat et al., 2020, p. 8).

Effective communication means also positive communication. Muthusamy's research (2019) confirms the importance of positive communication and its effects on the emotional buy-in, whereby the former also serves as a stress reducer. Sharing positive communication is central to achieving organizational transformation.

Quality change communication also fully mediates the relationship between an involvement-oriented climate and the affective commitment to change (Rogiest, Segers, and van Witteloostuijn, 2015). Leaders who embrace employee inclusion provide adequate information and listen to employees to make decisions effectively and gain organizational support (Yahaya, 2020). The growing emphasis on participatory and horizontal communication creates space in which people can give meaning to the change events, which allows people to be listened to and be heard. This in turn ends up contributing to social exchange and empowerment. Organizations involved in complex and continuous changes need to empower their employees to enact the change in ways that are best suited to the challenges they encounter (Morin et al., 2016).

3.4. Psychological empowerment

The empowerment literature lacks a set of well-accepted and consistently applied definitions of the important elements in the empowerment process, which may be due to the common belief that empowerment is a single, easily defined construct, when, in fact, it is an ongoing process that takes place in a dynamic environment (Robbins, Crino, and Fredendall, 2002). The concept can be viewed from two perspectives. The first one is empowerment as a relational construct concerning the managerial style; it is about an individual's power and control with respect to others, as well as the sharing or spreading power. The second perspective is the motivational/psychological state that results from the empowering (relational) activities undertaken by leaders. Psychological empowerment refers to a set of psychological states that are necessary for individuals to feel a sense of control in relation to their work (Spreitzer, 1995). It also pertains to personal beliefs that employees have about their role in the organization (Spreitzer, 2007). The psychological perspective is focused on how employees experience their work. People will adjust and accept organizational change if they have the feeling of

competence and confidence to face the changes. By sweeping psychological empowerment, people will have the confidence, determination, a sense of meaning about their work, competence, determination, and most importantly, the feeling of impact on the organization (Spreitzer, 2007).

Psychological empowerment is one of the sources of competitive advantage in developing the organization's readiness to changes (Ölçer, and Florescu, 2015). As such it becomes even more relevant under conditions of continuous change, where dealing with changes becomes an integral part of one's job and must be balanced with regular job responsibilities (Morin et al., 2016).

As this analysis focuses on key factors through which leaders' behaviors shape recipients' responses to change, it considers the psychological empowerment patterns intended to motivate empowered behaviors and engagement in the work environment rather than managerial practices of simply sharing power with others.

Research about psychological empowerment and commitment to change shows that the former has a positive and significant impact on the latter (Susilo, and Mangundjaya, 2020). Psychological empowerment and organizational trust act as full mediators for the relationship between change leadership and the affective commitment to change (Mangundjaya, 2019).

Empowering leadership reduces behavioral intentions to resist future change and contributes to increased cognitive intentions to resist future change through the strengthening of psychological empowerment. High-quality leadership contributes to the development of the psychological environment (Seibert, Wang, and Courtright, 2011) that is particularly responsive to beliefs about management support for the changes (Morin et al., 2016).

3.5. Leader support

Leader support in organizational change has not gained much attention in recent research. Neither has POS even though the latter may play an important role in employee responses to organizational change. Firstly, social support is associated with feelings of control during change (Vardaman et al., 2012). It suggests that other forms of support, for example organizational support, may also contribute to positive change-related outcomes. A study by Kirrane et al. (2017) seems to second this proposition by demonstrating a link between managerial support and readiness for change. Secondly, POS is associated with positive feelings toward change, which may also translate into fostering readiness (Self, Armenakis, and Schraeder, 2007). Thirdly, POS has been linked to higher comfort with risk-taking (Neves, and Eisenberger, 2014), suggesting that it encourages a greater psychological safety in situations when people are faced with uncertainty, which is a frequent occurrence during organizational change. Finally, individuals tend to reciprocate the support they receive (Bowling, Beehr, and Swader, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Gouldner, 1960), which suggests that employees with higher levels of POS might "return the favor" by supporting the organizational change initiatives. Employees who are aware of the organizational support they

have received develop a “felt obligation” to care about the organization’s well-being and help it achieve its objectives (Thakur, and Srivastava, 2018).

Organizations can improve the likelihood of bringing about change by supporting employees before change initiatives are introduced (Gigliotti et al., 2019). Studies show that POS plays a central role in the development of positive attitudes toward change which depend more on POS than material and extrinsic rewards (Giauque, 2015). As expected, POS acts as a mediator between direct antecedents of employee response to change. Readiness for change derives from POS (Arnéguy, Ohana, and Stinglhamber, 2018; Gigliotti et al., 2019), and the relationship between justice and readiness for change is mediated by POS (Arnéguy, Ohana, and Stinglhamber, 2018), with justice influencing readiness through POS.

The link between POS and readiness is also partially explained by trust as the delivery of support is associated with building trust toward management. Change recipients may draw upon this in accepting or rejecting change. “Managers should work to support their employees and build the associated trust in order to have a reservoir of ready change recipients when organizational transformation is inevitably attempted” (Gigliotti et al., 2019, p. 10). In the presence of trust and POS, the impact of change resistance on change readiness decreases to a great extent (Thakur, and Srivastava, 2018). However, as a study by Gigliotti et al. (2019) also shows, there is an inflection point (relatively high levels of POS) where additional organizational support does not yield substantial increases in trust, with the effect diminishing at higher levels.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Leaders are a lynchpin in the success of every change initiative because of the relationship they have with employees in the organization. They are positioned to influence staff and secure their positive response to change. Employees look to their leaders for clarity, connection, and accountability, particularly during change.

The need for mutual support between leaders/managers and employees has recently attracted the attention of management scholars (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Van Buren, Greenwood, and Sheehan, 2011), and one of the reasons is organizations’ shift from an employee focus to a strategic focus (Van Buren, Greenwood, and Sheehan, 2011). The relationship between employers and their employees is one of mutual obligation (Boxall, and Macky, 2009; Johns, 2006; Travaglione et al., 2017). Building a relationship of mutual respect where employees perceive that their needs are considered and are acted upon appropriately lies at the heart of managerial support (Travaglione et al., 2017). Such support can also facilitate the communication and implementation of strategic decisions (Dasgupta, 2015).

Changes perceived by employees as excessive can provoke negative reactions to change (Johnson, 2016), which is why the importance of leading people through change has gained credence. Leaders serve as role models in times of change, and the lack of leadership can generate negativity (van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Managers are the ones in the driver's seat of the change implementation process and therefore first to receive employee responses to organizational change. In light of the above, leaders can considerably improve the success rate of their change initiatives by having insight into what key factors have impact on employees' attitudes toward organizational change. Managers can build on them to create and develop an environment that motivates individuals and ensures their involvement and commitment to change.

The objective of this paper was to identify the key antecedents of employee responses to change, by means of which leaders can support their staff through organizational change. It is anticipated that these elements will be essential in managing a hybrid working team whose needs will focus primarily on getting managerial/leader support grounded in a culture of trust and a safe psychological environment. With this premise in mind, empirical research is planned on managerial support and behavioral competences required to manage hybrid working teams.

The analysis has shown that trust in leaders is an important enabler of organizational change. The overriding capacity of trust can turn an uncomfortable situation into a comfortable one; it is the ultimate determinant of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses of employees to organizational change. Perceived justice, communication, and psychological empowerment have also featured prominently in the recent research, all three playing an important role between leadership and positive employee responses toward change. The transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership has been found to also be linked with a greater likelihood of fostering the described aspects.

At this point, a distinction must be made between pre-change and change antecedents. The former are not directly linked to a particular organizational change, but are general quality indicators of the state of the employment relationship. Factors such as trust and psychological empowerment primarily concern the situation prior to the introduction of the organizational change. Therefore, they should be carefully considered by management during the planning and designing of the specific change stages. As Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell (2007, p. 949) point out, "organizations cannot roll out change after change assuming that each change is an independent event" without a thoughtful consideration of "extrachange factors, such as the workplace setting in which the change is occurring." If focus on pre-change antecedents is blended with communication practices, as well as procedural and distributive justice, the likelihood of positive change attitudes will increase. Thus, the knowledge of and focus on both pre-change and change antecedents should serve as the basis of leaders' long-lasting support (and consequently, POS) in order to build employees' approval for the entire transformation process rather than concentrate on each specific change.

With a few exceptions (Henricks, Young, and Kehoe, 2020; Holten, and Brenner, 2015; Kaltiainen, Lipponen, and Holtz, 2017; Morin et al., 2016), most studies on employee response toward change were of cross-sectional design, which critically limits the causal inference. The majority of the analyzed studies focused on a specific change initiative. Future research designed to provide a more systematic investigation into the large-scale organizational change seems required.

Furthermore, while it is clear that one course through which leaders influence organizational change is by eliciting more positive and less negative responses to it, according to the recent criticism of applicable research (Oreg, and Berson, 2018), responses to change tend to be treated in a very simplified manner as ranging from negative to positive, which overlooks their complexity. Very little research of reactions to change has been dedicated to study the possibility that individuals may concurrently exhibit positive and negative responses.

Although the number of studies on leaders and change that has accumulated over the recent years is considerable, research in this field lacks integration and has failed to provide a clear and broader understanding of leaders' role and, more specifically, their support for change. This is certainly a topic worth exploring in future research.

Finally, psychological journals as well as management/organizational reports are frequently siloed, preventing the exchange of ideas. A common approach could systematize the knowledge of the topic analyzed in this paper.

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