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Preliminary Master Thesis Report

- Motivational Climate, Attitudes  
Toward Change and the  
mediating role of Mindset -

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## Introduction

We live in a rapidly changing world where employees, like organizations, have to adapt to changing demands from their environment in order to succeed.

Organizational changes vary in its depth and may be both intentional and unintentional. However, studies indicate that up to sixty percent of all planned change processes tend to fail (Meany and Wilson, 2009; in Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). A review article by Choi (2011) argues that employees' attitudes toward change may help us understand why some change processes succeed while others fail. Therefore, this study seeks to explore antecedents of attitudes toward change and how these factors can help us understand why some employees are more positive to change than others.

According to traditional Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) (Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992a, 1992b), motivational climate at work refers to how employees perceptions of how success is defined at work, and has shown to predict outcomes such as goal orientations, work engagement, work performance, stress and turnover intention (Nerstad, 2012). In addition, studies suggest that motivational climate may influence employees' work-related attitudes (i.e. Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Nerstad, 2012; Harwood et al., 2015). Further, motivational climate may influence people's mindsets (Ommundsen, 2001b). While people with fixed mindsets tend to believe that human attributes are more or less fixed traits, people who hold a growth mindset seems to be more inclined to believe that all people, no matter what, can change significantly (Dweck, 2012a). Research also indicates that development of a growth mindset may boost employees' motivation, and achievements during challenging transitions (Levy et al., 1998; Dweck, 2012a).

Most research on motivational climate and mindset is conducted in sports- and education settings. As it of interest to further investigate the interplay of the concepts in an organizational setting, this study contributes to existing literature by addressing how motivational climate at work and employees' mindsets may influence employees' attitudes toward change. This research is important to strengthen our overall understanding of how motivational factors can influence organizational change processes.

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## Attitudes Toward Change

When employees first are exposed to some sort of information about a change process, they form certain beliefs about the change (Lines, 2005). These beliefs, or reactions, to organizational change may range from excitement and happiness to more negative attitudes such as anger and fear. The different kinds of reactions are regarded as normal since the change process involves going from known to the unknown (Bovey and Hede, 2001; in Vakola et al, 2003).

Attitudes reflect a person's tendency to feel, think or behave in a certain way towards something (Arnold and Randall, 2010). Lines (2005) argues that attitudes toward change can be thought of as employees overall evaluation of the change. According to a review article by Bouckennooghe (2010), previous studies have referred to attitudes toward change using various labels and definitions of the construct (i.e. readiness for change, resistance to change, cynicism about organizational change, commitment to change, openness to change, acceptance of change, coping with change, adjustment to change). The different labels have been used more or less interchangeably and the authors of this study therefore find it appropriate to include the different approaches in a more unifying sense of the term. Thus, this study will be more in line with Lines (2005) positive-negative perspective on attitudes toward change.

Elizur and Guttman (1976; in Vakola et al., 2003) argue that attitudes toward change generally consist of a person's cognitions about change, affective reactions to change, and behavioural tendency toward change. These dimensions of attitudes toward change (cognitive, affective and behavioural) are also supported by Dunham and colleagues (1989). The affective dimension relates to the feelings a person has towards the change, which involves evaluation and emotions. This component is often expressed as like or dislike for the change. The cognitive component of an attitude towards change consists of information a person possesses about the change, which is based upon what a person believes is true. The behavioural tendency is related to how a person intends to behave toward the change process (Dunham et al., 1989; Abdul Rashid et al., 2003). The development of attitudes toward the change is a crucial part of the change process, because, attitudes can be difficult to change once they are established (Abdul Rashid et al., 2003). Previous research has indicated that positive attitudes towards change are vital for organizational change processes to succeed (i.e. Eby et al., 2000; Gilmore & Barnett, 1992; Kotter, 1996). Further, studies suggests that

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negative attitudes toward change may lead to dysfunctional outcomes such as stress, low job satisfaction and reduced job commitment (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991; Vakola, et al., 2003). However, despite Abdul Rashid's (2003) concerns about the possibility to change employees attitudes to change, there are studies which has shown more promising results. For example, a longitudinal study by Bommer and colleagues (2005) revealed that work environments characterized by transformational leadership behaviour over time might have an impact on employees' attitudes to change.

Even though some research has found employee's personality traits to have a significant relationship to their attitudes toward change, most research has emphasized attitudes towards change to be more state-like and dependent on situational factors (Choi, 2011). The next sections suggest how different situational factors at work (e.g. motivational climate) can influence employees' attitudes toward change.

## **The role of Motivational Climate**

### ***Motivational Climate***

When discussing motivational climate it is important to be aware of the difference between *organizational motivational climates* and *psychological motivational climates*. While organizational climate refers to how the unit or group of employees perceive the work environment, psychological climate represents an individual's perception of its environment (Parker et al., 2003; Schulte et al., 2006). The organizational climate is assumed to relate to the psychological climate as a common organizational climate only occurs if individuals within the organization share the same perceptions of the work (Schulte et al., 2006). In this study we measure motivational climate at an individual level where we are interested in employees individual outcomes. Thus, this study primarily focuses on motivational climates as psychological climates. What we refer to as psychological climate is argued to origin from Kurt Lewin's (1936; in Parker et al., 2003) notion of life *space* in relation to individuals' motivational and affective reactions towards change. How individuals perceive the psychological motivational climate may affect outcomes such as motivation, work-related attitudes, well-being and performance (Parker et al., 2003). Further, a study by Martin and colleagues (2005) indicates that how employees perceive their

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psychological climate at work may have consequences for how they adapt to organizational change.

Even though there are several different perspectives and directions within the field of motivational climate, this study focus mainly on the theoretical approach of the traditional AGT where John G. Nicholls and Carole Ames is considered to be of the most influential scholars. AGT is regarded to be quite useful compared to many other motivational theories as it offers a suitable framework to investigate outcomes as a result of the employee-environment interplay (Nerstad, 2012). As a result of previous research and conceptualizations of the term, mainly through AGT, we may explain motivational climate as employees' perceptions of how success and failure are defined on the basis of the policies, practices, and procedures at work (Ames, 1992a; Schneider & Reichers, 1983 in Nerstad, 2012). Thus, the employees' perceptions of its environment and situations at the workplace will affect the motivational climate. The motivational climate at work may affect employees' goal setting, how their achievement are to be evaluated, and further, how employees are expected to relate to work-related tasks and their colleagues (Ames, 1992a, 1992b).

According to AGT, motivational climate can be characterized by two basic dimensions: *a mastery climate* and *a performance climate* (Ames, 1992a, 1992b). Whether the workplace is characterized by a mastery- or performance climate depends on the employee's subjective experience of the environment (Nicholls, 1984; Nerstad, 2012). There may be several factors contributing in the development of the motivational climate at work. However, previous studies suggest leaders to be the most important facilitator for what kind of motivational climate to be developed (Ames 1992a, 1992b; Nerstad, 2012).

### ***Mastery Climate***

A mastery climate promotes aspects such as effort, self-improvement and cooperation. In a typical mastery climate, employees view the work process in light of learning and development, and motivation is gained through mastery (Nerstad, 2012). Previous research has also suggested mastery climate to promote more adaptive behaviour such as increased effort in demanding situations (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Studies have indicated that mastery climate facilitates for positive outcomes such as engagement, increased performance, intrinsic interest and well-being (e.g., Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Valentini &

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Rudisill, 2006; Lau & Nie, 2008; Harwood et al., 2015). As mentioned, research also suggests that motivational climate at work can predict work related attitudes. More specifically, a perceived mastery climate is thought to promote positive attitudes among employees (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Harwood et al., 2015). Further, as indicated by previous studies, emphasis on mastery and development in work teams may have positive consequences for employees' likeliness of adaptation to unforeseen change (LePine, 2005).

### ***Performance Climate***

In contrast to a mastery climate, a performance climate at work tend to be characterized by a more egoistic motivation, where social comparison is in focus. Thus, the presence of a performance climate increases employees' interests in comparing their own achievements with others (Nerstad, 2012). As a result, a typical performance climate may foster undesirable behaviour such as avoiding difficult tasks and searching for shortcuts (Ames, 1992a; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Further, a performance climate has been suggested as a contributor to more serious consequences as ill-health, stress and burnout among employees (Nerstad, 2012). Unlike mastery climate, a performance climate is assumed to foster negative work related attitudes among employees (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Harwood et al., 2015).

Based on these reflections, the following hypotheses are suggested:

*H1) Perceived mastery climate is positively related to attitudes toward change*

*H2) Perceived performance climate is negatively related to attitudes toward change*



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## The mediating role of Mindset

### *Mindset*

In order to make sense of and cope with one's surroundings, employees often establish theories to explain their environment. Unlike theory based on research, these theories are often implicit, explained by Ross (1989) as knowledge that are schematic structured, and organize how to make sense of something. These schemas are often called mindsets or implicit theories of intelligence, described as people's perceptions of attributes such as intelligence and personality (Dweck, 2012a).

Nicholls (1984) suggested two different ways in which ability can be judged. One way is to compare one's abilities to others, the other way is to judge it based on one's previous performance and development of new knowledge. Several scholars have emphasized the importance of these cognitive schemas for one's development of behaviour, and the desire to connect these systems to different events as they arise (Kelly, 1955; Piaget 1928 in Burnette, 2013). Based on these theories, it is further suggested that whether one's abilities and attributes are malleable or fixed are influenced both by social perception and self-regulation (Molden & Dweck, 2006).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) introduced the theories of entity- and incremental theory of intelligence, today often referred to as fixed and growth mindset (Dweck, 2012a). The kind of mindset an employee has is likely to influence the beliefs he/she has about his/her ability to learn new things at work (Ommundsen, 2001b). Thus, employees' mindset may affect one's attitudes toward challenges. As change is often perceived as a challenging situation (Furst & Cable, 2008) it is likely to assume that the employee's mindset can have implications for their attitudes toward change.

Studies have indicated that employees through self-persuasion can develop and adopt a relatively sustainable growth mindset (Heslin, Latham, & VandeWalle, 2005). Further, Heslin and VandeWalle (2008) suggests that leaders holding a growth mindset are more inclined to both recognise, and help employees to change. As mentioned, leaders are among the most important facilitators for motivational climate at work. As emphasized by Ommundsen (2001b), it has been suggested that motivational climate influence employees mindset. Research indicated that a focus on results promotes development of fixed- whereas focus on

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development promotes a growth mindset (Ames & Archer, 1987; Mueller & Dweck, 1998 in Ommundsen, 2012b).

### ***Fixed Mindset***

The different implicit theories heavily influence whether you are able to, and believe that you can learn and develop (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ommundsen, 2001b). A fixed mindset/entity theory is as mentioned characterized by people who believe that how intelligent they are and are able to be, is predestined and not possible to change (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). As a result, people with a fixed mindset, tend not to engage in challenges as much as those with a growth mindset. Blackwell and colleagues (2007) found that one reason for this is their fear of being exposed as unintelligent or lacking ability. This way of coping with challenges often leads to a somehow defensive behaviour, as people with a fixed mindset often perceive failure as proof of their own lack of abilities, and become less motivated (Blackwell et al., 2007). A previous study by Yngvar Ommundsen (2001b) indicates that employees working in a typical performance climate tend to be more inclined to develop a fixed mindset. A performance climate tends to emphasize comparison of results and value the result higher than the process (Ames, 1992a, 1992b). In other words, employees that perceive their work climate as a performance climate may be hindered to see the relation between effort and result.

As mentioned, a fixed mindset can make employees less inclined to engage in challenges. Employees holding a fixed mindset are more likely to develop anxiety and be less satisfied at work (Ommundsen, 2001a). Holding a fixed mindset have also shown to be detrimental for believing in achievement (Ommundsen, 2001b). Those with a fixed mindset, tend not to believe they will benefit from new challenges and seldom engage in things they don't know whether they can manage or not (Dweck, 2012b). Organizational change is often associated with encountering the unknown (Bovey and Hede, 2001; in Vakola et al, 2003) and often demands extra effort from the employees. Based on this, and the implications that employees holding a fixed mindset tend not to engage in challenges, one can assume that employees with a fixed mindset will be more inclined to establish negative attitudes toward change.

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### ***Growth Mindset***

People with a growth mindset on the other hand, believe that their qualities can be developed through effort and practice (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Hence, employees with a growth mindset tend to acknowledge the link between hard work and results. Contrary to those with a fixed mindset, people with a growth mindset tend to seek more challenges, and view them as learning opportunities. Whereas those with a fixed mindset look at challenges as an opportunity to be exposed as incompetent, people with a growth mindset look at it as a natural part of the learning process. Due to this, those with a growth mindset have shown to be better able to deal with setbacks in an effective way (Dweck, 2012b). For employees, change processes are often characterized by changing the way of working (Erwin & Garman, 2010). Filstad (2010) suggests that learning is closely related to change, as it often requires new ways of doing things. For employees, this means a need for both adoption and learning of new skills to do their work (Ayas (1999; in Filstad, 2010). As argued, employees with a growth mindset view challenges as an opportunity to learn and develop themselves (Dweck, 2012a). Due to the implications that change is about moving from the known to the unknown (Bovey and Hede, 2001; in Vakola et al, 2003), change is often associated with challenging situations. Hence, a growth mindset can be assumed to increase one's inclination to engage in change and have positive attitudes toward it.

Ommundsen (2001b) argues that perceived mastery climate at work may impact employees mindsets. Unlike a performance climate, a mastery climate tend to encouraging growth mindset. When the learning environment at work is characterized by a mastery climate, employees are more inclined to see the value of effort and development. Through focus and appreciation of hard work and progress, employees are more likely to see the value of effort, and believe that they can change (Ommundsen, 2001b).

Based on these reflections, the following hypotheses are suggested:

*H3) A growth mindset mediates the relationship suggested in H1*

*H4 A fixed mindset mediates the relationship suggested in H2*

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## Summarizing hypothesis model

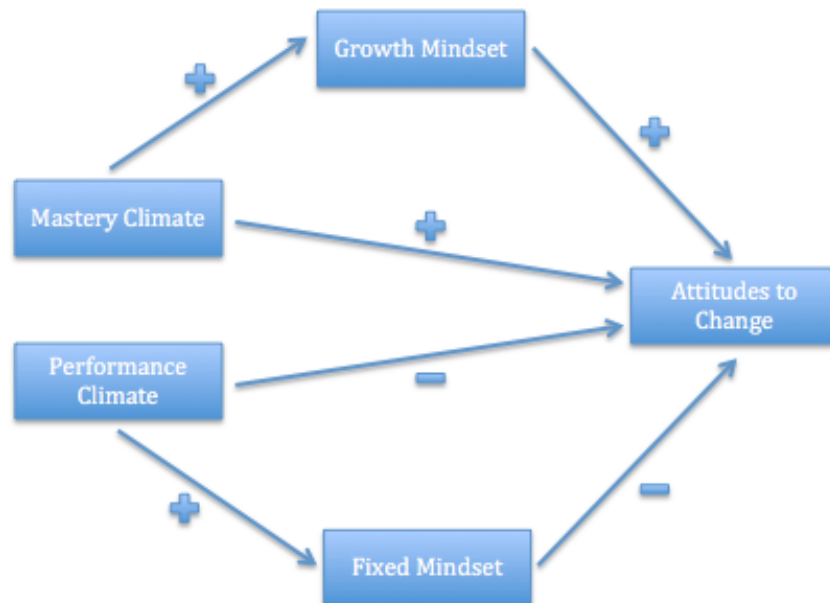
The proposed hypotheses are listed below, together with a summarizing hypothesis model.

*H1) Perceived mastery climate is positively related to attitudes towards change*

*H2) Perceived performance climate is negatively related to attitudes towards change*

*H3) A growth mindset mediates the relationship suggested in H1*

*H4) A fixed mindset mediates the relationship suggested in H2*



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## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The proposed hypothesis model was tested by a quantitative approach, using a cross-sectional research design, where the participants were asked to fill out self-assessment questionnaires. To secure anonymity of the participants and ensuring ethical guidelines to be followed, we got an approval from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) before the data collection started. 1104 (N=1104) employees in the financial sector in Norway, including 248 middle-line managers, contributed to the study. In order to reduce the effect of possible measurement errors, the questionnaire was two folded and data were gathered at two different times. Further, following Daniel Kahneman's (2011) suggestions, the survey were conducted in Norwegian as participants of a study should be able to answer in their mother tongue in order to increase the reliability of the results. The participants were asked to respond to all statements using a 7-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). In addition to measures of motivational climate, mindset and attitudes towards change, the participants were asked to fill in personal and demographic data such as gender, age, educational background and work experience. This was done in order to control for the possibility that sociodemographic differences may influence the results.

### *Questionnaires*

**Perceived Motivational Climate.** Motivational climate were assessed by the Motivational Climate at Work Questionnaire (MCWQ) by Nerstad and colleagues (2013). The measure has shown considerable psychometric support. The MCWQ Chronbach's alphas were found to exceed 0.80, and have been considered to have good internal consistency. In other words, the measure seems to be consistent in measuring perceptions of motivational climate at work (Nerstad et al., 2013). The questionnaire includes eight statements measuring performance climate including: *"In my department/work group, there exists a competitive rivalry among the employees"*. Further, the questionnaire also includes six statements assessing mastery climate. An example of a mastery climate statement is: *"In my department/work group, one is encouraged to cooperate and exchange thoughts and ideas mutually"*.

**Mindset.** Mindset was assessed using the well-known Implicit Person

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Theory Scale by Levy and colleagues (1998), which consists of eight statements. The questionnaire measure fixed mindset by statements as for example: *“The kind of person someone is something basic about them, and it can’t be changed very much”*. Contrarily, the questionnaire measures growth mindset by statements as for example: *“People can substantially change the kind of person they are”*. In the process of developing this measure, five validation studies were done in order to ensure the items to measure what they are supposed to measure (Levy et al., 1998). Further, the study showed high reliability scores supported by an Chronbach’s alpha of 0.93 (Levy et al., 1998).

**Attitudes Toward Change.** In order to measure attitudes toward organizational change, Dunham and colleagues (1989) Attitude Toward Change Instrument were used. The measure includes eighteen statements, six for each of the three components (cognitive-, affective- and behavioural attitudes). The measure includes statements as for example: *“change usually benefits the organization” (cognitive)*, *“I don't like change” (affective)* and *“I intend to do whatever possible to support change” (behavioural)*. Also this measure and its dimensions has shown to be consistent, revealing coefficient alpha’s around 0.80 for the three factors (cognitive, affective and behavioural) (Dunham et al., 1989).

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## Appendix 1

Thesis progression

