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Master Thesis

at BI Norwegian Business School

**Perceived Organizational Support and
Attitudes Toward Organizational
Change: The Moderating Role of
Perceived Supervisor Support.**

GRA1903 - Master Thesis

**Master of Science in Leadership and
Organizational Psychology**

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Date of Submission:
27.08.2012

This thesis is a part of the MSc programme at BI Norwegian Business School.
The school takes no responsibility for the methods used, results found and
conclusions drawn.

Acknowledgements

Although our names are prominently displayed on the title page, this thesis would not have been possible without the unconditional support of a number of brilliant people in our lives. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Associate Professor Anders Dysvik and Doctoral Candidate Robert Buch with BI Norwegian Business School for clear guidance and their open-door policy during the work with our thesis. We greatly appreciate the time and effort put forward by the managers and employees of the two organizations participating in the study. Additionally, we thank every single one who willingly let us bounce our ideas off of them. Finally, we will never forget the emotional and financial support received from our respective families during our studies.

Jo Andreas Nordli

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Abstract

Research on organizational change has identified the crucial role of the employees in whether or not a change initiative is successful. Due to the calling for more research on antecedents to change attitudes, the purpose of this study was to investigate perceived organizational support as an antecedent to attitudes toward organizational change, and whether such a relationship would be moderated by perceived supervisor support. The results from two cross-sectional surveys among 258 employees in two Norwegian private-sector companies showed that there is a direct positive relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change. As hypothesized, this relationship is moderated by perceived supervisor support. The form of the moderation revealed a positive relationship only for high levels of perceived supervisor support. Directions for future research and implications for practice are discussed.

Introduction

Organizational change is a hot topic in the organizational research literature. A number of studies provide good reasons as to why this is so; that being able to undertake successful organizational change is an important competence in today's business world (Parish, Cadwallader, and Busch 2008), that it is important to understand contributors to successful change initiatives (Bommer, Rich, and Rubin 2005), that many change initiatives fail to succeed (Choi 2011), and that change initiatives are risky business, of which we still know too little (Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell 2007). Choi (2011) reports that an increasing number of researchers argue that the high percentage of failed change initiatives are due to the change leaders' underestimation of the importance of the individuals' role. This is in accordance with Lines (2005) and Miller, Johnson, and Grau (1994), who states that the employees' attitudes toward the initiative will play a large role in whether or not the change initiative succeeds or fails.

Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell (2007) point to the substantial amount of literature available on individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward change. This is highly relevant as organizations face continuous change in today's competitive environment, making the ability to adapt a crucial one (Lines 2005; Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou 2004; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Since successful implementation depends in part on employees' reactions to change (Choi 2011), employees need to be able to cope with change in the workplace. Furthermore, researchers point to the importance of understanding individuals' reactions to change in an organization (Bovey and Hede 2001; Judge et al. 1999; Piderit 2000). Accordingly, "[e]mployees' attitudes toward change are a key component to whether an organization's change efforts are either successful or fail" (Elias 2009, 39).

Yet other researchers have stated the need for more research on the micro-level, people-oriented perspective on change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000), more specifically on how perceptions and individual differences might contribute to increased understanding of attitudes

toward organizational change. This is a reasonable statement, recognizing the importance of individuals for the success of change initiatives. By learning more about how individuals might be helpful in achieving success, and how individuals become willing to support and aid the initiative, organizations should be better able to plan and execute successful change initiatives.

Attitudes toward organizational change have been reviewed by several researchers (e.g., Armenakis and Bedeian 1999; Bouckenooghe 2010; Choi 2011), and different attitudinal constructs have been examined to grasp the complexity of employees' attitudes toward organizational change. Readiness for change (Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder 1993), commitment to change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), openness to change (Wanberg and Banas 2000), and cynicism about organizational change (Reichers, Wanous, and Austin 1997) provide different information about employees' evaluation of and concern about organizational change, as well as representing the diversity captured in these attitudes (Choi 2011).

This study will make use of social exchange theory (Blau 1964) to grasp some of the complexity surrounding attitudes toward organizational change. Social exchange theory has been used to explain employees' relations to their organization. Employees develop global beliefs about to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. They do this in order to evaluate the organizations' readiness to reward work effort, as well as to meet their own socio-emotional needs (Eisenberger et al. 2002). These global beliefs are both about the organization and the supervisor, and concern whether they will provide needed resources, aid employees in their work, reward their effort, and whether actions will be taken to secure the welfare of the employees. These beliefs are labeled perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support, respectively (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002).

Attitudes toward a specific item are usually described as a function of the individuals' affections, behaviors, and cognitions about the item in question, and this framework have also been applied in organizational change research (e.g., Argyris and Schön 1974, 1978; Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder 1993;

Ashforth and Mael 1998; Brower and Abolafia 1995; Lewin 1952; Piderit 2000; Vince and Broussine 1996; Watson 1982). Researchers have investigated antecedents of attitudes toward organizational change, including locus of control, growth need strength, internal work motivation (Elias 2009), personality, emotional intelligence (Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou 2004), and organizational commitment (Peccei, Giangreco, and Sebastiano 2011). However, as the research on possible antecedents is still at an early stage, this study will examine perceived organizational support as a possible antecedent of attitudes toward organizational change. Lines (2005) and Piderit (2000) have stated that the unpredictability of change situations induce negative reactions among employees. Perceived organizational support is based on perceptions of procedural justice (Moorman, Blakely, and Niehoff 1998), and it is likely that perceptions of support from the organization should attenuate the psychological unpredictability of the change, as perceptions of procedural justice should reduce the anxiety for negative outcomes of the change. Based on this premise we expect that employees' perceptions of organizational support will relate positively to their formation of attitudes toward organizational change. Furthermore, Bommer, Rich, and Rubin (2005) found that managers' behaviors affect employees' attitudes toward change over time. Managers are often portrayed as important to the formation of employees' attitudes (e.g., Lines 2005; Neves 2011; Piderit 2000), and we expect that the supervisors will play a crucial role in the formation of attitudes toward organizational change. Moreover, it is likely that supervisor support will strengthen the relation between perceived organizational support and employee outcomes (Maertz et al. 2007), so we set out to investigate the moderating role played by perceived supervisor support on the relation between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change. Additionally, the study responds to the call for more research on how employees' perceptions influence attitudes toward organizational change (Judge et al. 1999; Wanberg and Banas 2000).

Furthermore, as demonstrated by supervisor organizational embodiment (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, and Becker 2010), pertaining the degree to which an employee identifies his or her supervisor with the organization, employees

separate between their perceptions of the organization and their supervisor. Employees should perceive their relationship with their immediate supervisor separate from and parallel to their relationship with the organization. In this case, the perceived supervisor support should act as a condition under which the outcomes of perceived organizational support are either strengthened or weakened. In other words, the perception of supervisor support would either amplify the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, or weaken the relationship. Hence, following the research of Maertz et al. (2007), this study will test the model depicted in Figure 1 in which perceived supervisor support is used as a moderator of the relationship between perceived organizational support as dependent variable, and the criterion variable; attitudes toward organizational change.

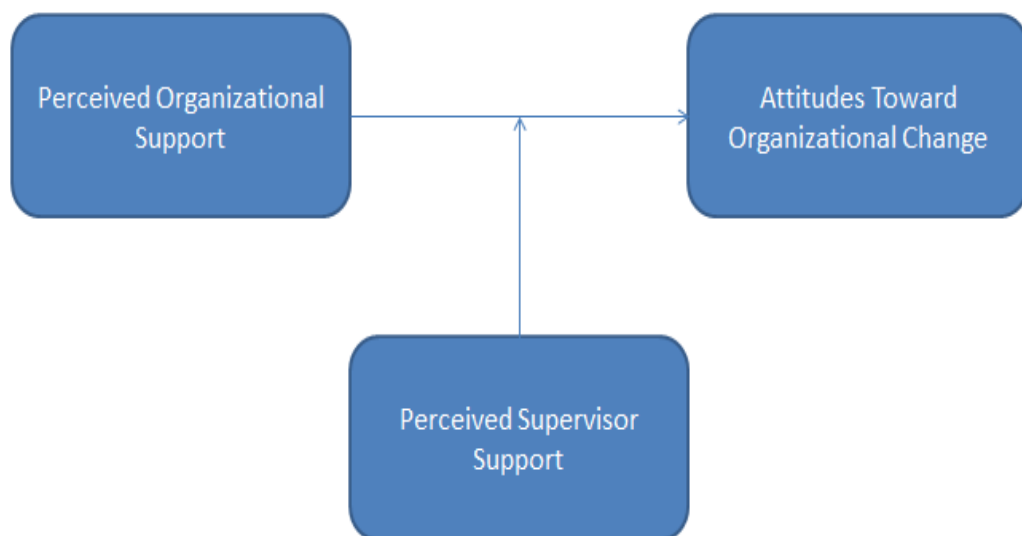


Figure 1: *The research model*

The theoretical contribution provided by this study will be to the research on attitudes toward organizational change by means of social exchange theory, focusing on individuals' perceptions of organizational and supervisor support, thereby contributing to the micro-level, people-oriented perspective on change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000).

Theory and Hypothesis

The following will present arguments for a direct relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change by presenting relevant literature on each of the constructs in turn. Relevant literature on perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change is presented, as well as arguments for the moderating role of perceived supervisor support on the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change.

Perceived Organizational Support

Social exchange theory (Blau 1964) suggest that employees develop beliefs about to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. One of these beliefs is labeled perceived organizational support. This perception is a global belief, and stems from employees having the impression that an organization is either positively or negatively inclined toward them (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Social exchange theory suggests that this impression is based upon the personification of the organization as described by Levinson (1965). Employees will observe actions taken by agents of the organization and see them as expressions of the organizations' intent toward them, rather than as actions by individuals acting on their own grounds. Based on their observations, employees in turn form a perception of whether or not their organization is supportive. Further, according to the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization is characterized by the mutual exchange of valuable exchange items. For the employee, valuable exchange items have been identified as the fulfillment of socio-emotional needs (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), organizational justice (Ambrose and Schminke 2003), procedural justice (Moorman, Blakely, and Niehoff 1998), and participation in decision making (Allen, Shore, and Griffeth 2003). For the organization, valuable exchange items received from the employee include increased performance (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006) and commitment (Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), as well as reduced turnover (Allen, Shore, and Griffeth 2003; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002).

Attitudes Toward Organizational Change

The importance of understanding individuals' reactions to change is based on the notion that the employees' reactions to change are crucial for the organization's ability to adapt in continuous environments (e.g., Bovey and Hede 2001; Judge et al. 1999; Lines 2005; Piderit 2000; Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou 2004; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Hence, a further understanding of antecedents to attitudes toward organizational change is warranted.

A positive attitude toward organizational change should lead an employee to engage in activities aimed at aiding a change initiative (Lines 2005).

Admittedly, employees might have some reservations against a change initiative, often caused by fear or insecurity regarding the consequences of the initiative (Oreg 2006), or even irrational thoughts about the change (Bovey and Hede 2001). Still, an employee should form positive attitudes toward an organizational change, based on the beliefs attached to the perception of organizational support, for several reasons. First, based on the perception of support from the organization and trust in a long-term exchange relationship, the employee would believe that the organization initiates a change process in order to improve the working situation for the employees. In this sense, the initiative should be seen as a resource, which in turn should lead employees to reciprocate by means of enhancing their attitudes toward organizational change (Blau 1964). This should especially be so in times of organizational change, which is a challenge for the organization that requires the aid of the employees (e.g., Bovey and Hede 2001; Judge et al. 1999; Piderit 2000). Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) an employee should both feel obliged to aid the change initiative, as well as perceive it to be in the best interest of him- or herself, in order to sustain the exchange relationship with the organization. Accordingly, an employee would utilize positive attitudes toward organizational change as an exchange item in the reciprocal relationship with the organization.

Second, as perception of organizational support is a global belief (Eisenberger et al. 1986), it seems logical that this belief would affect employees' attitudes. Following the lines of Thompson and Hunt (1996), beliefs both form the

attitude, as well as being part of the attitude itself. Also, according to Antoni (2004), beliefs shape employees' behavior during change. It is important for organizations that the employees hold positive beliefs about change such that the employees act in a supportive and constructive manner. Therefore, organizations need to influence employees' beliefs about change to have support for the change. Accordingly, the belief that the organization is supportive and positively inclined towards one self should foster the formation of positive attitudes toward organizational change.

Third, the perception of support from the organization affects the employees' feelings toward and within the organization (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). In turn, this should relate to employees' expectations about the organization's ability both to manage the change process and its possible outcomes (Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder 1993; Lines 2005; Oreg 2006), and thus to the employees' attitudes toward organizational change. For instance, an employee thinking that a change might result in a better working environment, and believing the preparations and decision process to have been thorough, should form more positive attitudes toward organizational change (Lines 2005). Hence, an employee perceiving a high level of support from the organization should more likely trust the organization and think more positively about the organizations' ability to make good judgments than one perceiving less organizational support.

Consequently, we expect perceived organizational support to be directly and positively related to the formation of attitudes toward organizational change. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organizational support is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Supervisor Support

Arguments have been made for the direct positive relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change,

and we expect that perceived supervisor support acts as a condition under which this relationship is strengthened.

Perceived supervisor support evolves as the employee believes the supervisor to hold a positive view of him- or herself, based on support and resources received from the supervisor. The employee associates these perceived inclinations by the supervisor with the perceived inclination by the organization. An employee is likely to assume that the supervisor has a close link to upper management, thereby fortifying the link between supervisors' and organizations' inclination toward him- or herself (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Studies have shown that perceived supervisor support is related to work-related outcomes such as turnover cognitions and turnover behavior (Maertz et al. 2007), and performance (e.g., Gagnon and Michael 2004; Kuvaas and Dysvik 2010; Neves 2011; Pazy and Ganzach 2009).

We acknowledge that Eisenberger et al. (2002) identifies perceived supervisor support as an antecedent of perceived organizational support. However, other researchers have argued for a more complex relationship between the two perceptions of support (Maertz et al. 2007). Considerable research has been conducted on the relationship between the two perceptions, and they have been found to be distinct constructs (e.g., Eisenberger et al. 2002; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Yoon and Thye 2000). Moreover, they hold independent relationships with outcomes such as turnover cognitions and commitment (Maertz et al. 2007). Since they are distinct constructs, it is reasonable to imagine that even though an employee does not perceive much supervisor support, other elements might still sustain an employees' perceived organizational support, and vice versa. Maertz et al. (2007) found support for this argument, using a model in which perceived supervisor support was only partially mediated through perceived organizational support, showing that perceived supervisor support had direct significant relationships with employees' turnover cognitions. Thus, it is likely that an employee's perception of supervisor support will moderate the relationship between perceived organizational support and certain outcomes, in this case employees' attitudes toward organizational change. The idea that the supervisor is more

prominent to the employee in everyday life is supported by Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2007). According to them, an employee forms both distal and proximal relationships, with the senior management and the immediate supervisor, respectively. They state that “[t]he role of the immediate manager may be one of facilitating the fulfillment of, or breaking the terms of the more distal exchange.” (20). Furthermore, Neves (2011) states:

[...] when employees feel supported by their supervisors, they should be more willing to embrace situations that are important to the organization and that, at the same time, include a certain level of risk, such as major organizational changes (439).

It is the supervisors who bring HR policies to life (Purcell and Hutchinson 2007), and the employees form attitudes in the workplace based on whether they perceive themselves to be viewed as assets or costs (Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider 2008). This should also be applicable in the case of attitudes toward organizational change. Following this line of thought, the alignment of perceived organizational and supervisor support should interact to strengthen the attitudes toward organizational change. As such, the perception of supervisor support will act as a condition under which the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change is accentuated. Hence, as an employee might cognitively separate the supervisor from the organization (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro and Shore 2007; Lavelle et al. 2009), perceived supervisor support should act as a moderator of the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change will be moderated by perceived supervisor support – the higher the perceived supervisor support, the stronger the relationship.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The sample consisted of respondents from one private-sector organization in Norway during the fall of 2011, and another private-sector organization in Norway during the spring of 2012. The two organizations were highly diverse in terms of structure, size, and industry. The first organization is a privately held business group operating across different industries, with more than 1000 employees. The other organization is a family-owned medium-sized company operating within one industry, with less than 300 employees. The study made use of a cross-sectional design, collecting data at two points in time with one month interval in order to reduce the potential for common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). At time 1 data were collected on perceived organizational and supervisor support, while at time 2 data were collected on attitudes toward organizational change. All employees receiving the survey were informed that their responses would be treated anonymously and confidentially in accordance with the requirements of Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Web-based surveys (Confermit) were submitted to a total of 1348 employees, and only those respondents finalizing surveys at both time 1 and time 2 were included in the study. This produced a total of 258 complete responses, corresponding to an overall response rate of 19.14 percent. Of these, 143 (55.4 percent) were women and 115 were men (44.6 percent). Age were distributed in six groups within the sample; 31 respondents (12 percent) under the age of 25; 94 respondents (36.4 percent) at the age 25-34; 75 respondents (29.1 percent) at the age 35-44; 38 respondents (14.7 percent) at the age 45-54; 18 respondents (7 percent) at the age 55-64; and 2 respondents (0.8 percent) over the age of 65. The distribution is depicted in Figure 2.

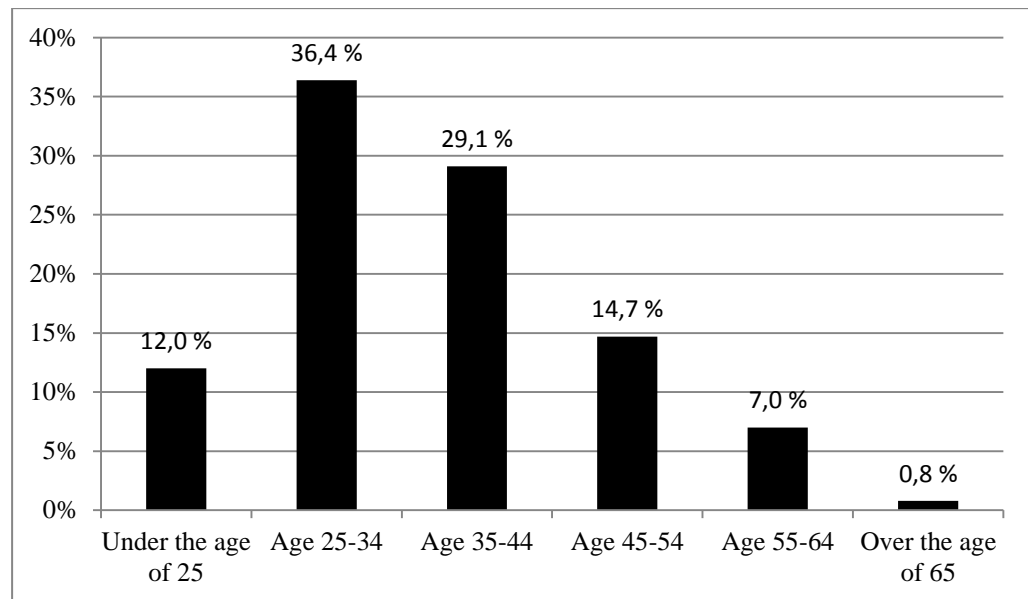


Figure 2: *Distribution of respondents within age groups*

Measures

All items were measured on five-point Likert response scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All items were coded such that a higher score indicates a higher level of the focal construct. A list of all items used are included in Appendix A.

Dependent variable

Attitudes toward organizational change were measured by Dunham et al.'s (1989) 18-item instrument. Example items are "I usually benefit from change" and "I usually resist new ideas" (reverse scored).

Independent variable

Perceived organizational support was measured by Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli's (2001) eight-item instrument. Example items are "My organization really cares about my well-being" and "My organization strongly considers my goals and values".

Moderator variable

Perceived supervisor support was measured by Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli's (2001) four-item instrument. Example items are "My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values" and "My supervisor shows very little concern for me" (reverse scored).

Control variables

First, we control for age as we want to be able to control for the notion that there are generational differences in terms of work attitudes (Twenge 2010). Second, as Sturges, Conway, and Liefoghe (2010) found differences between men and women in their reactions to different levels of perceived organizational support, gender was included as a control variable in the study. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable, where female was coded “0” and male was coded “1”. Third, following the research of Kuvaas (2008), who reports perceived organizational support to have a moderating role on the relationship between perceptions of developmental HR policies and work outcomes, we included organizational affiliation as a control variable. Organizational affiliation was measured as a dichotomous variable, where the first organization was coded “0”, and the second organization was coded “1”. Hence, we aim to reduce the potential for spurious relationships based on employees from the two firms having different perceptions of their firms’ HR policies.

Analysis

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, we made use of LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993) to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Since the factor structure for perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001), and attitudes toward organizational change (Dunham et al. 1989) have been reported previously, we focused our effort to formally test whether our data were structured according to our research model. Asymptotic and polychoric correlation matrixes, as well as robust maximum likelihood estimates, were calculated to conduct the CFA. Thus, we have not made use of ordinary product-moment correlations, following the recommendation of Jöreskog (2005), that ordinal data should not be treated as continuous data. Second, following the recommendation of Farrell (2010), we conducted paired-constructs tests in order to obtain the discriminant validity of the constructs. Third, the hypotheses were tested using stepwise multiple regression analysis (Cohen et al. 2003). Fourth, prior to the computation of the interaction term, the variables were centered by subtracting the mean of the variable from each

score, thus reducing potential multicollinearity issues (Aiken and West 1991). Fifth, low versus high scores on attitudes toward organizational change and perceived supervisor support was plotted, using non-standardized scores one standard deviation above and below the mean. This was in order to follow the advice of Cohen et al. (2003), to analyze the significance of the interactions more thoroughly. In the sixth and final step of the analysis, *t*-tests were used to determine whether the slopes' difference from zero, and from each other, were statistically significant.

Results

The three-factor model represents the full scales of the three constructs; perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, and attitudes toward organizational change. The CFA is reported in Table 1. The results indicated that this three-factor model represents a relatively well-defined measurement model ($\chi^2 [402] = 765.63, p < 0.01; \chi^2/df = 1.90; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.07$). The paired-constructs tests indicated that the hypothesized three-factor model holds significantly better fit over other more parsimonious models. First, the items for perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support were set to load on a single factor ($\Delta\chi^2_{[2]} = 415.81, p < 0.01$); second, the items for perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change were set to load on a single factor ($\Delta\chi^2_{[2]} = 2755.43, p < 0.01$); and third, the items for perceived supervisor support and attitudes toward organizational change were set to load on a single factor ($\Delta\chi^2_{[2]} = 2895.95, p < 0.01$). Accordingly, support for the independence of our constructs was obtained.

Table 1: Results of confirmatory factor analyses

Model	Chi-square	<i>df</i>	RMSEA	CFI	NNFI	SRMR
Three factors	765.63	402	0.06	0.97	0.97	0.07
Two factors, collapsing perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support	1181.44	404	0.09	0.93	0.93	0.08
Two factors, collapsing perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change	3521.06	404	0.17	0.73	0.71	0.20
Two factors, collapsing perceived supervisor support and attitudes toward organizational change	3661.58	404	0.18	0.72	0.70	0.22

Note: N = 258

The hypothesized model fit to the data, and following the recommendation of Chin (1998), the factor loadings also need to be reported. Accordingly, the model parameters concerning factor loadings should at least be .60, and ideally .70 or above (Chin 1998). Our model parameters indicated a majority of factor loadings above .60, and only three factor loadings under .55 (see Appendix B). Hence, the majority of the items account for over 60 percent of the variance of the underlying latent construct, whereas three of the items account for less than 55 percent of the variance. Furthermore, items for each factor were combined to create scale indexes by averaging the scale items. The reliability estimates for the final scales ranged from $\alpha = .88$ to $\alpha = .91$, demonstrating high internal consistency. The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability estimates for the variables are reported in Table 2.

When inspecting potential collinearity issues, we relied on Hair et al.'s (2010) statement of using .10 as a threshold for the tolerance values. Multiple and pairwise collinearity were inspected by using SPSS's collinearity diagnostics prior to the multiple regression analysis. The diagnostics showed the lowest tolerance value observed in our items to be .49, which is above the recommended threshold value. Thus, collinearity does not seem to be an issue in our items.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age ^a	1.71	1.12						
2. Gender ^b	0.45	0.50	-.04					
3. Organization ^c	0.31	0.46	-.26**	.28**				
4. POS ^d	3.70	0.81	.07	-.07	.01	(.89)		
5. PSS ^e	4.06	0.98	.11	-.11	-.20**	.60**	(.91)	
6. ATOC ^f	3.81	0.41	.19**	-.01	-.17**	.17**	.11	(.88)

Note: Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are displayed on the diagonal. $N = 258$.

^a "0" = age below 25; "1" = age from 25-34; "2" = age from 35-44; "3" = age from 45-54; "4" = age from 55-64; "5" = age over 64

^b "0" = women; "1" = men

^c "0" = employed in organization one; "1" = employed in organization two

^d "POS" = Perceived organizational support

^e "PSS" = Perceived supervisor support

^f "ATOC" = Attitudes toward organizational change

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

The results of the hierarchical moderated regression analyses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Regression analyses

	ATOC ^f			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Age ^a	.06*	.05*	.05*	.04†
Gender ^b	.03	.04	.04	.04
Organization ^c	-.13	-.14*	-.14*	-.14*
POS ^d		.08**	.10*	.10*
PSS ^e			-.02	.01
POS x PSS				.07*
R ²	.05	.08	.08	.10
Change in R ²		.03**	.00	.02*
F	4.73**	5.48***	4.45**	4.70***

Note: $N = 258$. † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

^a “0” = age below 25; “1” = age from 25-34; “2” = age from 35-44; “3” = age from 45-54; “4” = age from 55-64; “5” = age over 64

^b “0” = women; “1” = men

^c “0” = employed in organization one; “1” = employed in organization two

^d “POS” = Perceived organizational support

^e “PSS” = Perceived supervisor support

^f “ATOC” = Attitudes toward organizational change

Hypothesis 1, that perceptions of organizational support will relate positively to attitudes toward organizational change, was supported. After entering the control variables, perceived organizational support is significantly and positively related to attitudes toward organizational change ($\beta = .08$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2, that the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change will be moderated by perceived supervisor support, is supported by the statistically significant interaction term. Specifically, the results presented in Figure 3 suggest a significant positive association between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, for employees high on perceived supervisor support ($b_{high} = .15$, $p < .001$). However, there seems to be no association for employees low in perceived supervisor support ($b_{low} = .05$, ns). Furthermore, the results suggest significantly different slopes for low versus high levels of perceived supervisor support ($t = 2.36$, $p < 0.01$).

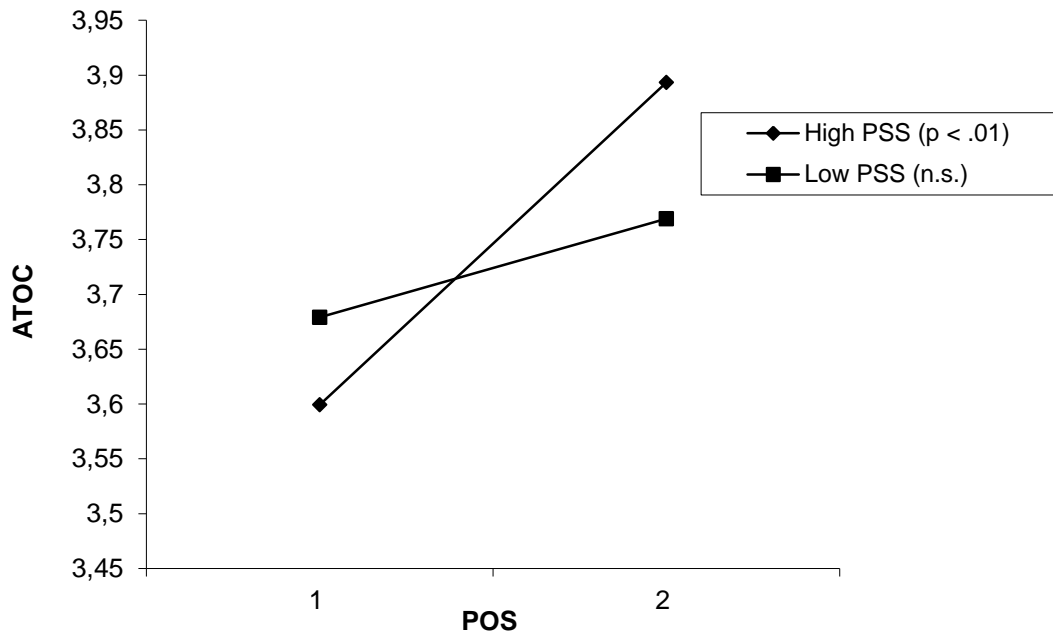


Figure 3: *The moderating role of perceived supervisor support (PSS) on the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and attitudes toward organizational change (ATOC). Perceived organizational support: One standard deviation below the mean = “1”; One standard deviation above the mean = “2”.*

Discussion

This study sought to make a contribution to the research on the micro-level, people-oriented perspective on change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000) by means of social exchange theory. Specifically, perceived organizational support was investigated as an antecedent to attitudes toward organizational change, and perceived supervisor support was investigated as a moderator of this hypothesized relationship.

First, we found a positive direct relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, indicating that employees perceiving much support from the organization are likely to hold positive attitudes toward organizational change. We interpret this finding to suggest that an employee feeling supported and taken care of by the organization will perceive a change initiative to be a resource provided him or her by the organization. This suggestion is in line with Lines’ (2005) view of change as an attitude object, and we therefore draw this link to change as a ‘resource object’. Furthermore, we suggest that the employees feel compelled or obliged to reciprocate the support

from the organization. One way to do this is to support the organization in times of change, which in turn contributes to the formation of positive attitudes toward organizational change. We believe this finding contributes to social exchange theory by showing that employees' perceptions of the relationship with the organization not only affects such elements as behaviors at work (e.g., Maertz et al. 2007), but that it also relates to attitudes toward organizational change.

Second, the association between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change is moderated by perceptions of supervisor support. Moreover, we note that the form of the moderation revealed that the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change is dependent on high levels of perceived supervisor support. High levels of perceived supervisor support will accentuate the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, but low levels of perceived supervisor support will render the association insignificant. This finding supports the arguments made concerning employees' cognitive separation of the supervisor and the organization (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, and Becker 2010). Furthermore, it supports the concepts of distal and proximal exchange relationships presented by Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2007). The prominence of the supervisor compared to the organization in everyday life seems to be strong enough to influence the relationships between perceived organizational support and work-related outcomes, in this case attitudes toward organizational change.

These findings may hold a number of theoretical implications. First, our findings support the idea that positive attitudes toward organizational change are seen as a resource, or a valuable exchange item. We have shown that attitudes toward organizational activities, in this case organizational change, are something an employee might utilize as reciprocation to the organization. Second, in addition to identifying perceptions of organizational support as a possible antecedent to attitudes toward organizational change, we have also identified a boundary condition under which this relationship is accentuated. This study contributes to expanding and combining the fields of both social exchange theory and research on attitudes toward organizational change. Accordingly, this study has responded to the call for more research on micro-level, people-oriented perspectives on

change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000) by means of social exchange theory. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of employees' perceptions of their supportive environment to the formation of attitudes toward organizational change. Third, in line with the findings of Maertz et al. (2007) we successfully made use of a conceptual model in which perceived supervisor support acts as a moderator between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change as the criterion variable.

Limitations and Future Research

The results from this study should be viewed in light of its limitations. We made use of a cross-sectional design and collected our data at two different occasions. Accordingly, we are not able to state causality, and our data could also be subject to reverse causality (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2001). Our findings are in line with Maertz et al. (2007), suggesting that the effects of perceived organizational and supervisor support on work-related outcomes are more complex than previously thought. This has been widely discussed in the social exchange literature, and we expect this debate to go on for some time. Still, as researchers advocate both viewpoints, it is unfortunate that we cannot draw any conclusions about casual relationships.

Although we have controlled for several variables, we cannot rule out the possibility of alternative explanations by variables. For instance, we have not controlled for employees' previous experience with change. This is a relevant limitation as other researchers have found employees' previous experiences to relate to their subsequent reactions to similar situations (Buch, Kuvaas, and Dysvik 2012). Accordingly, experimental and longitudinal studies should examine the formation of attitudes toward organizational change such that one is able to control for spurious relationships and also draw casual inferences.

A third limitation relates to the number of organizations participating in the study. Data were collected in two Norwegian organizations, and even though they were highly diverse from each other in terms of structure, size, and industry, future research should examine more organizations within other industries. Although we have no reason to believe that our participants differ fundamentally from the general Norwegian workforce, future research is still warranted to examine the

associations between the constructs in other companies and cultural contexts to test the replicability of the findings.

Finally, as we rely solely on self-report data, we must acknowledge the possibility of common-method bias and percept-percept inflated measures (e.g., Crampton and Wagner 1994). If so, the validity of our findings will be limited. However, as pointed out by Buch, Kuvaas, and Dysvik (2012), perceptual variables are hard to investigate by other means than self-report measures. This applies to our study concerning our variables perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support. In the case of attitudes toward organizational change, although supervisors' impressions of employees' general attitudes toward organizational change could have been collected, it is still the individual employee that is best able to report on his or her own attitudes. We base this assumption on Lines' (2005) statement, that "attitude formation is based on an individual's consideration of a subset of characteristics drawn from an attitude object" (12). In order to overcome potential problems associated with self-report data, we have followed the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003) as well as current research practice (Dysvik and Kuvaas 2012), and separated the scale items for the predictors and the criterion variables in time, as well as ensuring the anonymity of our respondents (Chan 2009).

Practical Implications

If the association between the constructs examined in this study reflects causal relationships, it may have important implications for practice as well. First, perhaps the finding with the most far-reaching implications, as perceived supervisor support moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, organizations need to realize the crucial importance of the employees' immediate supervisor. Our findings indicate that the alignment of perceived organizational and supervisor support is a prerequisite for being able to harvest the benefits of employees' perceptions of organizational support. According to the results, the lack of supervisor support seems to attenuate the possible outcomes of organizational support. In other words, to achieve high attitudes toward organizational change through facilitating perceptions of organizational support, a high level of perceived supervisor support is a condition for successful facilitation. This is in line with what has been referred

to as *pushing HR to the line* (Purcell and Hutchinson 2007), or moving *away from the table and into the jungle* (Welbourne 2011). Also, the intended and implemented HR practices of organizations need to be aligned if organizations are to benefit from employee reactions (Khilji and Wang 2006). Our findings support this. Given the importance of being able to successfully undertake change processes in today's business world (Choi 2011; Parish, Cadwallader, and Busch 2008), this implication should not go unnoticed by organizations and managers. Consequently, the link might be drawn to the training and selection of supervisors within an organization, where ability to support the employees should be emphasized.

Second, our results show that perceptions of organizational support are directly related to attitudes toward organizational change. Acknowledging the necessity of both parties in an exchange relationship to feel that they receive something of value for the relationship to continue (Dawley, Houghton, and Bucklew 2010), organizations need to be aware that employees might reciprocate to the organization by holding positive attitudes toward organizational change. In other words, employees who perceive to be supported by the organization are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward organizational activities. Hence, we are able to suggest that reciprocation from the employees to the organization may take on many forms. In addition to the acknowledged exchange items of reduced turnover (Allen, Shore, and Griffeth 2003; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), affective commitment (Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), and increased performance (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006), employees may also reciprocate by holding positive attitudes. For organizations, having employees who both behave appropriately and hold positive attitudes toward the activities of the organization, should be considered a goal in and of itself. This should be attainable if organizations and supervisors seek to facilitate perceptions of organizational and supervisor support, respectively, among the employees.

Finally, Lines (2005) states, “[t]he formation of attitudes toward the change is a crucial event in the change process, because, once formed, attitudes may be extremely difficult to alter” (11). In sum, the importance of facilitating positive

attitudes toward organizational change among the employees cannot be overlooked by organizations and supervisors.

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Appendix A

Items used in the study

Perceived organizational support

POS1: My organization really cares about my well-being

POS2: My organization strongly considers my goals and values

POS3: My organization shows little concern for me [R]

POS4: My organization cares about my opinions

POS5: My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor

POS6: Help is available from my organization when I have a problem

POS7: My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part

POS8: If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me [R]

Perceived supervisor support

PSS1: My supervisor cares about my opinions

PSS2: My work supervisor really cares about my well-being

PSS3: My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values

PSS4: My supervisor shows very little concern for me [R]

Attitudes toward organizational change

ATOC1: I look forward to change at work

ATOC2: Change usually benefits the organization

ATOC3: I usually resist new ideas [R]

ATOC4: I don't like change [R]

ATOC5: Most of my co-workers benefit from change

ATOC6: I am inclined to try new ideas

ATOC7: Change frustrates me [R]

ATOC8: Change often helps me perform better

ATOC9: I usually support new ideas

ATOC10: Changes tend to stimulate me

ATOC11: Other people think that I support change

ATOC12: I often suggest new approaches to things

ATOC13: Most changes are irritating [R]

ATOC14: Change usually helps improve unsatisfactory situations at work

ATOC15: I intend to do whatever possible to support change

ATOC16: I find most change to be pleasing

ATOC17: I usually benefit from change

ATOC18: I usually hesitate to try new ideas [R]

Appendix B

Confirmatory factor analysis

	POS	PSS	ATOC
POS2: My organization strongly considers my goals and values	.89		
POS1: My organization really cares about my well-being	.86		
POS4: My organization cares about my opinions	.79		
POS3: My organization shows little concern for me [R]	.83		
POS7: My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part	.77		
POS5: My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor	.76		
POS6: Help is available from my organization when I have a problem	.61		
POS8: If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me [R]	.52		
PSS2: My work supervisor really cares about my well-being		.94	
PSS1: My supervisor cares about my opinions		.88	
PSS4: My supervisor shows very little concern for me [R]		.86	
PSS3: My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values		.93	
ATOC10: Changes tend to stimulate me			.75
ATOC4: I don't like change [R]			.74
ATOC9: I usually support new ideas			.70
ATOC8: Change often helps me perform better			.67
ATOC13: Most changes are irritating [R]			.67
ATOC7: Change frustrates me [R]			.66
ATOC17: I usually benefit from change			.65
ATOC16: I find most change to be pleasing			.63
ATOC5: Most of my co-workers benefit from change			.60
ATOC18: I usually hesitate to try new ideas [R]			.60
ATOC1: I look forward to change at work			.59
ATOC3: I usually resist new ideas [R]			.59
ATOC15: I intend to do whatever possible to support change			.58
ATOC2: Change usually benefits the organization			.57
ATOC6: I am inclined to try new ideas			.56
ATOC11: Other people think that I support change			.55
ATOC14: Change usually helps improve unsatisfactory situations at work			.45
ATOC12: I often suggest new approaches to things			.37

Note: $N = 258$. Standardized factor loadings are shown. All estimates are significant at $p < .01$. The CFA was performed using the polychoric correlation matrix and the Robust Maximum Likelihood (RML) estimator. $\chi^2 [402] = 765.63$, $p < 0.01$; $\chi^2/df = 1.90$; CFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = .072. POS = Perceived Organizational Support; PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support; ATOC = Attitudes Toward Organizational Change

Appendix C

Preliminary thesis report

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**BI Norwegian Business School – Preliminary
Thesis Report**

Perceived Organizational Support and Perceived
Supervisor Support on Affective Commitment: The
Mediating Role of Attitudes Toward Organizational
Change

Hand-in date:
16.01.2012

Campus:
BI Oslo

Examination code and name:
GRA 19002 Preliminary Thesis Report

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Programme:
Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

In this study we plan to investigate the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS), attitudes toward organizational change (ATOC), and affective commitment (AC). As PSS is an antecedent of POS (Eisenberger et al. 2002), and PSS has been found to affect ATOC (Iverson 1996; Neves 2011), we want to investigate whether PSS moderates the relation between POS and ATOC. Furthermore, as POS affects employees' AC (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001), we further plan to investigate whether this effect is mediated by ATOC. The study aims to contribute to research within the field of Social Exchange Theory, more specifically within the micro-level, people-oriented perspective on change. A plan of progression is included, showing a timetable of further progression toward the hand-in of the thesis.

Introduction

Organizational change is undoubtedly a hot topic in the organizational research literature. A number of studies provide good reasons as to why this is so; that being able to undertake successful organizational change is an important competence in today's business world (Parish, Cadwallader, and Busch 2007), that it is important to understand contributors to successful change initiatives (Bommer, Rich, and Rubin 2005), that many change initiatives fail to succeed (Choi 2011), and change initiatives are risky business, of which we still know too little (Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell 2007). Choi (2011) reports that an increasing number of researchers argue the high percentage of failed change initiatives are due to the change leaders' underestimation of the importance of the role of the individual. This is in accordance with the findings of Lines (2005) and Miller, Johnson, and Grau (1994), that the employees' attitude toward the initiative will play a large role in whether or not the change initiative succeeds or fails. Also, further research is warranted as attitudes organizational change is viewed as an antecedent of organizational commitment, and the latter is suggested to be important for organizational functioning (Coleman, Irving, and Cooper 1999).

Other researchers, however, point to the substantial amount of literature available on individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward change (Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell 2007). Yet other researchers have stated the need for more research on the micro-level, people oriented perspective on change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000). This is a reasonable statement, regarding the importance of individuals for the success of change initiatives. By learning more about how individuals might be helpful in achieving success, and about how individuals become willing to support and aid the initiative, organizations should be better able to plan and execute successful change initiatives. Moreover, it would further strengthen the applicability of Social Exchange Theory in practice.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) has been used to explain the employees' relations to their organization. For instance, the norm of reciprocation is often mentioned in literature regarding organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). According to this norm, employees who experience that their organization provides them with resources and support will feel compelled to give something back, in order to reciprocate. Thus, employees provide the organization with their

commitment, which in turn lead to positive outcomes for the organization (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001).

Employees develop global beliefs about to what extent the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. They do this in order to evaluate the organizations' readiness to reward work effort, as well as to meet their own socio-emotional needs (Eisenberger et al. 2002). These global beliefs are both about the organization itself and their supervisor, and concerns whether they (the organization and the supervisor) will provide resources needed, aid them in their work, reward effort, as well as whether they will take action to secure the welfare of the employee. These beliefs are labeled perceived organizational support and perceived supervisor support, respectively (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002).

Research on commitment has had some trouble in presenting a united view of what commitment actually *are* (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001). However, there seems to be consensus that commitments in the workplace have an effect on organizational outcomes, such as productivity and behavior in the workplace (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001). Without launching the debate that these authors seek to contribute to, this study will look into the specific form of commitment labeled affective commitment. Affective commitment has shown to have an effect on such organizational outcomes as absenteeism, performance, and turnover (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). Furthermore, perceived organizational support has shown to be an antecedent of affective commitment, for instance through the norm of reciprocation (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001).

Studies within organizational commitment and social exchange theory find perceived organizational support to be an antecedent of organizational commitment (Pazy and Ganzach 2009; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002) and perceived supervisor support to be an antecedent of attitude toward organizational change (Iverson 1996; Neves 2011). This study will treat them accordingly, placing affective commitment as the dependent variable in the model. Moreover, Elias (2009) found attitudes toward organizational change to have a mediating role between individual difference variables and job related outcomes, such as commitment, enabling this study to treat attitudes toward organizational change as a mediating variable.

Research supports the notion that an employee who perceives support from the organization will view change initiatives as a supporting initiative, thereby holding positive attitudes toward change. This is supported by the findings of Neves (2011) that perceived supervisor support affects attitudes toward change. As perceived supervisor support is an antecedent of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al. 2002), perceived organizational support should have an impact on attitudes toward organizational change. Further, the support of the supervisor should be able to increase the effect of perceived organizational support on attitudes toward organizational change. Thus, the employee should become even more positively inclined toward the change initiative when perceiving supervisor support (Neves 2011). As perceived organizational and supervisor support increase the affective commitment toward the organization (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001), it is the purpose of this study to investigate whether this effect is mediated by the attitudes toward organizational change.

Accordingly, this thesis will study the relationship between the constructs perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS), attitudes toward organizational change (ATOC), and affective commitment (AC). The theoretical contribution provided by this thesis will be to the research field of Social Exchange Theory in the context of organizational change, placing itself within what is referred to as a micro-level, people oriented perspective on change (Judge et al. 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000). The study draws on the research of Dunham et al. (1989), by making use of ATOC as an overall construct when measuring employees' general attitudes toward organizational change.

Theory and Hypothesis

Affective commitment

Organizational commitment is widely examined, and Allen and Meyer's (1990) three-component model of organizational commitment has received extensive empirical support (Meyer et al. 2002). The model's three components include affective, continuance, and normative commitment. This study will go into the affective component of commitment. Affective commitment refers to employees' "emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the

organization” (Allen and Meyer 1990, 1). In other words, affective commitment is employees’ emotional bond to their organizations (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001). Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) suggest commitment as an important criterion variable when assessing possible effects on the organization-employee relationship caused by organizational change. However, Fedor, Caldwell, and Herold (2006) stress the importance to further investigate the relationship between organizational commitment and organizational change, and how these variables function together.

Affective commitment is recognized as a psychological and individual-level variable (Elias 2009). Hence, the current study focuses on affective commitment as researchers stress the importance of including micro-level, person-oriented variables to expand limited research of possible outcomes related to organizational change (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999; Judge et al 1999; Neves 2011; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Accordingly, affective commitment tends to correlate consistently and strongly with employee-relevant and organizational-relevant outcomes (Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al. 2002). According to Chen, Goddard, and Casper (2004), this is the reason why researchers mainly focus on affective commitment rather than all three components. For instance, the majority of 500 organizational-commitment studies published between the mid-1970s and late 1990s focused on affective commitment (Eby et al. 1999).

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support is an individually held belief which pertains to the degree an employee experiences and believes that the organization values and recognizes his or hers contributions, as well as whether or not the employee believes the organization will provide him or her with necessary resources when needed. This perception is a global belief, and stems from employees having the impression that an organization is either positively or negatively inclined toward them (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Maertz et al. 2007; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Social exchange theory suggests that this impression is based upon the personification of the organization described by Levinson (1965). Employees will observe actions taken by agents of the organization and see them as expressions of the organizations’ intent toward them, rather than actions by individuals acting on their own grounds. Perceived organizational support has been found to have an effect on several work related

outcomes, among them turnover intention, turnover behavior (Maertz et al. 2007), and organizational commitment (Elias 2009; Pazy and Ganzach 2009; Thompson and Prottas 2005). As employees perceive the organization to support them, they in turn develop an affective commitment toward the organization, thus arriving at the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relation between POS and AC. An increase in employees' POS will strengthen the employees' AC. Inversely; a decrease in POS will lead to a decrease in the employees' AC.

Attitudes Toward Organizational Change

Organizations face continuous change in today's competitive environment, and the ability to adapt is a crucial capability (Lines 2005; Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou, 2004; Wanberg and Banas 2000). Thus, employees need to cope with change in the workplace as it is agreed that successful implementation depends on employees' reactions to change. Furthermore, researchers point out the importance of understanding individuals' reactions to change in an organization (Bovey and Hede 2001; Judge et al. 1999; Piderit 2000). Accordingly, "employees' attitudes toward change are a key component to whether an organization's change effort are either successful or fail" (Elias 2009, 39). To have support for sustainable organizational change organizations need to change employees' beliefs about change, as beliefs shape their behavior during change (Antoni 2004).

Attitudes toward organizational change have been reviewed by several researchers (e.g., Armenakis and Bedeian 1999; Bouckenooghe 2010; Choi 2011), and different attitudinal constructs have been examined to grasp the complexity of employees' attitudes toward organizational change. Readiness for change (Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder 1993), commitment to change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), openness to change (Wanous and Banas 2000), and cynicism about organizational change (Reichers, Wanous, and Austin 1997) provides different information about employees' evaluation and concern about organizational change, as well as representing the diversity captured in employees' attitudes toward organizational change (Choi 2011). There is broad consensus to view attitudes toward organizational change as a tridimensional construct, consisting of three components; Affective, cognitive, and behavioral,

respectively (e.g.: Bouckenooghe 2010; Dunham et al. 1989; Elias 2009). This is consistent with Piderit's (2000) proposition that employees' responses to proposed organizational change should be captured along three dimensions: affective, cognitive, and intentional/behavioral, respectively. Thus, a multidimensional view of employees' responses to organizational change is adopted in the present study.

According to Dunham et al. (1989), the three dimensions are related, but independent enough to be kept separately. First, the affective component refers to individuals' feelings about change. Second, the cognitive component focuses on individuals' beliefs about whether or not the change will produce positive effects for the organization, co-workers, and for the individual. Finally, the behavioral dimension concerns the degree to which individuals support and initiate change. These three dimensions should be measured simultaneously for more accurate predictions of employees' behaviors and change-related outcomes (Lines 2005; Piderit 2000).

As research finds attitudes toward organizational change to be related to affective commitment (Lau and Woodman 1995; Yousef 2000a; Yousef 2000b), it seems an employee with positive attitudes toward organizational change should view a change initiative as a resource provided them by the organization. For instance, a change in procedures should be perceived as a change that takes place for the employee to be able to perform better. Thus, as the change is perceived as a supporting initiative, the employee should further strengthen the affective commitment to the organization. This effect is similar to that of perceived organizational support in general, only the relation between attitudes toward organizational change and affective commitment is specific to a situation of organizational change. Hence, as perceived organizational support is an antecedent of affective commitment, and attitudes toward organizational change is related to affective commitment in a specific situation of change, it is justified to investigate whether the employees' attitudes toward organizational change mediates the relation between their perceived organizational support and affective commitment toward the organization in a situation of change. An employee which perceives high organizational support should, in a situation of change, hold positive attitudes toward organizational change as it is perceived as a resource, leading to further strengthened affective commitment. This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The positive relation between POS and AC is mediated by ATOC in situations of change. High POS affects ATOC positively, further strengthening the relation from POS to AC. Inversely; low POS affects ATOC negatively, thus weakening the employees' affective commitment.

Perceived Supervisor Support

Perceived supervisor support evolves as the employee believes the supervisor to hold a positive view of him- or herself, based on support and resources received from the supervisor. The employee associates these perceived inclinations by the supervisor with the perceived inclination by the organization. An employee is likely to assume that the supervisor has a close link to upper management, thereby fortifying the link between the supervisors' and the organizations' inclination toward him- or herself (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Studies have shown that perceived supervisor support, much like perceived organizational support, has an effect on work related outcomes, such as turnover intention, turnover behavior (e.g., Maertz et al. 2007), as well as commitment and performance (e.g., Gagnon and Michael 2004; Kuvaas and Dysvik 2010; Neves 2011; Pazy and Ganzach 2009).

Considerable research has been conducted on perceived organizational and supervisor support, as well as on the relationship between them (e.g., Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Yoon and Thye 2000). The results suggest that perceived supervisor support precedes perceived organizational support, and that they are highly correlated yet distinct constructs. Employees perceiving much support from their supervisor should attribute this support to the organization, leading to higher perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al. 2002). Still, as they are distinct constructs, it is reasonable to imagine that even though an employee does not perceive much supervisor support, other elements might still sustain an employees' perceived organizational support, and vice versa. Maertz et al. (2007) found support for this argument, using a model in which perceived supervisor support was only partially mediated through perceived organizational support, showing that perceived supervisor support had direct significant effects on organizational outcomes. Thus, it is possible that an employees' perceived supervisor support will moderate the effects of perceived organizational support on certain outcomes, in this case the employees' attitudes

toward organizational change. Take the example of an employee who perceives the organization to support him or her, but still does not perceive the supervisor to be very supportive. In this case, the level of perceived supervisor support should also have a direct effect on the outcomes of perceived organizational support. Thus, hypothesis 3 is derived:

Hypothesis 3: The relation between POS and ATOC will be moderated by PSS.

The Research Model

Studies within organizational commitment and social exchange theory find perceived organizational and supervisor support to be antecedents of organizational commitment (Elias 2009; Thompson and Prottas 2005) and attitudes toward organizational change (Iverson 1996; Neves 2011), respectively. This study will treat them accordingly. However, following the research of Maertz et al. (2007), perceived supervisor support is used as a moderator of the relation between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change. As relevant literature has shown attitudes toward organizational change to mediate between individual difference variables and job related outcomes, such as commitment (Elias 2009), attitudes toward organizational change act as a mediating variable. Affective commitment is the dependent variable in the model. Thus, this study will test a model in which perceived supervisor support moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change, and where attitudes toward organizational change mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment.

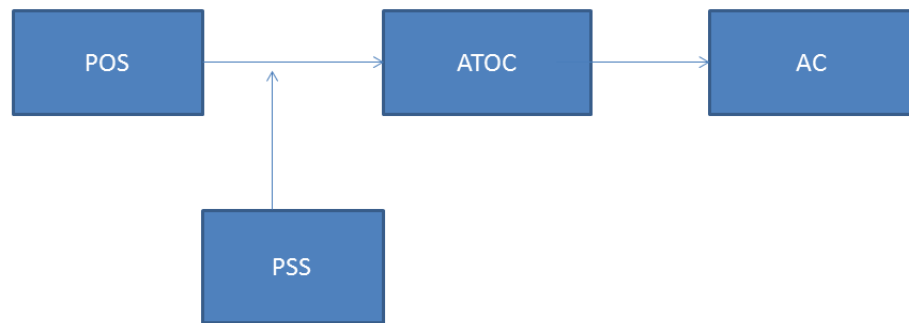


Figure 4 - The research model to be tested.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Respondents were drawn from a privately held, Norwegian, business group during three stages of data collection with one month separation. POS and PSS were collected at time 1, ATOC at time 2, and AC at time 3. All questionnaires were distributed using a web-based tool (Confermit). The questionnaire at time 1 was deployed to approximately 1100 employees, and only those who answered at time 1 received a survey at time 2. Accordingly, only those who completed questionnaires at time 1 and time 2 received a questionnaire at time 3. At time 3 approximately 250 respondents received the final survey as they had partaken in the first two surveys.

Measures

All items were measured on a five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All items used are included in Appendix in Norwegian as it was deployed to the respondents.

Attitudes toward organizational change (Appendix A)

Attitudes toward organizational change were measured by Dunham et al.'s (1989) 18-item instrument. The instrument consists of three subscales: cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendency, respectively, and each subscale consist of six items. Example items are "I usually benefit from change" and "I usually resist new ideas". Subscale scores are obtained by calculating the average of the 18 responses, and a more positive attitude toward organizational change are indicated by higher scores.

Affective commitment (Appendix B)

Affective commitment was measured by Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) six-item scale. Example items are "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own" and "I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization" (reversed score).

Perceived organizational support (Appendix C)

Perceived organizational support was measured by Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli's (2001) eight-item instrument. Example items are "My organization really cares about my well-being" and "My organization strongly considers my goals and values".

Perceived supervisor support (Appendix D)

Perceived supervisor support was measured by Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli's (2001) four-item instrument. Example items are "My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values" and "My supervisor shows very little concern for me" (reversed score).

Analysis

For the analysis we expect to make use of structural equation modeling by the statistics program LISREL (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993), in order to determine the effects of the moderating and mediating relationships proposed in the model. However, we have not yet reached this point in the process. We expect to make use of literature by Baron and Kenny (1986), Edwards and Lambert (2007), and Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005) in the analysis of the gathered data.

Progression and time schedule

So far in the thesis project we have deployed the survey to gather data, as well as prepared theories and arguments relevant for the thesis. In November 2011 we deployed the first survey, through Confermit, to approximately 1100 e-mail addresses provided by a privately held, Norwegian, business group. The second survey was deployed in December, to those employees who had responded to the first survey. In January 2012, approximately 250 surveys were sent out to those who had partaken in the first two surveys. These three send-outs are how we have gathered data to test the hypothesis. The work with gathering data is planned

to end in January 2012. However, if there is need for more data, we will attempt to deploy a new series of surveys in February /March, thus ending the process of gathering data in April /May of 2012.

Overview of planned Master Thesis Process in 2012:

- January: Data received.
- February: Start doing statistical analysis – evaluate data gathered.
- March: Continue statistical analysis.
- April: Start writing the thesis (Results).
- May: Continue writing thesis (Discussion).
- June: Continue writing thesis (Discussion/Conclusion).
- July: “Wrap up” thesis.
- August: “Wrap up” thesis.
- September: Hand in thesis September 1st.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Affective commitment (Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993)

Jeg tilbringer veldig gjerne resten av karrieren min i denne organisasjonen

Jeg føler virkelig at denne organisasjonens problemer er mine egne

Jeg føler meg ikke som en "del av familien" i denne organisasjonen (R)

Jeg er ikke "følelsesmessig knyttet" til denne organisasjonen (R)

Denne organisasjonen betyr mye for meg rent personlig

Jeg har ingen sterk følelse av tilhørighet til denne organisasjonen (R)

Appendix B

Attitudes Toward Organizational Change (Dunham et al. 1989)

Jeg ser frem til endringer på jobben

Endringer er som regel fordelaktige for organisasjonen

Jeg er som regel i mot nye ideer (R)

Jeg liker ikke endringer (R)

De fleste av mine kolleger vil dra nytte av endringer

Jeg er tilbøyelig til å prøve nye ideer

Endringer frustrerer meg (R)

Endringer fører ofte til at jeg presterer bedre

Jeg støtter som regel nye ideer

Jeg blir som regel stimulert av endringer

Andre på jobben ser på meg som en som støtter endringer

Jeg foreslår ofte nye tilnærminger til saker og ting

De fleste endringer er irriterende (R)

Endringer bedrer som regel situasjoner som er lite tilfredsstillende på jobb

Jeg ønsker å gjøre alt jeg kan for å støtte en endring

Jeg oppfatter de fleste endringer som tiltalende

Jeg drar som regel nytte av endringer

Jeg nøler som regel med å prøve ut nye ideer (R)

Appendix C

Perceived Supervisor Support (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001)

Min nærmeste overordnede bryr seg virkelig om mine meninger

Min nærmeste overordnede viser interesse for at jeg har det bra på jobben

Min nærmeste overordnede tar hensyn til mine mål og verdier

Min nærmeste overordnede bryr seg egentlig ikke særlig mye om meg(R)

Appendix D

Perceived Organizational Support (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli 2001)

Min organisasjon bryr seg virkelig om mitt velvære

Min organisasjon tar hensyn til mine mål og mine verdier

Min organisasjon bryr seg lite om hvordan jeg har det (R)

Min organisasjon bryr seg om hva jeg mener om saker og ting

Om jeg har et problem tror jeg organisasjonen stiller opp for å hjelpe meg

Dersom jeg er ærlig om en feil jeg har gjort vil organisasjonen helt sikkert tilgi meg

Organisasjonen stiller nok opp for meg dersom jeg trenger det

Organisasjonen vil ganske sikkert utnytte meg dersom anledningen byr seg (R)