

Exploring employees' perceptions, job-related attitudes and characteristics during a planned organizational change

Kleanthis K. Katsaros
University of Macedonia
Department of Accounting and Finance
156 Egnatia Str, 54006, Thessaloniki - Greece
Telephone: +30 2310891699, Fax: +30 2310891636
Email: kleanthis.katsaros@gmail.com

Athanasios N. Tsirikas
University of Macedonia
Department of Accounting and Finance
156 Egnatia Str, 54006, Thessaloniki - Greece
Telephone: +30 2310891699, Fax: +30 2310891636
Email: tsirikas@uom.gr

Sofia-Maria N. Bani
University of Macedonia
Department of Accounting and Finance
156 Egnatia Str, 54006, Thessaloniki - Greece
Telephone: +30 2310891699, Fax: +30 2310891636
Email: sofiamaria.mpani@gmail.com

Abstract

The current study explores employee perceptions regarding organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change during a planned organizational change in a public hospital. Survey data were collected at two time periods, before and five months after the initiation of the planned change. Research findings show a significant increase in perceived organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change after the planned change implementation. Findings also suggest that differences in the aforementioned perceptions are moderated by certain job-related attitudes, namely, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement; and job-related characteristics, namely, skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy and goal clarity. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: attitudes, job characteristics, perceptions, organizational change

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1 INTRODUCTION

In today's extremely complex business environment where change continues to be the norm rather than the exception, organizational change has become a core organizational value able to provide organizations with a sustainable competitive advantage. However, though many change programs have originally perceived as being successful; it is claimed that ultimately nearly 70 percent of all change initiatives fail (Kotter, 2008) and thus, long-term success is elusive (Nadine & Persaud, 2003). That is, changes involve making painful modifications to one's behaviour; as well as they require placing oneself in jeopardy (e.g. take risks that put the common good above self-preservation; Quinn, Spreitzer & Brown, 2000). Within this context, management scholars acknowledge that this rate of change may affect negatively employee attitudes, perceptions, morale, emotions, and/or feelings (Eby, Adams, Russell & Gaby, 2000; Osterman, 2000). Organizational change has an important personal dimension (Moran & Brightman, 2000); and it is actually an emotional experience, which notes the crucial role of employees' perceptual and attitudinal characteristics (Nicolaidis & Katsaros, 2010). Equally, it is suggested that positive employee workplace attitudes are often critical in achieving organizational goals and in succeeding in change programmes (Eby et al., 2000; Martin, 1998; Kotter, 1996).

Research proposes that employee perceptions of organizational readiness to change may either facilitate or inhibit an organizational change initiative (Eby, et al., 2000). That is, they reflect the degree to which the organization has the flexibility to achieve change, and the extent to which an employee can actively and genuinely participate in the change process (Smith, 2005). On the whole, an organizational environment that engulfs innovation and change influences positively employees' preconceived notions about the extent to which the organization is ready for change. Other studies suggest that organizational change may be more successful if employees perceive the management support during the change initiative (Holt et al., 2007). That is, employees consider that their supervisors are responsible for providing information and support because they are perceived to be the principal agents of the organization (Cole et al., 2006). Nevertheless, support provided by supervisors, yields positive emotions and emotional/cognitive openness towards the proposed change. Research also proposes that trust in management can reduce negative feelings provoked by change uncertainty and ambiguity (Weber & Weber, 2001). Thus, honest and fair business practices, trustful communication and teamwork may craft a significant basis for accomplishing organizational change goals (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Overall, trust in management is one mechanism that enables organizational members to cope with operational flexibility and constant change (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). The change management literature also proposes that perceptions about the appropriateness of change are extremely significant during organizational change (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris 2007). Within this context, Armenakis (2002) suggests that not only does there have to be agreement that the proposed change is suitable, applicable and profitable, but also there must be agreement that the initiative is congruent with. Thus, the perceived change's fit with the organization is as vital as whether the initiative is the proper one.

Nevertheless, several gaps remain in scholars' understanding regarding how perceptions change during new organizational efforts, as well as how job-related attitudes and characteristics influence these changes. While employee perceptions regarding organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change are considered to be vital to successful organizational change, there are few empirical studies that examine how these attitudes may vary before and after a change has been initiated. In more detail, there are few empirical studies that collect longitudinal data before and after a planned change event and consequently, draw out some insights into how change takes place. Based on Weber and Weber's research model (2001), the main aim of the current research is to investigate how these critical attitudes may differ prior and five months after the initiation of a planned organizational change. Further, it examines certain job-related attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and specific job-related characteristics (i.e. skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity) that may moderate employee aforementioned perceptions. These job-related attitudes and characteristics may be vital in establishing an organizational culture and climate able to promote innovation and change (Liu & Perrewé, 2005; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) and their deeper understanding can be useful at both practical and theoretical level.

2 EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Perception is the process by which an employee organizes and interprets his/her impressions in order to give meaning to his/her environment and thus, it influences significantly his/her workplace behaviour (Langton & Robbins, 2006). The evidence suggests that what individuals perceive about their work situation influences their attitudes and behaviour during organizational change. Thus,

employee perceptions will lead to either resistance or acceptance of change. (e.g. Coghlan, 1993, Galpin, 1996).

Perceptive organizational readiness to change: Organizational readiness to change is reflected in the organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, intentions and it is defined as the employees' belief in the benefits from a proposed change (Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005). Similarly, Kotter (1996) suggests that failure to create sufficient readiness accounts for one-half of all unsuccessful, large-scale change efforts. Employees' perceptions of organizational readiness to change can either facilitate the success of a change intervention or be a significant source of resistance to change (Eby, et al., 2000). Employees' readiness perceptions indicate the extent to which an organization is ready to make the necessary changes as well as its ability to be adaptive to changing demands and new evolutions (Elgamal, 1998). Thus, most change readiness models emphasize the significance of generating an awareness of the need for change and supporting people's perceived ability to change. In formulating their change efficacy judgments, employees are influenced by the extent to which the work environment and the organizational features seem to create a more receptive context for innovation and change. Overall, it is critical to assess employees' readiness perception prior to any change attempt.

Supervisory support: Supervisors act as agents of the organization who have responsibility for managing and appraising employees' performance. Thus, employees would view their positive or negative orientation toward them as indicative of the organization's support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Generally, perceived supervisor support reflects the extent to which the organization cares about its members' well-being (Treadway et al., 2004). Perceptions of supervisory support refer to employees' perceptions of how management both encourages and implements employee suggestions for improvement (LaRocco et al., 1975). In more detail, they reveal whether management encourages employees to propose creative ideas and suggestions for work improvements, supports the improvement efforts and finally rewards employees for the resulting outcomes (Weber & Weber, 2001). Overall, during times of organizational uncertainty and/or ambiguity, employees have an increased need to perceive supervisory support (e.g. their input is being considered, frequent and accurate feedback, available resources; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1994). Thus, supervisory support plays a vital role in an employee's appraisal of a crisis situation and it may provide a foundation for open employee participation and involvement.

Trust in management: The importance of trust during organizational change is widely reported in the international literature, mainly because it is considered as a precondition for successful collaboration (e.g. Cullen, Johnson & Sakano, 2000; Vangen & Huxham, 2003) and market orientation (Kimura, 2012). It is acknowledged as an essential feature of organizational change and best achieved through consultation, participation and empowerment (e.g. Cashman, 1998; Holoviak, 1999; Khan, 1997). Employees evaluate the key qualities of managers (e.g. integrity, competence, consistency/fairness, openness; Clark & Payne, 1997) or similar attributes (e.g. Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995) according past behaviours and current situations. Further, Costigan, Ilter and Berman (1998) claim that employees trust in management is based on the results of organizational decisions made by the top management and less on direct experience of their character, words and actions. Therefore, employee trust in management is interpreted through the organization's policies and practices. Within this context, other researches indicate that the performance of a manager during a change effort may depend upon gaining the trust of their employees (Brockner, Siegel, Daly, Tyler & Martin, 1997; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990). Overall, employees' trust in management is a key factor for sustaining individual and organizational effectiveness during organizational change.

Appropriateness of change: Employees perceived appropriateness of change is very critical for avoiding individual resistance during organizational changes (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). Management should always provide information why the proposed change initiative is the correct one by noting what the initiative is intended to correct or improve (Beckhard & Harris, 1987). In other word, it should provide justification why the proposed change is the suitable action for the identified discrepancy (e.g. the difference between the current state and an ideal or desired state). Further, employees must believe they have the knowledge, skills, and ability to successfully implement the proposed change. Without such a belief, the perception may be that the change initiative is incompatible because it would not be successful (e.g., Galpin, 1996; Vollman, 1996). Though, not only does there have to be agreement that the change initiative is suitable, but also there must be agreement that the initiative is in the same vein with the vision, mission, scope, culture and structure of the organization (Langton and Robbins, 2006). On the whole, change appropriateness refers both to the features of a particular change (e.g. deals with the inconsistency between the organization's present and desired state), and the context where the change will be implemented (e.g. organization is facing rough

competition). Thus, the change's fit with the organization is as important as whether or not the initiative is the right one.

The cited researchers indicate that the above mentioned employee perceptions are critical for management consideration during a change initiative. Thus, it is proposed that during an organizational change; employees' perceptions of organizational readiness to change will covary with their perceptions of supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change. Hence, the following hypothesis arises.

H1: Perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change will covary.

Further, the paper suggests that perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change will augment after the employees are trained and have experienced the relevant changes. That is, employees progress through phases of change acceptance (anticipation, confirmation, culmination, aftermath; Isabella, 1990). After a change has been initiated in an organization, employees have a propensity to fear the unknown and exhibit partial support for the proposed change effort. After training has been conducted and employees have had initial knowledge of how the change will actually affect them, they may display greater understanding and support for the planned change. Thus, the following hypothesis arises.

H2: Perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change will increase from time 1 to time 2 (prior and after the initiation of the planned organizational change).

3 EMPLOYEE JOB-RELATED ATTITUDES & CHARACTERISTICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Research suggests that job-related attitudes and characteristics may potentially moderate increases in perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change; prior and after the initiation of a planned organizational change (Weber & Weber, 2001). These basic job-related attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (i.e. skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity) may influence significantly the aforementioned employee perceptions from time 1 to time 2. In more detail:

Job satisfaction is defined as the emotional response to the job, resulting from an employee's job assessment regarding his/her personal values (Janssen 2001) and/or as the emotional orientation that an employee has towards his/her work (Price, 2001). In other words, it is an affective reaction to a job that results from the comparison of perceived outcomes with the needed ones (Kam, 1998). Shortly, job satisfaction describes perceptions, feelings or attitudes of individuals regarding their work (Chen, 2008). Clearly, changes in one's job are likely to have an impact on employee perceptions (Ang & Slaughter 2000). Further, organizational commitment is defined as an individual's identification with an organization; and it relies on one's own personal choices as well as the expectations from others around us (Singh, 2010). There is evidence that organizational commitment plays an important role in employee's acceptance of change in the workplace (Cordery, Sevastos, Mueller & Parker, 1993, Iverson, 1996). Relatively, Lau and Woodman (1995) argue that highly committed employees are more willing to accept organizational change ambiguity if it is perceived to be useful. That is, an individual committed to an organization accepts its values, is willing to exert effort on its behalf, and wishes to remain in the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Additionally, job involvement is an attitude towards the work role and its context and it is mainly defined as the employee's willingness to support the organization even if additional time and effort are required (Madsen, Miller & Cameron, 2005). Literature suggests that employees' involvement relates to their cognitive support during the change process (Oswald, Mossholder & Harris, 1994); may promote individual readiness for change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002); and thus, enhance tolerance of change uncertainty. Relatively, research suggests that involvement leads employees to recognize opportunities (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985); to drive organizational performance (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1993), and to have positive impact on the firm's knowledge creating capability (Smith, 2005).

According to job characteristics theory, the core job-related characteristics are linked directly to critical employees' psychological and perceptual states. In more detail, skill variety is the degree to which the job entails a number of different activities in carrying out the work and/or the extent to which a job requires the use of different talents (Hackman & Oldham 1980). Work that stretches one's skills and abilities consistently is experienced as more meaningful than work that is simple and routine. Task

identity, is the extent to which a job involves completing a whole identifiable outcome (Hackman & Oldham 1980). Putting together an entire product or providing a complete unit of service is intrinsically more meaningful than being responsible for only a small part of the work. Further, task significance is the degree to which the work has a considerable impact on the lives of other people and/or the extent to which a job has impact on the lives of people in an organization or society in general (Hackman & Oldham 1980). A job that is substantial for the psychological or physical wellbeing of the employees is experienced as more meaningful than a job that makes a little difference.

In the same vein, feedback refers to the extent to which employees receive clear information about his/her performance (Oldham & Hackman, 1981). Feedback informs employees about how successful their work has been, which in turn enables them to learn from their mistakes. Further, it connects them emotionally to their outputs, thus giving further purpose to their work. Similarly, providing effective feedback may facilitate in managing employees' fear of uncertainty/ambiguity since resistance to change mainly derives from their fear of the unknown. Overall, it is acknowledged that an organization with an effective feedback system would be in a better position to acquire employee support and cooperation for the initiation of a planned change. Further, autonomy refers to the extent to which employees are able to exercise discretion and initiative over what occurs on the job; as well as to the freedom and independence in terms of scheduling their work, selecting the tools they will use and deciding on procedures to follow (Chien & Su, 2009) and/or the employees' ability to make changes and incorporate the learning they gain whilst doing their job. By the mid-1990s, forms of employee participation such as autonomy were used in more than 90% of Fortune 1000 companies (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995). Most important, employee autonomy may influence his/her perception about how quickly and how efficiently the organization can respond to an upcoming change (Weber & Weber, 2001). Finally, goal clarity is defined as the degree to which the goals, purposes and objectives of the job are clearly and adequately defined (Bang, Fuglesang, Ovesen, & Eilertsen, 2010); and/or the extent to which employees know what is expected of them and how these role expectations contribute to the goals and strategy of the organisation (De Beuckelaer & Lievens, 2009). Further, it is suggested that an increased understanding of work goals provides important work-relevant information and motivation to improve work performance (Tubre & Collins 2000). Thus, goal clarity is positively associated with employee performance especially during changing situations.

The cited studies indicate that the abovementioned job-related attitudes and characteristics may influence employee perceptions during organizational change. Hence, the following four hypotheses arise.

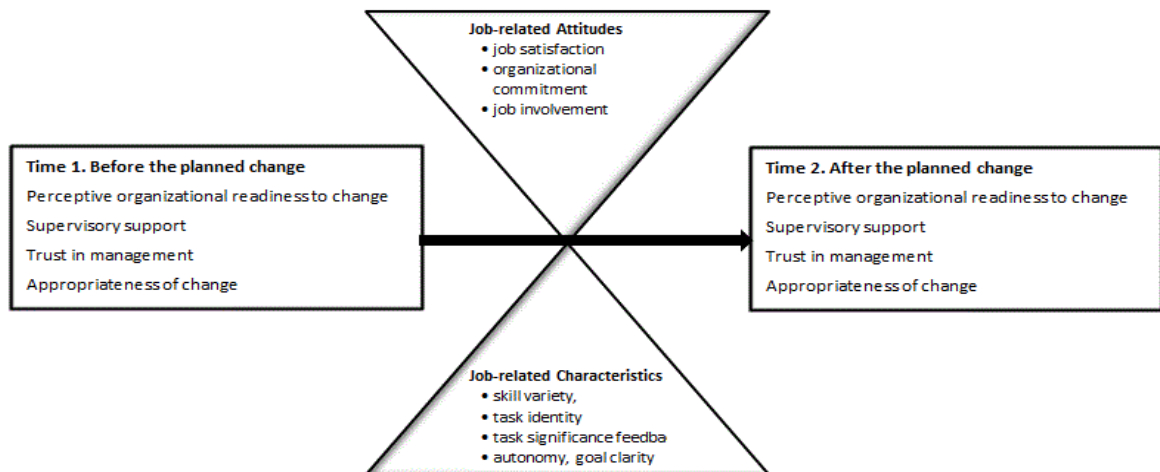
H3: Changes in perceived organizational readiness to change from time 1 to time 2 will be moderated by job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity).

H4: Changes in perceived supervisory support from time 1 to time 2 will be moderated by job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity).

H5: Changes in perceived trust in management from time 1 to time 2 will be moderated by job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity).

H6: Changes in perceived appropriateness of change from time 1 to time 2 will be moderated by job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance feedback, autonomy, goal clarity).

Figure 1. Research Model



4 RESEARCH SETTING

The research was conducted in a public hospital with approximately 800 employees. This organization was selected because it was about to begin a wide range organizational change under the direction of a new external president appointed by the central government. Further, for the first time the new president would be a technocrat and not a doctor. Prior to the change effort, the organization exhibited poor effectiveness in terms of financial profitability and efficiency, quality of health services, average length of stay, waiting lists, occupancy rate (inpatient days of care / bed days available) as well as high levels of bureaucracy and conflicts among stakeholders. Further, the management style was characterized as rather centralized (e.g. fully dominated by the top management), authoritative (e.g. doctors and nurses were excluded from decision making processes about their own departments), and inflexible (e.g. the director of a medical department couldn't replace a nurse that was sick without the senior management approval). After the resignation of the former president and the hiring of his replacement we collected the first data (time 1). At time 1 no changes have been initiated but there was information about the changes that were about to happen.

The new president was highly educated, with significant experience in public healthcare management. His main goals were to initiate a new Hospital Information System (HIS) and to implement quality management principles in order to achieve efficient administration of finance and distribution of medical aid; quality of services; decentralization of the decision-making process; monitoring of drug usage; immediate solutions for the patients' problems; reduction of transcription errors; information integrity and an overall patient oriented culture. These initiatives included wide-ranging training. In more details, extensive internal and external seminars were conducted by internal and external specialists to broaden employees' IT knowledge capabilities; to reduce operational costs; to enhance employees' feelings of security; to improve their stress management; to note future perspectives; to increase their organizational commitment and thus, their loyalty and efficiency. In parallel, they were introduced significant policy changes to improve patient service and employee satisfaction (e.g. open horizontal and vertical communication; close monitoring of performance indicators to motivate employees and promote a culture of continuous quality improvement; promotion of teamwork; coordination of services and enhancement of continuity).

We selected a five-month time frame for the second measurement (time 2) because during this time period the organization's planned training and new policy implementation efforts were fulfilled. The present research aims to capture how employee perceptions and attitudes changed after the completion of the implementation process.

5 SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in close cooperation with the hospital administration at two different points in time, prior and five months after the implementation of the planned change (2012 - 2013). The research sample was the total number of the hospital employees (801 employees; doctors, nurses, administrative staff). Through a relevant workshop, employees were informed about the purpose of the research as well as the confidentiality of their responses. One month before the beginning of the research, we conducted a pilot test to examine the research features and functionality. All through the

research period, we provided full support (i.e. personal meetings, phone or e-mail) to the participants. At time 1, survey data were collected from 442 employees including doctors, nurses and administrative staff (response rate 55,25%). At time 2 (5 months later), 428 surveys were completed and returned (fourteen less employees due to retirements or unavailability). Further, surveys with uncompleted items as well as surveys that were not completed by the same employees at both time 1 and time 2 were excluded, resulting in a total of 778 usable surveys (389 pairs).

In more detail, 53.98% of the respondents were female and 66.84% were married; their average age was 44.2 years (min 23 vs max 62 years); their working experience in the current position was 14.2 years (min 1 vs max 29 years); and their total working experience was 19.4 years (min 2 vs max 41 years). Finally, to a response bias, we examined whether any significant differences existed between participants and non-participants. Thus, t-tests were performed on the measures taken at time 1 between two groups; the respondents who completed surveys for time 2 and those that did not. Data analysis showed that respondents were not significantly different from their colleagues that did not complete surveys at both times (1 & 2). There were no differences in mean age, working experience in the current position and total working experience; nor were differences in time 1 appraisals of study variables at the $p < 0.05$ level.

5.1 Measures

Participants used a seven point Likert type scale ranging from “never” to “always” to complete the survey. Regarding the perceptual dependent variables, change appropriateness was explored with the questions proposed by Armenakis and Harris (2002; 4 items) and supervisory support was examined with De Beuckelaer and Lievens questionnaire (2009; 3 items). Further, trust in management was assessed with LaRocco et al. questionnaire (1975; 4 items; cited in Weber & Weber, 2001) and for the measurement of perceptive organizational readiness to change we used the Survey of Management Climate Questionnaire (Gordon & Cummins, 1979; 4 items; cited in Weber & Weber 2001).

Regarding the independent attitudinal variables of our model, for the measurement of job satisfaction, we used the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire which contains a three-item overall satisfaction subscale (Spector, 1997). Regarding the measurement of organizational commitment we used Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Mowday et al., (1979) that is composed of 15 semantic different items. Additionally, for the measurement of job involvement, we used the McQuarrie and Munson’s (1991) revised version of their Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII; 10 items). The questionnaire suggests that individual’s involvement is based on the inherent needs, values and interests and it captures two independent and bipolar dimensions that appraise involvement namely, importance and interest (Bearden, Netemeyer & Mobley, 1993).

Regarding the independent job-related variables of our reasearch; skill variety, feedback and autonomy were assessed through Job characteristic Inventory developed by Sims et al. (1979). Further, we employed the Measures of the Five Organisational Climate (De Beuckelaer & Lievens, 2009; 3 items) to examine goal clarity (i.e. the degree to which employees know what is expected of them and how these role expectations translate into the goals and strategy of the organisation). Finally, task identity and task significance were examined with the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980). Study variables and their relevant internal reliability (Cronbach alpha) are presented in Table I. Alphas ranged from 0.782 to 0.912.

Table I. Variables, number of respondents and associated internal reliability

| Variables | N | Alpha |
|--|----------|--------------|
| Perceptions | | |
| Organizational readiness to change | 389 | 0.810 |
| Supervisory support | 389 | 0.841 |
| Trust in management | 389 | 0.912 |
| Appropriateness of change | 389 | 0.794 |
| Job-related attitudes & characteristics | | |
| Job satisfaction | 389 | 0.802 |
| Organizational commitment | 389 | 0.709 |
| Employee involvement | 389 | 0.862 |
| Skill variety | 389 | 0.782 |
| Task identity | 389 | 0.812 |
| Task significance | 389 | 0.820 |
| Feedback | 389 | 0.869 |
| Autonomy | 389 | 0.888 |
| Goal clarity | 389 | 0.798 |

6 RESULTS

Taking into consideration that organizational change is actually a change in organizational members' perception, attitudes, beliefs and interpretative schemes (Isabella, 1990; Lau & Woodman, 1995) and the few empirical relevant studies regarding their differentiation before and after a change effort; the purpose of the research was firstly, to examine how perceptions regarding *organizational readiness to change*, *supervisory support*, *trust in management* and *appropriateness of change* differ during a planned organizational change; and secondly, to investigate how these perceptions are moderated by certain job-related attitudes (i.e. *job satisfaction*, *organizational commitment*, *job involvement*) and job-related characteristics (i.e. *skill variety*, *task identity*, *task significance feedback*, *autonomy* and *goal clarity*).

The principal component analysis results revealed two factors that describe employees' job involvement: (i) *importance* (variance 42,07%), and (ii) *interest* (variance 19,53%). The two factors had eigenvalues greater than 1 and accounted for 61,60% of the total variance. Further, high reliability characterizes the two factors. The Cronbach coefficient alpha is 0,85 for the *importance* factor and 0,80 for the *interest* factor. On the whole, employees' involvement factors are considerably positive. The factor of *importance*, on a 1 to 6 scale, has a value equal to 5,55 (sd:0,74) and the factor of *interest* has a value equal to 4,99 (sd:1,01). Finally, the correlations among the two factors are in general medium to low degree ($r < 0,32$; $p < 0,05$).

Table II. Involvement - Factor Analysis Results

| Questions | I. Importance | II. Interest |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| IQ1 | .828 | |
| IQ2 | .789 | |
| IQ3 | .770 | |
| IQ6 | .702 | |
| IQ10 | .689 | |
| IQ7 | | .888 |
| IQ8 | | .787 |
| IQ4 | | .732 |
| IQ5 | | .699 |
| IQ9 | | .689 |
| Eigenvalue | 3.816 | 1.752 |
| % Variance | 42.07 | 19.53 |
| Cronbach α | 0.851 | 0.801 |
| Mean & SD | 5.55+ 0.74 | 4.99+ 1.01 |

We validated the construct measures with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which is most appropriate for verifying whether construct measures load on their respective a priori defined constructs (Browne & Cudek, 1993). The range of loadings for the four employee perceptions were as follows: organizational readiness to change 0.75 to 0.84; supervisory support 0.77 to 0.88; trust in management 0.72 to 0.90; and appropriateness of change 0.75 to 0.88 respectively. The results demonstrate the discrete nature of these constructs. Further, correlation coefficients were calculated between all-time 2 job-related independent variables and all time 1 and time 2 dependent perceptual variables. Correlations between organizational readinesses to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change were all significant ($p < 0,05$, $p < 0,01$). Thus, with respect to *H1*, perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change will co-vary. Table III illustrates descriptive statistics and correlations between these variables.

Table III. Means, standard deviations and correlations of research variables

| Variables | Mean | Sd | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| 1. T1_ Org. readiness to change | 3.52 | 0.86 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. T2_ Org. readiness to change | 3.98 | 0.96 | 0.48** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. T1_ Supervisory support | 3.51 | 0.78 | 0.39* | 0.33* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. T2_ Supervisory support | 4.02 | 0.88 | 0.33* | 0.32* | 0.32* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. T1_ Trust in management | 3.52 | 0.77 | 0.32* | 0.33* | 0.31* | 0.34* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. T2_ Trust in management | 4.08 | 0.97 | 0.31* | 0.31* | 0.32* | 0.34* | 0.44** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. T1_ Appopr. of change | 3.90 | 0.91 | 0.47** | 0.46** | 0.33* | 0.42** | 0.55** | 0.34* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. T2_ Appopr. of change | 4.23 | 1.07 | 0.34* | 0.29* | 0.35* | 0.35** | 0.31* | 0.32* | 0.30* | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. T2_ Job satisfaction | 4.10 | 0.96 | 0.22 | 0.42** | 0.31* | 0.38** | 0.32* | 0.30* | 0.32* | 0.21* | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. T2_ Org. commitment | 4.56 | 0.88 | 0.43** | 0.42** | 0.38* | 0.35** | 0.21 | 0.32* | 0.31* | 0.36** | 0.42** | | | | | | | | |
| 11. T2_ Importance (Involvement) | 5.55 | 0.74 | 0.33* | 0.42** | 0.38** | 0.35** | 0.32* | 0.30* | 0.32* | 0.17 | 0.28 | 0.38** | | | | | | | |
| 12. T2_ Interest (Involvement) | 4.99 | 1.01 | 0.30* | 0.41** | 0.21 | 0.17 | 0.22* | 0.30* | 0.41** | 0.18 | 0.28 | 0.42** | 0.55** | | | | | | |
| 13. T2_ Skill variety | 4.62 | 0.85 | 0.25 | 0.22* | 0.17 | 0.32* | 0.45** | 0.38** | 0.22 | 0.12 | 0.31* | 0.30 | 0.32* | 0.27* | | | | | |
| 14. T2_ Task identity | 4.58 | 0.97 | 0.28 | 0.17 | 0.24 | 0.38** | 0.32* | 0.32* | 0.30* | 0.22 | 0.38** | 0.49** | 0.38** | 0.27* | 0.30* | | | | |
| 15. T2_ Task significance | 4.63 | 1.02 | 0.25 | 0.46** | 0.29* | 0.41** | 0.29* | 0.21 | 0.41** | 0.37** | 0.39** | 0.31* | 0.30* | 0.29* | 0.39** | 0.29* | | | |
| 16. T2_ Feedback | 4.87 | 0.85 | 0.32* | 0.45** | 0.42** | 0.31* | 0.32* | 0.44** | 0.42** | 0.21 | 0.25* | 0.12 | 0.18 | 0.22* | 0.38* | 0.22 | 0.37** | | |
| 17. T2_ Autonomy | 3.99 | 0.88 | 0.32* | 0.41** | 0.38** | 0.17 | 0.21* | 0.55** | 0.31* | 0.44** | 0.38** | 0.21 | 0.17 | 0.22 | 0.12 | 0.30* | 0.32* | 0.22 | |
| 18. T2_ Goal clarity | 4.05 | 1.05 | 0.41** | 0.37** | 0.29* | 0.12 | 0.25* | 0.36** | 0.30* | 0.22 | 0.32* | 0.44** | 0.32* | 0.31* | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.31* | 0.30* | 0.37** |

Note. significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table IV shows the means and standard deviations of the perceived organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change during the planned organizational change. It also illustrates the results of paired t-tests regarding the difference in means from time 1 to time 2 for every variable. The research findings indicate significant positive changes after the change initiative in all perceptions and thus, they fully confirm H2. That is, perceptions of organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change will increase from time 1 to time 2 (i.e. prior and after the initiation of the planned organizational change).

Table IV. Means, standard deviations and paired t-tests (time 1 & time)

| Variables | Time 1 | Time 2 | t-test difference |
|---|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Organizational readiness to change | 3.52 (sd:0.91) | 3.98 (sd:0.96) | 1.89** |
| Supervisory support | 3.51 (sd:0.77) | 4.02 (sd:0.88) | 2.52** |
| Trust in management | 3.52 (sd:0.78) | 4.08 (sd:0.97) | 2.22* |
| Appropriateness of change | 3.90 (sd:0.86) | 4.23 (sd:1.07) | 1.99** |

Note. significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

We run ordinary least-squares regressions in order to investigate how the changes in perceptions from time 1 to time 2 will be moderated by job-related attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) and job-related characteristics (i.e. skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, autonomy, goal clarity). We added the job-related independent variables into the model to assess their effect on the variation in dependent variables from time 1 to time 2. Table V shows the regression analysis results.

Table V. Results of regression analysis

| Variables | Organizational readiness to change | Supervisory support | Trust in management | Appropriateness of change |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Job satisfaction | 0.188 | 0.358* | 0.228 | 0.548** |
| Organizational commitment | - 0.542 | 0.322 | - 0.622** | - 0.622** |
| Importance (Involvement) | 1.325** | 0.885* | 0.245 | 0.356 |
| Interest (Involvement) | 0.253 | 0.563 | 0.425* | 0.785* |
| Skill variety | 0.475* | 0.475 | 0.257 | 0.237 |
| Task identity | 0.225 | 0.325* | 0.369 | 0.256* |
| Task significance | 0.242 | 0.349* | 0.984 | 0.241 |
| Feedback | 0.867 | 0.867 | 0.256 | 0.563* |
| Autonomy | 0.825** | 0.825 | - 0.522* | 0.459* |
| Goal clarity | 0.783** | 0.602** | 0.802** | 0.562* |
| T1_Org.readiness to change | 0.251 | | | |
| T1_Supervisory support | | 0.142 | | |
| T1_Trust in management | | | 0.042 | |
| T1_Appropri. of change | | | | 0.242 |
| F | 21.69** | 14.42** | 18.63** | 20.11** |
| N | 389 | 389 | 389 | 389 |
| R ² | 0.43 | 0.64 | 0.51 | 0.68 |

Note. significance levels: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

In more detail, partial support was found for H3: One attitude (i.e. job importance) and three job-related characteristics (i.e. skill variety, autonomy, goal clarity) emerged as significant moderators of the perceptive organizational readiness to change from time 1 to time 2 (positive relationships). Further, partial support was also found for H4: Two attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, job importance) and three job-related characteristics (i.e. task identity, task significance, and goal clarity) emerged as significant moderators of the perceptive supervisory support from time 1 to time 2 (positive relationships).

Additionally, limited support was found for H5. Statistically significant moderators of trust in management included two positive relationships with employee interest and goal clarity; and two negative relationships with organizational commitment and autonomy. Finally, partial support was found for H6: Three attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job interest) and four job-related characteristics (i.e. task identity, feedback, autonomy, goal clarity) emerged as significant moderators of the perceptive change appropriateness from time 1 to time 2 (negative relationship only with organizational commitment).

7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The research provides empirical evidence that five months after the implementation of a planned organizational initiative change, measures of perceived organizational readiness to change, supervisory support, trust in management and appropriateness of change increased significantly. Thus, in line with previous researches which suggest that individuals progress through a series of stages in recognizing and accepting the need to change (e.g. Isabella, 1990; Rogers, 2003; Weber & Weber, 2001), we can propose that as employees become more familiar with the change process and its outcomes, their support for the change initiative will augment. Consequently, management should focus on both the timing and the amount of information disseminated as well as the training received regarding the planned change; to influence positively employee attitudes towards the proposed organizational change. As a result, open communication, early training and transparency of the process may facilitate employee understanding of the change purpose and allow them to progress more quickly towards change acceptance.

The research findings, also suggest that job involvement (i.e. importance and interest) as well as goal clarity have a positive relationship with all four dependent variables from time 1 to time 2. This provides further support to the international literature, which suggests that it is impossible to influence ones' perception or attitude if he/she considers it as relevantly unimportant or without personal interest (e.g. Curren & Harich, 1994; Katsaros, Tsirikas & Nicolaidis, 2014); and the goals and objectives of the change effort are not clearly well defined (Sawyer, 1992). Thus, management should try to enhance employees' job involvement (e.g. by employing a collaboration/participation management style; Johnson & Scholes, 2002) and clearly define the goals of the proposed organizational change (Weber & Weber, 2001) to develop employees' positive attitudes during a change initiative.

Further, feedback has a moderating effect on change appropriateness but not on the other three perceptions. Even so, management should establish formal processes of directive (i.e. what change aims to fix and/or revise) and facilitative (i.e. suggestions to facilitate employees in their own revision and conceptualization) feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998); to provide employees with the necessary verification (e.g. judgment of why the proposed change is the correct one) and elaboration (e.g. discuss the particular problems, provide real case studies, give tender guidance).

Research data showed negative moderating relationships between organizational commitment and trust in management & appropriateness of change, as well as between autonomy and trust in management. As literature suggests, highly committed employees with positive attitudes towards their present jobs may face changes negatively if they perceive them as a threat for their own benefit or harmful to the organization (Mowday, et al., 1979). Similarly, other research suggests that employees tend to act more independently when they lacked trust in management to properly manage their efforts (Weber & Weber, 2001). Consequently, we argue that management should try to influence their employees' cognitive and emotional attitudes by delivering the right "message" to them (discrepancy, self-efficacy, personal valence, principal support, appropriateness; Armenakis et al., 1999). This "message" may address the necessity, suitability and effective outcomes of change for them and the whole organization; as well as to note management's continuous support during the change process.

Further, we argue that senior management should try to employ dynamic approaches to change, such as the appreciative inquiry. This approach seeks to detect the unique qualities and special strengths of an organization, which can then be built on to develop organizational performance; rather than looking for problems to fix (Four D's: Discovery, Dreaming, Design, Destiny; often played out in a large-group meeting over a two- or three-day time period, and overseen by a trained change agent; Langton & Robbins, 2006). That is, this approach allows the organization to change by focusing on to its strengths and competitive advantages.

Finally, certain aspects of the findings presented here should be interpreted in light of their limitations. Since time 2 data were collected five months after the planned organizational change, it is possible that employees needed more time to fully adapt emotionally and cognitively to the implemented change. Furthermore, the simultaneous examination of all employees, regardless their position, specialization or educational background, indicates that further research need to be conducted through the use of certain control groups. Additionally, even if the president of the hospital reassurance us that no other changes occurred within the organization, it is possible that other external or internal evolutions could provide further explanation for the employee attitudinal change. Finally, the fact that survey was conducted in a single organization may to some extent limit the applicability of the results to other contexts. Nonetheless, it should be noted that further investigation needs to be conducted in other industries, by examining concurrently other important perceptual, emotional and attitudinal moderators (e.g. stress, risk-taking, self-motivation, emotional intelligence, organizational citizenship, self-efficacy) at different points of time.

8. CONCLUSION

In closing, the present paper demonstrates how employee perceptions change during a planned organizational change and it suggests that as employees become more aware of the change process; their support for the change effort will increase. Research findings suggest that management should try to initiate certain policies and practices that could positively influence employees' attitudes and thus, minimize the potential negative impact of the proposed change. Overall, the paper provides an additional step towards understanding a critical component of organizational change, which is a major focus of today's organizational behavior and change management research; and notes the necessity for future research.

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