Employee Commitment to Change: A Literature Review

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In management theory and practice, employee commitment to change is an important issue. Nevertheless, there are vastly different approaches to the concept and theory, including the affecting factors and results of employee commitment to change. As yet, there is no authoritative or definitive approach. This paper has reviewed and summarised the findings of previous studies, based on Herscovitch & Meyer's Three-Component Model of commitment to change, formulated in 2002. The varying degrees of change commitment have been explained in light of several underpinning theories, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model, the Social Exchange Theory, the Social Cognitive Theory, the Broaden-and-Build Theory, the Conservation of Resources Theory and the Implicit Change Leadership Theory. The paper has also examined the various viewpoints on the influencing factors (or antecedents) and end results of employee commitment to change. Ultimately, the literature review has shown that there were several limitations in previous studies, including inadequate research on individual factors and job factors in light of commitment to change.

Key words: *Employee commitment to change, literature review, recommendations.*

Introduction

In recent years, change has been considered as an avoidable process for most organisations due to the changing demands in their business operations (Samah, 2018). Hence, it is a priority for organisations to constantly transform their strategies, policies and practices in business in order to handle the fluctuating requirements of the business setting as well as to attain durable sustainability along with comprehensive organisational competency (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015). Previous studies have revealed that the successful enforcement of organisational change is highly dependent on the acceptance and change commitment of employees (Nielsen & Randall, 2012; Augustsson, Richter, Hasson & von Thiele Schwarz, 2017).

However, despite the numerous studies carried out, conceptual inconsistencies continue to restrain research on commitment to change, according to Bouckenooghe, Schwarz & Minbashian (2015). Thus, the aim of this article has been to analyse previous experimental findings derived from written works on commitment to change, including the antecedents and consequences associated with commitment to change.

This review has examined academic journals from the EBSCO database, the Emerald database and Google Scholar, as well as articles from peer-reviewed journals.

Objectives of this Study

This study has:
1) Examined the concept of employee commitment to change.
2) Evaluated the theoretical overview of employee commitment to change.
3) Analysed the antecedents and outcomes associated with employee commitment to change.

The Literature Review
Concept of Employee Commitment to Change

The idea of change commitment was initially proposed by Conner (1992) as a change programme derived from a psychological view that involves a three-stage process. It starts with awareness, to acceptance of change, and finally the need for the change initiative.

A study by Coetsee (1999) built a model for commitment to change by integrating Lawler's (1992) concept of involvement that combines the interaction of both psychological factors, also known as awareness, with objective factors, meaning skills possession. Besides that, organisational context, which is reward structure is also included.

Armenakis et al. (1993) built a model of the causes affecting employees' motivation for change commitment. As contrasted with the Coetsee and Conner models, their model is more comprehensive as the underlying causes in employees that decide the awareness of the urgency for change (a noticeable difference between the current status and the desired state) is clarified. Besides that, Coetsee's concept of skills is also widened by the model beyond that which is employee-owned to integrate an analysis of the organisation's abilities. The Armenakis model further indicates that leaders' efforts may affect the employee's feeling of a desire for change, which leads to readiness for commitment.

Finally, a Three-Component Model of change commitment, consisting of "normative (obligation-based), continuance (cost-based) and affective (feelings-based) attachments to

change initiatives" was introduced by Herscovitch & Meyer (2002). It has since become the predominant conceptualisation for the understanding of change commitment, alongside Meyer and Allen's (1991) establishment of the units of organisational commitment.

From the theoretical aspect, researchers agree that change commitment is a reflection of an attachment to, and engagement in, the change initiative. This drive is the product of a realisation of the change, along with a mix of motivating factors, goal(s), self-interest, together with the mental or physical capacity to labour for the change initiative (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015).

Thus far, this discussion has demonstrated how change commitment models have evolved from Conner's basic framework that was expanded upon by Coetsee, Armenakis et al. and Herscovitch & Meyer.

Theoretical Overview of Employee Commitment to Change

A number of underpinning theories have been used to explain employees' commitment to change. However, there is no exclusive theoretical framework, as different researchers explain employee commitment to change from different theoretical perspectives within their own empirical studies.

In this review, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Social Exchange Theory, Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model, the Social Cognitive Theory, the Psychological Contract Theory, the Broaden-and-Build Theory, the Implicit Change Leadership Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory are evaluated to explain the association between the variables studied and employee commitment to change. These relationships have been set out in Table 1.

Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) presented their model by implementing an integrative framework—the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)—in explaining attitudes towards change (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015). In addition, the authors' model was devised to be a mechanism to plan the consequences of different ways of change commitment that include affective, continuance and normative scales, which are related to the underpinnings of TPB.

According to Herscovitch & Meyer, an affective commitment to change is described as 'an individual's desire to change'—a feeling of 'wanting to do' or willingness to change, rather than being forced to commit to change. This has become the most preferred value that an organisation seeks to promote among its employees as a result of endless changes in the workplace (Choi, 2011).

On the contrary, continuance commitment to change is also believed to incur costs if one does not commit to a certain target or action set by the organisation (Gelaidan, 2012;

Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Normative commitment is about a sense of 'ought to' where one has a feeling of obligation or responsibility to give one's backing and adherence to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model also relates to research on commitment to change (Gelaidan, 2012). Lewin (1951) believed that change could be influenced by customs and social habits, together with the group dynamic. The group dynamic is influenced by norms and standards that individuals follow (also known as psychological forces). Lewin's Three-Step Model was believed by Gelaidan to be the most fitting theory to explain the mitigating effect of organisational culture on the connection between two variables: leadership style and commitment to change.

Besides that, the Social Exchange Theory is also related to employee commitment to change. In a study by Zainun, Johari & Adnan (2018), the authors explained the social exchange concept by examining internal communications between higher management and employees in the workplace. Zainun et al. proposed that this concept might lead employees to feel more committed to change when there is effective communication within the company.

A study by Ling, Guo & Chen (2018) further contributed to studies on change commitment by examining the role of the employee's social perception and social identity in relation to the Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986), which is a learning theory based on the concept that learning is done by observation or imitation of others. An explanation of the effects wrought by change leadership on employees' change commitment from their social perception and social identity perspectives was then attempted by Ling, Guo & Chen.

The Broaden-and-Build Theory was adopted by Malik & Garg (2017) who proposed a relationship between five aspects—"learning culture, inquiry and dialogue, knowledge-sharing structure, employee resilience and affective commitment to change". The authors explained that people are better able to develop their work view and awareness if there is a feeling of contentment, which in turn enhances social relations and skills. This is because exploration — the foundation of knowledge and personal growth — is stimulated by interest.

Studies by Bakari, Hunjra, Jaros & Khoso (2018) and Erkutlu & Chafra (2016) adopted the Psychological Contract Theory. Bakari et al. explored how cynicism moderates relationship transitions in genuine management and change commitment; value congruence and affective change commitment were examined by Erkutlu & Chafra to discover its relation with psychological contract breach and workplace ostracism. Both of the latter variables play moderating roles.

Most recently, the Implicit Change Leadership Theory was adopted by Guerrero, Teng-Calleja & Hechanova (2018) and Hechanova, Caringal-Go & Magsaysay (2018) to study the ways implicit change leadership is related to change management.

Table 1: Theoretical frameworks of employee commitment to change

Theories	Authors	Characteristics
The Theory of Planned Behaviour	Herscovitch & Meyer (2002)	Suggests that intentions, judgement and behaviour can be predicted by a person's beliefs
Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Model	Gelaidan & Ahmad (2013)	The three steps involve firstly, an unfreezing stage where the process of change is begun by creating the need for change; secondly, a changing stage, in which the new stage of desired behaviour is pursued; and lastly, a refreezing stage, where the new behaviour is established as the norm
The Social Exchange Theory	Zainun et al. (2018)	Suggests that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process between two parties
The Social Cognitive Theory	Ling, Guo & Chen (2018)	Provides a framework for understanding how people are shaped by their environment
The Broaden-and-Build Theory	Malik & Garg (2017)	A model to explain the mechanism behind positive emotions and broadened awareness. The model also encourages positive actions that over time, build skills and resources
The Psychological Contract Theory	Bakari et al. (2018) Erkutlu & Chafra (2016)	Refers to the relationship between an employer and its employees concerning the mutual expectations of both parties
The Conservation of Resources Theory	Erkutlu & Chafra (2016)	Implies that under resource-depleting situations, behaviours that are focused on protecting current resources and pursuing new resources are usually adopted by individuals

The Implicit Change Leadership Theory	Guerrero, Teng-Calleja & Hechanova (2018) Hechanova, Caringal-Go & Magsaysay (2018)	Assumes that individuals have a constructed image of the ideal change leader which is compared with the behaviours of their actual leader during organisational change. When the ideal and actual behaviours match up to each other, the change leader is deemed to be effective

Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Commitment to Change

The influencing factors of employee change commitment can be classified into organisational factors, job factors and individual factors. Much of these factors have been revealed by previous literature. Meanwhile, current research on the outcomes of employee change commitment is focused on Herscovitch & Meyer's three dimensions of commitment to change. Most of the studies reviewed have utilised these distinguishable components, which are: affective, continuance and normative.

Herscovitch & Meyer's Three-Component Model of change commitment is measured separately, individually or by a combination of all three scales into a single overall evaluation of change commitment. Several recent studies have measured the three components separately (Malik & Garg, 2017) or have combined the three components into a single overall measure of commitment to change (Bakari et al., 2018).

This section of the paper has reviewed the studies that concentrate on identifying the factors that instigate the evolution of commitment to change. Table 2 has reported the summaries of key study attributes.

There are three categories for the antecedent variables of employee engagement: organisational, job and individual factors. According to the literature review, most of the studies have focused on organisational factors as antecedents of employee commitment to change.

Conway & Monks (2007) proposed that human resource (HR) practices, which include performance and career-building, communication, independence, training, compensations, staffing, job security and cooperation, are able to influence employee commitment to change. Communication was found to be strongly affiliated with affective commitment to change.

Existing written works have shown that the degree of commitment in followers is influenced by different forms of leadership. Studies by Gelaidan (2012) and Somia & Hafiz (2018) examined the ways in which transformational and transactional leadership affected commitment to change. Gelaidan (2012) found that, in the Yemeni context, these two kinds of leadership are positively affiliated with normative commitment to change as organisational culture acted as a moderator.

Somia & Hafiz pointed out that the above two leadership styles and organisational culture can significantly influence employees' affective commitment to change. Nevertheless, they also found several insignificant results at the dimensional level. For example, employee affective commitment towards change is insignificantly related to management by exception (passive management) in the transactional leadership dimension.

Another study disclosed that servant leadership and contingent reward leadership strengthens the feeling of interactional justice, optimism and commitment to change (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012). Furthermore, Ling, Guo & Chen (2018) studied the relationship between change leadership and employee change commitment, along with the influence of collective identity and change self-efficacy as mediators. They concluded that change leadership is an effective strategy to improve attitudes toward change commitment in employees. Thus, the concept of leadership in change management was broadened.

This finding is confirmed by other studies that showed that the relationship of change leadership framework and affective commitment to change is mediated by change management (for e.g., Hechanova, Caringal-Go & Magsaysay, 2018). This can be seen in business enterprises and educational institutions.

Conversely, Bakari et al. (2018) explored how the relationship between authentic leadership and employee change commitment is moderated by cynical attitudes towards change. Their results demonstrated that employees' commitment to change increases with authentic leadership when cynicism is at a lower level than when it is at a higher level, which is consistent with previous findings by Barton & Abrosini (2013).

In terms of other organisational factors, Paolillo, Platania, Magnano & Ramaci (2015) examined the function of organisational perceptions of fairness and optimism in perceiving continuance change commitment. Their findings indicated that perceived justice is a contributing factor to optimism, as these concepts are linked with continuance commitment to change. Meanwhile, Marchalina & Ahmad (2017) established that employees' responsibility towards change is affected by internal communication.

Malik & Garg (2017) conducted further studies on employee resilience and its' mediating effect on the association between four aspects: knowledge-sharing structure, inquiry and discourse, learning culture and affective commitment to change. Their study exhibited a strong association between the studied aspects and they discovered that the relationship is only partially mediated by employee resilience.

In this review, there were several studies focusing on individual factors, i.e. Erkutlu & Chafra (2016), Marchalina, Ahmad & Gelaidan (2018), and Mansor (2017). Erkutlu & Chafra's study offers a new understanding of value congruence as their findings revealed that value congruence and employees' change commitment were positively and significantly related.

Mansor's research, conducted on middle-level officers in Malaysia, discovered that affective commitment to change is positively influenced by variables of emotional quotient, which includes: self-emotional evaluation, others' emotional evaluation, usage of emotion and control of emotion.

Marchalina, Ahmad & Gelaidan (2018) investigated the effects of individual personality traits, which were moderated by the organisational culture, on employees' change commitment. The results established that these two variables are indeed related.

While most of the studies reviewed concentrated on positive variables as antecedents of employee commitment to change, Zainun et al. (2018) investigated the stressor factors which are linked to commitment to change. The outcomes of the study determined that there is a far-reaching impact on change commitment from these four factors: responsibility overload, responsibility ambiguity, interpersonal conflict and organisational restrictions. Furthermore, internal communication acts as a moderator for responsibility ambiguity and change commitment.

The authors acknowledged that their findings contradicted previous studies due to the high levels of work stressors among administrative staff. These high levels lead to an increased commitment to change, with the expectation that the problems associated with the staff's stressor factors would be resolved along with it.

Table 2: Antecedents and outcomes of employee change commitment

Authors	Antecedents	Outcomes
Conway & Monks (2007)	HR practices: performance and career building, communication, independence, training, compensations, staffing, job security cooperation	Affective commitment to change

Gelaidan (2012)	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Normative commitment to change
Kool & van Dierendonck (2012)	Contingent reward leadership, servant leadership	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change
Mangundjaya (2015)	Psychological empowerment, organisational trust	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change
Paolillo, Platania, Magnano & Ramaci (2015)	Organisational justice	Continuance commitment to change
Erkutlu & Chafra (2016)	Value congruence	Affective commitment to change
Marchalina & Ahmad (2017)	Internal communication	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change
Malik & Garg (2017)	Knowledge-sharing structure, inquiry and discourse, learning culture	Affective commitment to change
Mansor (2017)	Emotional intelligence	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change
Zainun et al. (2018)	Responsibility overload, responsibility conflict, responsibility ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, organisational constraint	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change
Marchalina, Ahmad & Gelaidan (2018)	Personality traits, conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion and openness	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change

Ling, Guo & Chen (2018)	Change leadership	Affective commitment to change
Bakari et al. (2018)	Authentic leadership	Combination of the three scales into a single overall measure of commitment to change, organisational change cynicism
Somia & Hafiz (2018)	Organisational culture: involvement, consistency, adaptability Mission leadership style: transformational, transactional	Affective, normative and continuance commitment to change, change-related behaviour
Guerrero, Teng-Calleja & Hechanova (2018) Hechanova, Caringal-Go & Magsaysay (2018)	Implicit change leadership	Affective commitment to change

Conclusion
Discussion

The literature review of employee change commitment above has produced the following outcomes. First, people's acceptance of change initiates employee commitment to change. This acceptance leads to the evolution of different forms of commitment to change which involves individuals, not organisations. Therefore, employee change commitment is an individual-level concept, not a group-level concept.

Second, researchers involved in the studies above have discussed employee commitment to change from different theoretical perspectives related to their own individual studies. Thus, there is no overarching, comprehensive theoretical model for commitment to change. This view is consistent with the results of previous studies by Choi (2011) and Cinite & Duxbury (2018), who agreed that no consensus on the ways that the construct of commitment to change should be theorised or measured has been reached.

Third, the empirical results have shown that most of the studies measured the three components of commitment to change together, while other studies measured them separately or combined the three components into a single overall measure of commitment to change.

Therefore, our findings have shown that the Herscovitch & Meyer model occupies a crucial role in clarifying employees' behaviour for change initiatives.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for efforts to differentiate the components separately in order to continue improving and developing a stronger constituent model of commitment to change.

Limitations

This paper has sought to make a contribution to the literature review of commitment to change. Nonetheless, this review has not covered all the studies in the areas related to employee change commitment due to limited time and resources. First, this review has examined several studies published in peer-viewed journals, which were mainly viewed online.

Second, there are numerous research findings relating to the definitions and theoretical basis, as well as the antecedents and outcomes, of employee commitment to change; this paper has only reviewed some of them according to the authors' proclivities. This deficiency may have led to bias and incompleteness of the review of the literature on employee change commitment.

Third, employee change commitment in this review has referred to individual commitment and has not involved organisational commitment.

Recommendations for Future Research

A comprehensive range of studies have been conducted on employee change commitment since the Three-Component Model of commitment to change was constructed by Herscovitch & Meyer. To date, the studies have mainly been conducted via cross-sectional correlational methods. For future research, other designs such as experimental or longitudinal approaches should be utilised as these are more suitable for detecting causal effects.

Additionally, from this literature review, there appears to be limited research focusing on the impact of individual factors, job factors and cultural differences on change commitment. Thus, future work should converge on expanding the framework by incorporating variables related to individual factors and job factors.

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