Organisational commitment and responses to planned organisational change: An exploratory study

C.M Visagie & C. Steyn

ABSTRACT

Previous research has identified organisational commitment as a pre-requisite to the successful implementation of organisational change. Change managers rely on the commitment of employees when implementing organisational change, but organisational commitment may decrease in response to the change. This appeared to be the case when a South African telecommunications organisation embarked on an organisational change initiative in 2008. The commencement of the change was followed by large-scale employee resignations, suggesting a possible decline in organisational commitment as a result of the change. Organisational change is complex and is accompanied by cognitive, affective and behavioural responses from employees, but little research has been conducted to show how these responses are related to organisational commitment. This study attempts to address this gap by exploring whether levels of organisational commitment are related to employee attitudes towards change, and whether these attitudes are related to the manner in which employees perceive the change process. Data were collected from 113 employees through an electronic survey. The findings indicate that affective and normative commitment are positively associated with change readiness, personal and organisational valence. Change readiness, personal and organisational valence are, in turn, positively associated with employee perceptions of change communication and training.

Key words: organisational change, organisational commitment, personal valence, organisational valence, change readiness

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Introduction

No organisation is immune to change. As globalisation continues to challenge the appropriateness of current organisational strategies, processes and structures, organisations are required to constantly grapple with the costs and benefits associated with change. The kinds of changes implemented could be minor, major or transformative. Minor change is characterised by a slight modification of the individual employee's mental attitudes and behaviours, without a shift in perception. This type of change is said to address surface-level issues and avoids threats to deep-seated beliefs. Transformative change, however, is characterised by a fundamental shift in the meanings that employees attach to the organisation and its environment (Buckley & Perkins 1984). Despite the nature of organisational change, however, it is generally confronted with resistance, uncertainty and fear. As a result, many organisational change initiatives fail in spite of the effort and money that are invested in trying to render them successful.

Research suggests that the failure of organisational change initiatives can generally be attributed to negative employee attitudes towards the change (Bellou 2007; Coetsee 1999; Durmaz 2007). Unless adequately managed, organisational change initiatives result in feelings of fear and uncertainty (Bovey & Hede 2001), leading to increased stress, reduced levels of trust between employees and management, and declining levels of organisational commitment (Coetsee 1999; Schweiger & Denisi 1991).

A number of scholars have identified organisational commitment as an essential pre-requisite to the successful implementation of organisational change (Bellou 2007; Darwish 2000; Lau & Woodman 1995; Vakola & Nikolaou 2005: Yousef 2000). Change managers tend to rely on the commitment of their employees when implementing organisational change (Bennet & Durkin 2000), but levels of organisational commitment, may, in fact, decrease in response to the change initiatives (Lau, Tse & Zhou 2002; O'Reilly & Chatman 1986). A decrease in levels of organisational commitment during processes of change could lead to increased levels of absenteeism and higher turnover rates (Cotton & Tuttle 1986), further hampering the success of the change initiative.

In 2008, a South African telecommunications company (herein referred to as Company X) embarked on a long-term organisational change initiative, characterised by a series of mergers, acquisitions and outsourcing activities. The commencement of these changes initiated widespread apprehension and uncertainty among employees of the company. According to research conducted by Company X's employee union, voluntary turnover at the company increased dramatically following the implementation of the change initiative. This suggests a possible decline in levels of

organisational commitment at Company X, which might be the result of negative employee responses to the change processes implemented in the company.

The objectives of the study were threefold. Firstly, the study aimed to determine whether there was a relationship between the organisational commitment and the attitudes and behavioural intentions that employees at Company X had developed towards the change.
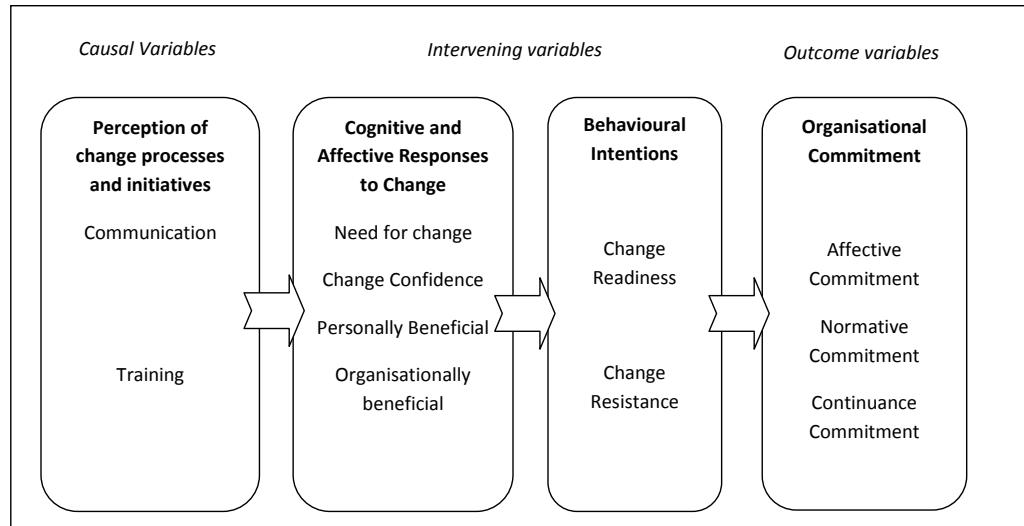
The change management literature also suggested that attitudes towards organisational change might be influenced by the perceptions employees develop towards change management practices and processes. The second objective of the study was therefore to determine whether any statistically significant relationships exist between employee perceptions of the training and communication strategies used by Company X during the change process and the attitudes they developed towards the change. An understanding of how these cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change are related to the various components of organisational commitment will enable change managers to maintain and even increase levels of organisational commitment during the change process by facilitating meaningful adjustments to change initiatives. Recommendations on how this could be done are included in the discussion section of this paper.

The third objective of the research was of a more conceptual nature. Responses to organisational change are diverse, and while some are essential drivers of the change process, others may seriously hamper the success of change initiatives. Most research into employee responses to organisational change initiatives has focused on attitudinal responses, resulting in a dichotomous classification of responses to change as either *change readiness* or *resistance to change* (Chreim 2006). Our research seeks to broaden this somewhat narrow focus on change responses by proposing a differentiated conceptualisation of employee responses to planned organisational change. Instead of focusing exclusively on attitudinal responses to change, we also focus on behavioural intentions and employee perceptions of change processes and interventions.

In the sections that follow, we present our conceptual model along with a set of seven hypotheses developed to test the relationships between the variables depicted in the model. We then test each of these hypotheses using a cross-sectional survey conducted in Company X. Our research demonstrates how various responses to organisational change are related to one another and to levels of organisational commitment. This ultimately provides us with a better understanding of how change management practitioners should focus their efforts in order to maintain organisational commitment during times of change.

Conceptual model

As previously mentioned, we propose a model incorporating attitudinal, behavioural and perceptual responses to planned organisational change. This model, depicted in Figure 1, and subsequently referred to as the Employee Responses to Planned Organisational Change Model, was constructed in response to the change models developed by Schraeder (2004) and Bovey and Hede (2001).

Figure 1: Employee responses to planned organisational change model

According to our model, a distinction should be made between employee perceptions of change processes and the subsequent attitudes and behavioural intentions that employees develop towards the change. This model is therefore based on the idea that the more favourably employees perceive change initiatives and processes (causal variables), the more favourable their attitudes, thoughts and behavioural intentions towards the change (intervening variables) will be, and the higher their levels of organisational commitment (outcome variable).

Each of the variables included in our model and the hypotheses developed to test the relationships between them will be discussed in the following sections. For ease of purpose, we deviate from the norm by discussing the outcome variables first, followed by the intervening variables and then the causal variables.

Organisational commitment: Outcome variable

Organisational commitment is a well-researched variable in the field of organisational studies. As a result, the conceptual definitions of the term are numerous, but most make a distinction between commitment to the organisation based on instrumentality, and commitment to the organisation based on moral attachment by virtue of a value congruence between the employee and the organisation (Bennet & Durkin 2000). For instance, Jaros, Jermier, Koehler and Sincich (1993) distinguish between continuance commitment, affective commitment and moral commitment. Continuance commitment is based on instrumentality and is characterised by employees who feel compelled to commit to the organisation because the monetary, social, psychological and other costs associated with leaving the organisation are high. Affective commitment is characterised as attachment to the organisation at the emotional level, whereas moral commitment is characterised by the internalisation of the goals, values and mission of the organisation to which one belongs. Meyer and Allen (1991) offer a similar conceptualisation of commitment, but instead of including moral commitment as a component in the conceptualisation, they make a distinction between continuance, affective and normative commitment. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), these three components are theoretically and empirically distinct.

Affective commitment is defined as the strength of an individual's identification and involvement with the organisation. It is characterised by a strong belief in and acceptance of the goals and values of the organisation, a willingness to put in extra effort on behalf of the organisation and a desire to remain a member of the organisation (Maxwell & Steele 2003; Falkenburg & Schyns 2007). Work experiences that are consistent with an employee's expectations and basic needs will facilitate the development of affective commitment towards the organisation (Stallworth 2004), and employees displaying high levels of *affective commitment* will act in the interests of the organisation even in the face of uncertainty.

Continuance commitment can be defined as the commitment an employee has towards the organisation because of the investments they have made in the organisation and the costs associated with leaving the organisation (Falkenburg & Schyns 2007). These investments could include close working relationships with co-workers, retirement and career investments. *Continuance commitment* is also strengthened by a perceived lack of employment alternatives, which increases the cost associated with leaving the organisation (Stallworth 2004). Employees who possess a high degree of *affective commitment* will remain with the organisation because they want to, while employees with a high degree of *continuance commitment* will remain with the organisation because they have to. Such employees may also

exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation if they believe that continued employment requires such performance.

Normative commitment is a form of commitment that is based on an individual's feeling of obligation to remain with the organisation because it is seen as the moral and right things to do (Meyer & Allen 1991). These feelings of obligation can occur in instances where, for example, the organisation has supported the employees' educational efforts (Williams 2004).

Commitment to the organisation on the part of the employee is critical when an organisation engages in change initiatives, as committed employees will provide many benefits to the organisation undergoing change. These benefits include putting in extra effort to ensure that the change succeeds, serving as public relations representatives during the change and going above and beyond the norm to assist the organisation to function effectively. It is therefore of the utmost importance to maintain levels of organisational commitment during times of change. In the case of Company X, voluntary turnover increased immediately after the introduction of the change initiative, suggesting that levels of organisational commitment may have dropped as a result of employee attitudes towards the change.

Attitudinal responses to planned organisational change (intervening variables)

Employee attitudes may be referred to as hypothetical constructs that represent an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item (Bagherian, Bahaman, Asnarulkhadi & Shamsuddin 2009). Attitudes towards organisational change may therefore refer to the employees' positive or negative evaluative judgments of the change. These attitudes may range from strong positive attitudes to strong negative ones. Change may be received with happiness and excitement, or with fear and anger. Some employees may approach organisational change as an opportunity for growth and improvement, while others may associate it with instability and risk (Cochran, Bromley & Swando 2002). These negative reactions towards change occur because change generally causes increased pressure, stress and uncertainty (Jones, Watson, Hobman, Bordia, Gallois & Callan 2008). Positive attitudes towards organisational change are critical to the success of change initiatives, as they increase employee cooperation during the change process and prevent resistant behaviours such as hostility and fear (Miller, Johnson & Grau 1994; Vakola & Nikolaou 2005).

Attitudes towards organisational change can be classified as cognitive, affective and behavioural or intentional (Piderit 2000). Affective responses to change reflect how employees feel about the change, while cognitive responses to change reflect

the employees' thoughts about the change. Behavioural or intentional responses to change result from the thoughts and judgements (cognitions) individuals have about the change and the feelings and emotions (affects) associated with the change.

Change readiness, and its opposite, *resistance to change*, have been identified as the two primary behavioural or intentional responses to change (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder 1993; Armenakis, Harris & Feild 1999; Armenakis & Harris 2002; Bernerth 2004). As a precursor to behaviours of resistance towards or support for the change effort, *change readiness* has been described as the best attitudinal predictor of commitment and support for change. Its opposite, *resistance to change*, manifests itself in a number of different ways such as an increase in grievances, high levels of employee turnover, low efficiency, restriction of output and aggression towards management (Benebroek Gravenhorst 2003). This leads us to our first hypothesis, which states: *Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant relationship between change readiness and the components of organisational commitment.*

Change readiness results from the thoughts and judgements that individuals have about the change (cognition) and the feelings employees have towards the change (affect). As a result, and as reflected in our conceptual model, *change readiness* can only be achieved when certain cognitive and affective attitudes are present. For instance, readiness for change increases when employees feel that the change is needed (*need for change*), justified and appropriate.

Employees are also less likely to resist change when they feel that some value will accrue to them as a result of the change. While many authors refer to this as '*personal valence*' (Armenakis et al. 1993, 1999; Dirks, Cummings & Pierce 1996), a distinction should be made between perceptions that the change is personally beneficial and perceptions that the change will benefit the organisation (*organisational valence*). Employees who believe that the change will benefit both themselves and the organisation are more likely to support the change, whereas employees who do not believe any benefits will result from the change will resist the change effort (Jansen & Michael 2010).

Resistance to change is also less likely when employees believe that they are able to cope with the change (Armenakis et al. 1993, 1999) and have the skills and abilities to execute the tasks and activities that are associated with the implementation of the intended change (*change confidence*) (Holt, Armenakis, Feild & Harris 2007). As suggested by Bandura and Adams (1977), the stronger an employees' *change confidence* is, the more active his or her coping efforts are. Employees whose confidence levels are low, or whose coping efforts cease, are more likely to resist organisational change. Our second hypothesis therefore reads: *Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant relationship between employee attitudes towards planned organisational change and change readiness.*

Personal and *organisational valence* are depicted in our model as intervening variables, which result in either *change readiness* or *change resistance*. We also hypothesise, however, that *personal* and *organisational valence* will be related to *organisational commitment*. Our next hypothesis states: *Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant relationship between employee attitudes towards planned organisational change and the components of organisational commitment.*

According to our conceptual model, attitudes towards organisational change are informed by the perceptions that organisational members have of the change processes and activities characteristic of planned organisational change. We therefore next turn our attention to the causal variables in our model, namely employee perceptions of change processes and activities.

Employee perceptions of change communication and training (causal variables)

Change communication and training are essential pre-requisites to fostering healthy attitudes towards the change process. *Need for change* and *personal* and *organisational valence* can be improved through proper and effective communication of the change process. Organisational change initiatives often fail as a result of poorly managed communication, which results in rumours, resistance to change and exaggeration of the negative aspects of the change (Elving & Bennebroek Gravenhorst 2009). By communicating the change and its associated outcomes, managers are able to enhance *personal* and *organisational valence* for the change (Yazici 2002).

Through communication, the successes and triumphs associated with the change are relayed to employees, fuelling *change confidence* (Reichers, Wanous & Austin 1997) and enhancing employee trust in management (Swanson & Power 2001). Similarly, all failures and mistakes associated with the change should be communicated to employees, as this serves to restore management credibility and trust (Wanous, Reichers & Austin 2000). Since trust is a "physiological state comprising the intentions to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of intention or behaviour of another" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer 1998: 124), it creates willingness among employees to engage in risk-taking (Mayer & Davis 1999), which is often required during times of change. Because change processes in organisations involve both an element of risk and vulnerability, employees who trust management are more likely to engage confidently with the risks associated with organisational change and may, as a result, display higher levels of change efficacy or confidence. Our next hypothesis therefore states: *Hypothesis 4: There will be a significant relationship between employee*

perceptions of change communication and the attitudes they develop towards planned organisational change.

By hypothesising that perceptions of change communication will be associated with *personal valence, organisational valence, change confidence* and *need for change*, we can also conclude that these perceptions may be associated with *change readiness*. The fifth hypothesis therefore states: *Hypothesis 5: There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of change communication and change readiness.*

Jones et al. (2008) suggest that social identities become increasingly important during times of change, since individuals are more likely to react negatively to organisational changes when they believe that the changes will threaten valued workplace identities (Pasmore & Woodman 2007). It is therefore important that managers maintain a sense of identity among their employees during times of change. This can be done by making employees feel part of the change process and by providing them with information regarding the change process and its associated outcomes. This ultimately increases self-esteem and feelings of efficacy among employees and shows them that they are valued by the organisation.

According to Fox and Amichai-Hamburger (2001), emotional elements can be used during change communication to enhance employee commitment to the change. These emotional elements mobilise and direct employee behaviour and can include the use of pictures, colours, music and sensation (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger 2001). The use of trusted employees within the organisation to communicate with and convince other employees of the motives behind the intended change is also a helpful tactic (Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky 2005).

Training is also an important change process that can enhance change efficacy among employees (Chiang 2010; Schalk, Campbell & Preese 1998). Research suggests that training employees about the change minimises fear and uncertainty (Vakola & Nikolaou 2005). Through training, accurate information regarding the reasons for the change, the desired outcomes of the change and the impact that the change could have on employees and the organisation is transferred (Kotter & Schlesinger 1979), thereby creating beliefs about the need for the change.

Training for organisational change also stimulates feelings of involvement among employees while simultaneously imparting to them the skills, knowledge and competencies that they will require to cope effectively with the change (Weber & Weber 2001). Our next hypothesis therefore states: *Hypothesis 6: There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of training and the attitudes they develop towards planned organisational change.*

By hypothesising that perceptions of training will be associated with *personal valence*, *organisational valence*, *change confidence* and *need for change*, we can also conclude that these perceptions may also be associated with change readiness. The last hypothesis thus states: *Hypothesis 7: There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of training and change readiness.*

Research approach

Our research employed a quantitative research methodology in the form of a self-administered electronic survey.

Research method

Participants

Due to financial constraints, not all employees at Company X could be surveyed. A specific service unit within Company X was therefore purposively selected to participate in the research. The selection of the service unit was based on the relatively large size of the unit in comparison to other units within Company X and the fact that both permanent and contract employees were represented in the specific unit. A total of 380 employees were employed in the service unit at the time of the research, and all were invited to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire was made available to respondents via a web-based application that interfaced with an Oracle database. The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter that explained the purpose of the research to the participants and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of participation and responses. E-mail reminders were sent to all potential respondents every second day in order to improve response rates.

The survey questionnaire was completed by 113 respondents, representing a response rate of 30 per cent. Almost 63% of the sample were male, and the mean age of respondents was 35 years. Seventy-six per cent of respondents were contractors and technical officers, while 24% held positions at the operational specialist and management levels. The majority of the sample consisted of employees in possession of a diploma (39%), followed by grade 12 (25%) or a post-school certificate (23%).

Measuring instruments

Organisational commitment

Levels of organisational commitment in Company X were measured using an instrument developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). Their instrument consists of 22 items measuring *affective* (eight items), *normative* (six items) and *continuance commitment* (eight items). Each item is measured on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree. Previous research attests to the reliability of each of the scales, with a Cronbach's alpha of between 0.77 and 0.88 for *affective commitment*; 0.65 and 0.86 for *normative commitment*; and 0.69 and 0.84 for *continuance commitment* (Fields 2002). As indicated in Table 1, the items displayed reasonable internal consistencies (Nunnally 1967) in our study, with *affective commitment* displaying a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75; *normative commitment* displaying a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80; and *continuance commitment* displaying a Cronbach's alpha of 0.61.

Perceptions of and attitudes towards organisational change

Attitudes towards organisational change were measured using selected items from the *Readiness for Organisational Change Questionnaire* developed by Holt et al. (2007) and Durmaz's (2007) *Officer Attitude Survey*. Two items were selected from the Holt et al. (2007) instrument to measure *change confidence*, while *personal* and *organisational valence* were measured using six items from the original instrument.

Change readiness, *need for change* and *employee perceptions of change communication* and *training* were measured using selected items from Durmaz's (2007) instrument. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree.

All items were selected based on their applicability to employees at Company X and were in some instances slightly adapted to the Company X context.

As indicated in Table 2, *change readiness*, *personal valence* and *organisational valence* scales all displayed acceptable internal consistencies of 0.75, 0.62 and 0.88 respectively. The *need for change* and *change confidence* scales, however, presented lower than acceptable reliability coefficients and were excluded from further analysis. The *perceptions of change communication* and *perceptions of training* scales both presented good internal consistencies of 0.74 and 0.72 respectively.

Table 1: Commitment items and associated reliability scores

Affective commitment (α = 0.75)
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with the organisation
I enjoy discussing my organisation with people outside of it
I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own
I think I could easily become attached to another organisation as I am to this one (recoded)*
I do not feel like part of the family at my organisation (recoded)*
I do not feel emotionally attached to this organisation (recoded)*
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation (recoded)*
Normative commitment (α=0.80)
I owe a great deal to this organisation
I would not leave my organisation right now, because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it
This organisation deserves my loyalty
I would feel guilty if I left my organisation now
I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer (recoded)*
Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave the organisation
Continuance commitment (α=0.61)
Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organisation
It would be very hard for me to leave this organisation right now, even if I wanted to
I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up (recoded)*
One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organisation would be the scarcity of available alternatives
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organisation
Right now, staying with my organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire
It would be too costly for me to leave my organisation right now
One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organisation is that leaving would require a considerable amount of personal sacrifice – another organisation may not match the overall benefits I have here

* All negatively phrased items were recoded in the opposite direction.

Table 2: Perceptions of and attitudes towards change scales and associated reliability

Change readiness (α=0.75)
Organisational changes improve our organisation's overall efficiency
Our senior managers encourage all of us to embrace organisational changes
My managers are committed to making the change effort a success
My colleagues support organisational change efforts
Personal valence (α=0.62)
When this change is implemented, I envisage financial benefits coming my way
This change will disrupt many of the personal relationships I have developed (recoded)*
The prospective change will give me new career opportunities
When this change is implemented, I don't believe there is anything for me to gain (recoded)*
My future in this job will be limited because of the intended changes (recoded)*
The intended change makes me question my future employment with this organisation (recode)*
Organisational valence (α=0.88)
I think the organisation will benefit from the change
The organisation is going to be more productive when we implement this change
When the intended change is adopted, we will be better equipped to meet our customers' needs
This change will improve our organisation's overall efficiency
This organisation will lose some valuable assets when we adopt this change (recoded)*
The intended change matches the priorities of the organisation
Perceptions of change communication (α=0.74)
I am thoroughly satisfied with the information I receive about the changes in my organisation
I know how to access the necessary information about the changes in the organisation
I believe that the information transmitted about the changes in this organisation explains why change is needed
Perceptions of training for change (α=0.72)
This organisation's head office arranges seminars or workshops in order to train personnel about the changes in this organisation
I consider myself adequately trained about the changes in the organisation

* All negatively phrased items were recoded in the opposite direction.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The mean scores and standard deviations for each of the variables included in our conceptual model are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Sample means (N=113)

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Change readiness	3.47	0.76
Personal valence	2.98	0.62
Organisational valence	3.32	0.57
Perceptions of change communication	3.40	0.82
Perceptions of training for change	2.87	0.99
Affective commitment	4.40	1.20
Normative commitment	4.08	0.99
Continuance commitment	4.52	0.82

The sample means for *perceptions of communication* and *perceptions of training* were 3.40 (SD=0.82) and 2.87 (SD=0.99) respectively. Given that both variables were measured using a Likert-type scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree, it can be concluded that both scores reflect a slightly more positive than negative perception of organisational change processes and interventions. Employee perceptions at Company X were, however, more favourable towards *change communication* than they were towards *training for organisational change*. This may be due to the fact that Company X scheduled regular employee broadcasts informing employees of the progress made in terms of change implementation.

Employees at Company X were also of the opinion that the change was more likely to benefit the company (*organisational valence*) than it was likely to benefit the individual employee (*personal valence*). With a mean score of 3.32 (SD=0.57), employees at Company X displayed moderate to favourable levels of *organisational valence*. Feelings of *personal valence* were lower, with a sample mean of 2.98 (SD= 0.62). This might be due to the fact that, as part of its change process, Company X embarked on a retrenchment programme. This might have fuelled negative sentiments among the remaining employees regarding the extent to which the change would benefit them.

The sample reflects moderate levels of *change readiness*, with a mean score of 3.47 (SD=0.76).

Levels of organisational commitment among respondents were relatively moderate, given that all three commitment components were measured on a Likert scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Agree. Interestingly, *continuance commitment* displays the strongest mean score (mean=4.52; SD=0.82) of all the commitment components. This suggests that the perceived costs of leaving the company might be quite high for a number of employees surveyed. This is notable, given the fact that Company X experienced higher than normal levels of voluntary turnover during the initial stages of the change process. This anomaly might be explained by the fact that longer-serving employees at Company X lost a substantial amount of money due to the decline in pension funds as a result of the 2008/2009 economic recession. As a result, they might want to remain with the organisation for the time being in order to recover the losses incurred in 2008/2009; hence the generally favourable levels of *continuance commitment* displayed by the sample. The increase in turnover at Company X may be explained by the comparatively lower levels of *affective commitment* (mean = 4.40: SD = 1.20), which, according to Whitener and Walz (1993) are more strongly related to turnover intention than *continuance commitment* is.

Levels of *normative commitment* (mean=4.08; SD=0.99) were comparatively low when compared with the mean scores for *affective* and *continuance commitment*.

Relationships between causal, intervening and outcome variables

In order to test for relationships between the causal, intervening and outcome variables measured in the study, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between each pair of variables was assessed in order to identify statistically significant relationships. Relationships were regarded as statistically significant if $p \leq 0.05$. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients between the variables of interest to the study and, as can be seen, 18 statistically significant relationships were observed. Of particular interest, however, are the statistically significant relationships between causal and intervening variables, and the intervening variables and organisational commitment (outcome variable).

Correlations between causal and intervening variables

As indicated in Figure 2, *perceptions of change communication* are significantly positively associated with *personal* and *organisational valence*, thereby confirming hypotheses 4 and 6.
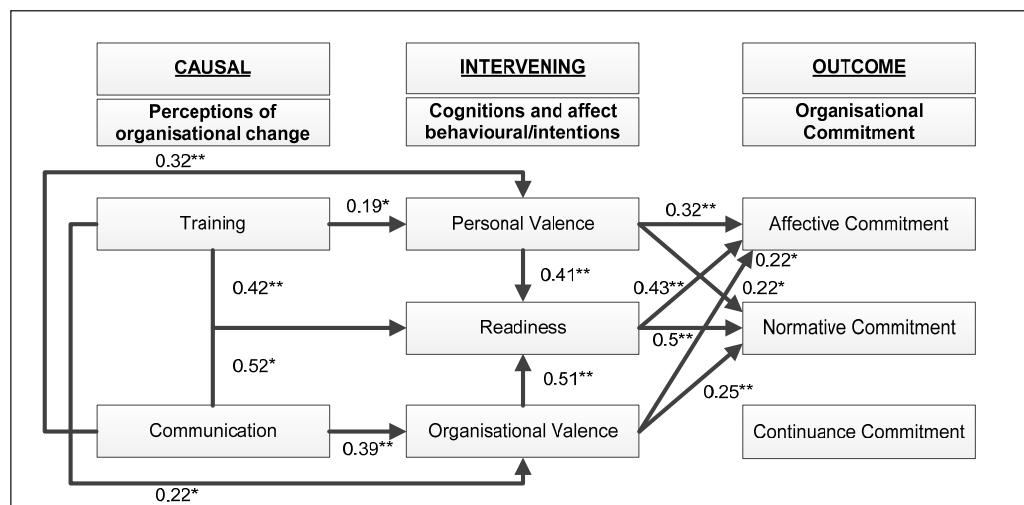
Table 4: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Causal					
Perception of communication					
Perception of training					
Intervening					
Personal valence	0.32**	0.19*			
Organisational valence	0.39**	0.22*			
Change readiness	0.52**	0.42**	0.41**	0.51**	
Outcome					
Affective commitment	0.38**	0.34**	0.32**	0.22*	0.43**
Normative commitment	0.43**	0.38**	0.22**	0.25**	0.50**
Continuance commitment	0.19	-0.01	0.01	0.11	0.10

* $p<0.05$

** $p<0.01$

* $p<0.05$

** $p<0.01$

Figure 2: Relationships between causal, intervening and outcome variables

Perceptions of change communication display a stronger relationship with *organisational valence* (r=0.39; p≤0.01) than with *personal valence* (r=0.32; p≤0.01). Similarly, *perceptions of training* also display a stronger relationship with *organisational valence* (r=0.22; p≤0.05) than with *personal valence* (r=0.19; p≤0.05).

Both *perceptions of communication* and *training* are significantly associated with *change readiness*, confirming hypotheses 5 and 7. *Perceptions of communication* display a stronger correlation with *change readiness* (r=0.52; p≤0.05) than *perceptions of training* do (r=0.42; p≤0.01).

According to our conceptual model, responses to organisational change will be associated with the behavioural intentions employees develop towards the change. Both *personal valence* (r=0.41; p≤0.01) and *organisational valence* (r=0.51; p≤0.01) reflect moderate significant relationships with *change readiness*, thereby confirming hypothesis 2. In the case of Company X, *organisational valence* displays a stronger correlation with *change readiness* than *personal valence* does.

Correlations between intervening variables and outcome variables

As shown in our conceptual model and as stated in hypothesis 3, employee attitudes towards planned organisational change should be associated with the components of organisational commitment. While both *personal* and *organisational valence* display significant positive correlations with *affective* and *normative commitment,* they are not significantly associated with *continuance commitment*. This is to be expected, since *continuance commitment* is an extrinsic form of commitment related to economic and instrumental benefits (Johnson & Chang 2006). *Personal valence* displays a stronger correlation with *affective commitment* (r=0.32; p<0.01) than *organisational valence* does (r=0.22; p<0.05). *Organisational valence*, however, displays a slightly stronger correlation with *normative commitment* (r=0.25; p<0.01) than *personal valence* does (r=0.22; p<0.05).

Hypothesis 1 states that there should be a significant relationship between *change readiness* and organisational commitment. *Change readiness* is associated with both *affective* (r=0.43; p≤0.01) and *normative* (r=0.50; p≤0.01) *commitment*, but no significant correlation exists between *change readiness* and *continuance commitment*. *Change readiness* displays stronger correlations with both *affective commitment* than *personal* and *organisational valence* do. This could be due to the fact that *change readiness* is the intervening variable between *valence* and *organisational commitment*. Furthermore, *change readiness* is more strongly related to *normative commitment* that to *affective commitment*.

Table 5 provides a summary of all seven hypotheses tested, and is followed by a discussion of the results.

Table 5: Summary of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1	There will be a significant relationship between change readiness and the components of organisational commitment.	Confirmed in the case of affective and normative commitment
Hypothesis 2	There will be a significant relationship between employee attitudes towards planned organisational change and change readiness.	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3	There will be a significant relationship between employee attitudes towards planned organisational change and the components of organisational commitment.	Confirmed in the case of affective and normative commitment
Hypothesis 4	There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of change communication and the attitudes they develop towards planned organisational change.	Confirmed
Hypothesis 5	There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of change communication and change readiness.	Confirmed
Hypothesis 6	There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of training and the attitudes they develop towards planned organisational change.	Confirmed
Hypothesis 7	There will be a significant relationship between employee perceptions of training and change readiness.	Confirmed

Discussion

As indicated in our conceptual model, perceptions of organisational change interventions and activities such as training and communication should be related to the employees' cognitive and affective reactions towards planned organisational change. The data derived from our research confirm this, as both *perceptions of training* and *perceptions of change communication* display significant positive correlations with both *personal* and *organisational valence*. *Perceptions of change communication* do, however, display stronger correlations with both *personal* and *organisational valence* than *perceptions of training* do. This is not surprising, since communication is arguably the most effective tool through which to inform employees of the benefits

surrounding the change (Chiang 2010; Schraeder 2004). *Perceptions of change communication* also display a stronger correlation with *change readiness* than *perceptions of training* do. According to Schraeder (2004), effective organisational communication during times of change evokes perceptions among employees that the organisation is supportive. Although our research regrettably did not include a quantitative measure for perceived organisational support during times of change, it could be argued that the change communication implemented by Company X might have fostered perceptions of organisational support, and subsequently fostered *change readiness*.

Interestingly, *perceptions of change communication* display a stronger relationship with *organisational valence* than with *personal valence*. This suggests that the change communication messages disseminated by Company X during the change process might have been predominantly directed at relaying information about the value of the change that could accrue to the organisation as opposed to the value of the change that could accrue to the individual employee. Since our study also shows that *personal valence* displays a particularly strong correlation with *change readiness*, it might have been prudent on the part of Company X to direct change communication programmes at informing employees of the personal benefits that could accrue as a result of the organisational change.

It is important, however, that organisations should not communicate only an idealised vision of the change process to employees. This results in the development of unrealistic expectations surrounding the change and consequently disappointment. Organisations should instead communicate a realistic picture of the proposed change, thereby enabling employees to cope better with the proposed change and suffer fewer disappointments (Lines 2005). This realistic portrayal of the change might improve feelings of *personal valence* and *organisational valence*, resulting in improved levels of *change readiness*. The Realistic Change Preview (RCP) can be used for this purpose, and is based on prior work that suggests that employees develop more favourable attitudes towards an attitude object if both favourable and unfavourable aspects of the attitude object are communicated (Phillips 1998).

Our research also shows that attitudes towards organisational change are related to both *affective* and *normative commitment*. *Personal valence* displays a stronger relationship with *affective commitment* than *organisational valence* does. According to Elias (2009: 40), *affective commitment* is a "psychological and individual level variable that primarily hinges on the fulfilment of personal needs". *Normative* and *continuance commitment*, however, are dependent on factors external to the individual, such as social norms and the nature of the job

market. The perceived benefits accruing to an individual as a result of organisational change could include aspects related to personal growth and development and would therefore have a direct impact on the individual's emotional attachment to the organisation in the form of *affective commitment*. It therefore makes sense that *personal valence* would correlate more strongly with *affective commitment* than with *normative commitment*.

Affective commitment has been regarded as the primary component of organisational commitment due to its strong and consistent correlations with a number of organisational and individual level outcomes (Elias 2009). Organisations are therefore encouraged to focus on improving, or at least maintaining, levels of *affective commitment* during times of change. Given the strong correlation in our study between *affective commitment* and *personal valence*, this can be done by highlighting the benefits of the change to the individual.

As expected, *change readiness* displayed the strongest relationship with the components of commitment when compared to *personal* and *organisational valence*. It also reflected a stronger relationship with *normative commitment* than with *affective commitment*. *Normative commitment* has been described as the "internalised normative pressures to act in a way that meets organisational goals and interests" (Weiner 1982: 421). According to Meyer and Allen (1997), *normative commitment* is established through socialisation experiences and organisational investments, while *affective commitment* is established by creating favourable work experiences for the employee. *Normative commitment* is therefore fostered when employees feel that the organisation expects their loyalty. The fact that *change readiness* correlates more strongly with *normative commitment* than with *affective commitment* suggests that *change readiness* at Company X may be underpinned by normative pressures.

Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

As indicated by our research, *change readiness* correlates strongly with both *affective* and *normative commitment*. Since *change readiness* is informed by both *personal* and *organisational valence*, it is important that change management practitioners stimulate the development of both *organisational* and *personal valence* among employees during times of change. As indicated through our research, this can be done by focusing on *employee perceptions* of both *change communication* and *training*.

Due to the exploratory nature of our research and the fact that our analysis is correlational, we are unable to establish the direction of causality between the variables. While our unidirectional conceptual model depicts organisational commitment as an outcome variable, previous research has shown that attitudes

towards organisational change may also be shaped by levels of commitment to the organisation. Further research is therefore required to establish possible reciprocal effects between the variables.

It should also be noted that our research was conducted just after the initial change implementation at Company X. Further research using a change model incorporating causal, intervening and outcome variables would benefit from adopting a longitudinal approach. In this way, all variables could be measured prior to, during and after the change is implemented in order to ascertain whether the relationships between variables observed in this study remain consistent throughout the change process. A longitudinal approach would also allow researchers to test assumptions regarding the direction of causality.

The conceptual model developed at the start of this research incorporated a number of intervening variables that could not be included as part of the analysis due to poor internal consistency. The poor reliability of these scales may have been due to the fact that only a limited number of items from the original instruments were included in our questionnaire. While we purposively limited the number of items in our research to ensure contextual relevance and limit respondent fatigue, future researchers are advised to develop scales that include more items.

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