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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of perceived organizational support (POS) in individual change readiness. Drawing upon social exchange theory, this study tests the notion that POS is linked to readiness via trust in the organization. It also explores the nonlinear effects of POS on trust and its nonlinear indirect effects on change readiness. Data were collected from a sample of 154 employees of a restaurant chain undergoing a restructuring and the introduction of new leadership. The results show a direct effect of POS on change readiness, as well as indirect effects that become manifest through trust. *Post-hoc* analyses indicate that the POS–trust relationship is nonlinear, such that the relationship is attenuated at higher levels of POS, and reveal a nonlinear indirect effect on change readiness. Study findings suggest organizations could improve the likelihood of bringing about change by supporting employees before change initiatives are introduced, but that very high levels of support may yield diminishing returns.

Introduction

Organizations often struggle with change, as studies report that up to 70% of change initiatives fail (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Beer & Nohria, 2000). Although the veracity of that figure has been called into question (Hughes, 2011), it is clear that the ability of organizations to successfully manage and implement change programmes remains critical to firm success. A major component of successful organizational change involves gaining employee buy-in (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). For example, Kotter and Cohen (2002) suggest that many organizational change failures can be attributed to a lack of employee support for, and belief in, the proposed changes. As such, change readiness has become a topic of significant interest for organizational change scholars (e.g. Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Specifically, scholars have called for greater focus on the antecedents of individual readiness (Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Rafferty et al., 2013). However, research on those antecedents remains in a nascent state, and the few existing studies focus primarily on the impact of the organization's change management processes in predicting readiness (e.g. Rafferty et al., 2013). In particular, studies have

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focused on the importance of ensuring employee participation in change formulation (e.g. Gopinath & Becker, 2000; Rafferty & Restubog, 2010; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), or the content of the organization's change message (e.g. Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004) in fostering readiness for change. However, the impact of other aspects of an organization's activities remain relatively unexplored. One particularly important factor that has received little attention is the role of employee support.

Perceived organizational support (POS), or employee perceptions of the degree to which the employing organization values one's contributions and is attentive to individual well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), may play an important role in readiness for multiple reasons. First, social support is associated with feelings of control during change (Vardaman, Amis, Dyson, Wright, & Randolph, 2012), suggesting other forms of support, such as organizational support, may contribute to positive change-related outcomes. This proposition has been supported by work demonstrating a link between managerial support and readiness for change (Kirrane, Lennon, O'Connor, & Fu, 2017). Second, Self, Armenakis, and Schraeder (2007) found that POS was associated with positive feelings toward change directives, suggesting it might also foster readiness. Third, POS has been linked to greater comfort with risk-taking (Neves & Eisenberger, 2014), suggesting it fosters greater psychological safety when individuals are faced with uncertainty, such as during organizational changes. Finally, individuals reciprocate the support they receive (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960), thereby potentially influencing their likelihood of readying for organizational change as a response to receiving support; individuals with higher levels of POS might reciprocate by backing organizational change initiatives.

However, because organizational change involves significant vulnerability on the part of change recipients, reciprocating POS in a change setting likely requires feelings of trust that the change is well intended and not harmful to one's interests. Employee trust is commonly viewed as an employee's willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of the organization or leader over which the employee has no control (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Social exchange theory suggests that employees who perceive that they are supported by the organization are likely to trust that the organization's change initiatives will not harm them or their interests (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). For these reasons, this paper contends that trust in management is a key intermediate mechanism that intervenes in the POS–change readiness relationship.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the role of POS in individual change readiness. Contributing to a growing body of work on organizational change recipient reactions, this study draws upon a sample of 154 employees from a restaurant chain in the northeastern United States undergoing a significant restructuring initiative. With insights derived from social exchange theory, the study specifically explores the relationship between change readiness and two important attitudinal antecedents. In so doing the paper makes several theoretical and practical contributions. First, this study casts light on the role of POS in individual readiness for change. Although recent work that suggests that POS may have a positive influence on individual change recipient perceptions and emotions (Fuchs & Prouska, 2014; Turgut, Michel, Rothenhöfer, & Sonntag, 2016), the current study tests the specific importance of POS in fostering change readiness, which has been cast as vital for change effectuation (By, 2007).

Although conceptual work theorizes that trust fosters change readiness (e.g. Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Santhidran, Chandran, & Borromeo, 2013) this relationship is more assumed than empirically known. The present study's second contribution is elaborating trust's role in garnering employee readiness. Third, this study empirically incorporates alternative explanations for the level of change readiness, such as job attitudes (i.e. satisfaction and turnover intentions) and demographics. In doing so, it allows for a more comprehensive model understanding the role of each theoretical antecedent in light of other related variables. Finally, drawing on recent research that suggests POS's effects may be nonlinear in uncertain situations, this paper reports the results of *post-hoc* tests for the potential non-linearity of the effects. Results from these tests show that POS's effects on trust tend to level off at higher values of POS.

Theory and Hypotheses

Individual change readiness is defined as an individual's 'beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully undertake those changes' (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 681). Although change readiness is burgeoning on the scholarly landscape, relatively little is known about its antecedents (Rafferty et al., 2013). Whereas a small number of studies have linked personal characteristics to individual change readiness (e.g. Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000; Rafferty & Simons, 2006), most of the research on readiness antecedents has focused on the effects of the organization's attributes and change management processes. For example, Jones, Jimmieson, and Griffiths (2005) found that favourable perceptions of the organization's culture were linked to readiness for change. Other studies have found that employee empowerment and participation in change decisions (Armenakis et al., 1993), and employee perceptions of quality information and communication regarding change (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991) were related to change readiness. This study uses a social exchange approach to build on existing literature to understand the ways in which support contributes to change readiness.

A Social Exchange Approach to Change Readiness

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests employees view the treatment they receive as an indicator of whether the organization favours or disfavours them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees volunteer their work efforts in exchange for economic and noneconomic rewards (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). The norm of reciprocity suggests that favourable treatment from an organization elicits a felt obligation in employees to reciprocate through positive workplace behaviours (Gouldner, 1960). Grounded in these theoretical frameworks, POS elicits a variety of positive social outcomes such as organizational commitment, organizational identification, job involvement, citizenship behaviours, and improved job performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Likewise, POS has been found to reduce job stress, burnout, and withdrawal behaviours (Kurtessis et al., 2015). Within a change context, POS has a role in crafting participation in and evaluations of change (Fuchs & Prouska, 2014), and thus can alter change recipients' perceptions of the change.

The belief that one is supported should result in greater acceptance that proposed organizational changes will benefit employees. If employees perceive that their organization supports them, they are more likely to believe that change is needed, is achievable, and will likely generate positive outcomes (Self et al., 2007). For example, employees may find themselves emotionally depleted during organizational changes, particularly those that are resistant to change, yet these negative effects are buffered when POS is high (Turgut et al., 2016). These perceptions of organizational support are likely to help employees feel confident that despite the changes taking place, they are valued members of the organization. Such feelings might further increase an individual's employee belief that the organization is considering the best interests of the employee whilst handling the change, thereby fostering individual readiness for change. Hence, both the beliefs and affective feelings generated by POS could result in an employee's desire to reciprocate support by developing greater change readiness.

Hypothesis 1: POS is positively associated with change readiness.

The Importance of Trust

Reciprocating support in the change context can be problematic, however. Change recipients experience turmoil and upheaval in their work lives, which creates fear and anxiety (Paterson & Cary, 2002). These feelings could problematize the exchange of support between employee and organization. Therefore, during organizational change, the most important way individuals might reciprocate support is by trusting the organization's management. Broadly, trust refers to a person's inclination to depend on another entity (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust applied to the workplace environment, as proposed by Mayer et al. (1995), is a subordinate's willingness to be vulnerable to the behaviour or actions of his/her leader or organization. Trust in leadership also has a strong meta-analytic relationship with POS (Ferrin & Dirks, 2002).

Trust in management is a key component in social exchange relationships because of the discretionary nature of the reciprocation process (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002). Indeed, social exchange 'requires trusting others to discharge their obligations' (Aryee et al., 2002, p. 269). Therefore, as organizational entities establish repeated patterns of support, employees are likely to develop greater feelings of trust that future organizational decisions, goals, and plans for change will continue to reciprocate employee support. Additionally, within a POS framework, employees believe their performance will be continuously rewarded by the organization's management based on prior exchange experiences and that the organization will not 'take advantage of their vulnerabilities' (Kurtessis et al., 2015, p. 16). Based on the accumulated reciprocity associated with POS, it should be linked to trust in the organization's management during organizational change.

Hypothesis 2: POS is positively associated with trust in management.

Trust is a key determinant of cooperative attitudes and participative behaviours in organizations (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Employee trust has been associated with positive workplace outcomes such as organizational commitment, citizenship behaviours, intentions to remain, and job satisfaction (Aryee et al., 2002; Ferrin & Dirks, 2002). Perhaps

more importantly, within an organizational change context, trust has been linked to commitment to change (Neves & Caetano, 2006). When employees have trust in leaders and organizations, they are often more open to change and demonstrate higher levels of cooperation (Eby et al., 2000; Kiefer, 2005; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Additionally, employees who view organizational leaders as trustworthy are likely to deliver greater effort and become more engaged in their work than those with lower trust (Tabak & Hendy, 2016). Therefore, when employees trust their organization's management they will be more inclined to believe that decisions and plans regarding organizational change are necessary and positive. Greater trust in the organization's management can also enhance employee confidence that organizations can be successful undertaking major changes and in their own abilities to handle the change.

Hypothesis 3: Trust in management is positively associated with change readiness.

Implicit in these social exchange-based arguments is the idea that trust intervenes in the POS–change readiness relationship. That is, when employees perceive they are supported by their organizations, they develop trust and a desire to reciprocate in the form of readiness for organizational change. The opposite idea has been supported in previous work on change reactions: unsupportive work environments can create cynical reactions and negative emotions to change, resulting in resistance to change (Kiefer, 2005; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). Whereas cynicism assumes the other party acts based on self-interest motives, trust implies a belief that the other party will act in one's best interest. This paper contends that trust is a mechanism through which POS is related to cooperation in the change process. Drawing on social exchange theory, this paper suggests that POS manifests in change readiness through the creation of trust. Individuals who feel supported trust the organization and its management to protect them and their interests. The belief that the organization and its management team is a trustworthy partner may help employees to more readily accept change initiatives. For this reason, POS should indirectly influence change readiness via trust.

Hypothesis 4: The indirect effects of POS on change readiness become manifest through trust.

Methods

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from employees of a large restaurant chain in the northeastern United States. The firm was in the early stages of a major restructuring plan and had recently hired a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a new Chief Operating Officer (COO). The COO believed the organization was too flat based on observations that corporate managers had too many direct reports from the field. The COO proposed re-structuring the company into three divisions, and instituting an intervening layer of middle management between managers in the field and divisional managers at the corporate headquarters. The COO also believed that the company lacked formalization and standardization in its practices and that it needed to modernize its practices and food offerings.

The restructuring was instituted by the company's new top managers and specifically included changes such as adding a new layer of middle management, changing reporting relationships, new training protocols, new safety processes, new food preparation

procedures, a new menu design, and new food offerings. Participants performed a variety of job functions including customer service, food manufacturing, food delivery, and food preparation. The organization announced the planned changes to location managers at an annual holiday gathering for the management team. The company provided details about the change to those managers and front line employees via e-mail. Location managers were also tasked with explaining the change to their employees at the restaurant locations, and the COO and the new Division managers visited each location to outline the changes to employees.

Data were collected via a pencil and paper survey. The first author visited each of the chain's 15 locations to distribute and collect surveys. Participants voluntarily completed surveys and were entered into a drawing to win a small prize ($50 in value) as an incentive for participating. Surveys were distributed to the population of the chain's non-managerial employees. The final sample consisted of 154 employees who completed the survey, for a response rate of 17%. The sample was 73% female, with an average age range of 26–34 and an average tenure of 1–5 years.

Measures

Perceived Organizational Support

POS was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'. The three items were drawn from Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro's (1990) short form measure of POS. The items were: 'My organization cares about my opinions', 'My organization really cares about my well-being', and 'My organization strongly considers my goals and values'. The scale's internal consistency reliability estimate (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.90.

Trust in Management

Trust was measured using three items adapted from Stanley et al.'s (2005) trust in management scale. Responses ranged from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'. A sample item was: 'In general, I trust the management in my organization'. Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.94.

Readiness for Change

Individual change readiness was measured with three items adopted from Eby et al.'s (2000) individual readiness scale. A sample item is 'Regarding the restructuring plan, I am confident any changes my organization institutes will have their desired effect'. The scale's internal consistency reliability estimate (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.87.

Control Variables

Job satisfaction was included as a covariate in the model because of the possibility that satisfied employees may be more resistant to changing the status quo in organizations. Turnover intentions were considered to account for the possibility that employees with plans to leave might be unconcerned with organizational change. Job satisfaction was measured via three items ($\alpha = 0.95$) from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983). Turnover intentions were measured using Hom and Griffeth's (1991) three-item scale ($\alpha = 0.94$). Responses for both scales ranged from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to

5 = 'Strongly Agree'. A sample job satisfaction item is 'All in all, I am satisfied with my job'. A sample turnover intentions item is: 'I intend to quit my present job'. Age in years, and gender (0 = female; 1 = male) were included as control variables to account for the effects of demographics. Tenure was also included in the model to account for the possibility that employees with a longer history in the organization might be more reluctant to accept change.

Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to ensure the validity of the variables used in testing the hypotheses. To evaluate the fit of the measurement model, Bollen's (1990) recommendation to interpret multiple indexes of model fit was followed. The analysis included the χ^2 test, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 2009). Hypotheses were tested using OLS regression and the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). This technique employs regression equations to test the moderated mediation model, and sampling bias-corrected bootstrapping to test for direct, indirect, and conditional indirect effects.

Results

Results from the CFA reveal that the hypothesized three-factor model had adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 78.96$, df = 24, $p < .01$; CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.12) with all factor loadings above 0.84. The hypothesized factor structure was compared to several other alternative models including a two-factor model in which employee POS loads with trust on one factor ($\chi^2 = 175.73$, df = 26, $p < .01$; CFI = 0.89, TLI = 0.86, RMSEA = 0.20), and one in which all items load on one factor ($\chi^2 = 365.27$, df = 27, $p < .01$; CFI = 0.77, TLI = 0.69, RMSEA = 0.29). The three-factor model fit significantly better than the two-factor model (χ^2 difference = 96.97, df = 2, $p < .01$) and better than the one-factor model (χ^2 difference = 286.28, df = 3, $p < .01$). Thus, the hypothesized factor structure had the best fit with the data. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables. In order to ease concerns of multicollinearity, the variance inflation factors for each of the predictor variables in relation to change readiness were examined; all of the factors were

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job satisfaction	4.01	0.98								
2. Turnover intentions	2.35	1.22	0.36*							
3. Age	1.27	1.58	0.02	0.20*						
4. Gender	0.27	0.44	−0.12	0.01	0.09					
5. Tenure	0.27	0.45	−0.11	−0.04	0.13	−0.07				
6. POS	3.65	1.05	0.66**	−0.32*	−0.13	−0.11	−0.20*			
7. Trust	3.85	1.13	0.64**	−0.26*	−0.03	−0.17*	−0.18*	0.75**		
8. Change readiness	3.55	1.08	0.63**	−0.34*	−0.05	0.11	−0.22*	0.71**	0.78**	—

Notes: n = 154. Age is coded 0 = 16–25 years, 1 = 26–34 years, 2 = 35–49 years, 3 = 50–64 years, 4 = 65 and older years; gender is coded 0 = female, 1 = male; tenure is coded 0 = 0–3 months, 1 = 3–6 months, 2 = 6–12 months, 3 = 1–5 years, 4 = 5+ years.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

Table 2. Model results for trust and change readiness.

Variable	Trust				Change readiness			
	β	SE	t	VIF	β	SE	t	VIF
Job satisfaction	0.30**	0.08	3.65	1.93	0.12	0.08	1.51	2.12
Turnover intentions	−0.01	0.05	−0.18	1.22	−0.10*	0.05	−2.08	1.22
Age	0.04	0.04	1.01	1.11	−0.01	0.04	−0.33	1.12
Gender	−0.12	0.13	−0.88	1.04	0.23	0.12	−1.97	1.04
Tenure	−0.04	0.05	−0.91	1.09	−0.05	0.04	−1.21	1.09
POS	0.63**	0.08	7.95	1.99	0.25**	0.08	2.88	2.88
Trust	–	–	–	–	0.47**	0.08	6.23	2.69
Intercept	0.46	0.39	–	–	0.68	0.35	–	–

Notes: $n = 154$; β = unstandardized coefficients; trust $R^2 = 0.63$; change readiness $R^2 = 0.67$; age is coded 0 = 16–25 years, 1 = 26–34 years, 2 = 35–49 years, 3 = 50–64 years, 4 = 65 and older years; gender is coded 0 = female, 1 = male; tenure is coded 0 = 0–3 months, 1 = 3–6 months, 2 = 6–12 months, 3 = 1–5 years, 4 = 5+ years.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

well below recommended thresholds as demonstrated in Table 2 (Neter, Kutner, Nacht-sheim, & Wasserman, 1996).

Hypothesis 1 suggested POS would be associated with change readiness. Results from Table 2 show that the relationship is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 1 is supported. Hypothesis 2 stated that POS would be positively associated with trust. Results presented in Table 2 show that this hypothesis is supported ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3 proposed that trust would be positively associated with change readiness. Results presented in Table 2 also support this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 4 proposed that trust would intervene in the relationship between POS and change readiness. Results from analysis using the PROCESS macro support the indirect effect hypothesis, as evidenced by the 95% confidence interval not containing zero ($\beta = 0.30$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.43]). Results from the PROCESS macro also support the direct effects of POS on change readiness ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < .01$). Taken together, the results support our model's predictions, and suggest that trust partially intervenes in the POS–change readiness relationship.

Post-hoc *Analyses*

Although the results generally support our model's predictions, recent insights from the POS literature suggest its effects may be nonlinear (Burnett, Chiaburu, Shapiro, & Li, 2015). Specifically, Burnett et al. (2015) tested the relationship between POS and taking charge, and found the effect was curvilinear in part due to conditions of uncertainty in their context. Given the uncertainty in this study's change-laden context, we believe the effects of POS that were demonstrated here might also be nonlinear. In order to test for these nonlinear effects, we ran our model in SPSS with a squared POS term. Results show that the POS term was significant ($\beta = 1.34$, $p < .01$), while the squared POS term was also significant ($\beta = −0.77$, $p < .01$), suggesting the effect is at least partially nonlinear. The increase in R^2 derived from adding the squared term was 0.03, which is a small but significant model effect ($p < .01$).

Perhaps more importantly, the graph produced using the curve estimation function in SPSS presented in Figure 1 demonstrates the nature of POS's nonlinear effect on trust. The figure shows that the effect on trust has an upward slope at lower and medium values of POS, but levels off at higher values. This suggests that the utility of POS in fostering trust may be attenuated as POS reaches higher levels. Although the line is not as markedly
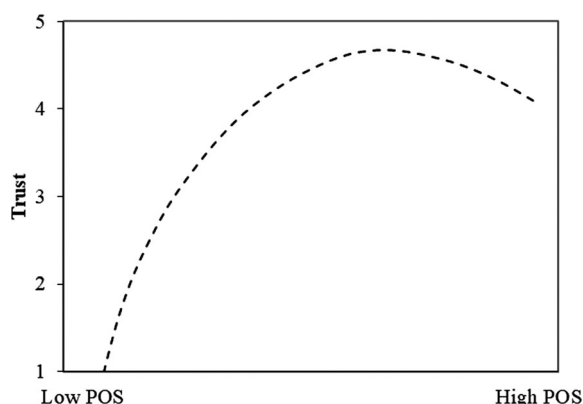
Figure 1. Nonlinear effect of POS on trust.

curvilinear as that found by Burnett et al. (2015) in examining POS's role on taking charge, it does support the idea that POS's effects are nonlinear in the change context, especially at higher levels of POS.

We extended this *post-hoc* analysis by testing the nonlinear indirect effects of POS on change readiness using the MEDCURVE macro, which uses bootstrapping to assess instantaneous nonlinear indirect effects (Hayes & Preacher, 2010). Results demonstrate significant instantaneous indirect nonlinear effects for POS on change readiness through trust at low ($\theta = 0.51$; 95% CI [0.33, 0.72], $p < .05$), mean ($\theta = 0.39$; 95% CI [0.26, 0.53], $p < .05$), and high ($\theta = 0.27$; 95% CI [0.14, 0.46], $p < .05$) levels of POS. Tests for direct nonlinear effects of POS on change readiness were not significant ($\beta = 0.02$, $p = .60$). Taken together, the *post-hoc* tests and curve estimation graph suggest that POS's effects on trust have an upward slope but tend to taper off at higher levels, and that trust intervenes in the instantaneous nonlinear indirect effects of POS on change readiness. However, a note of caution is warranted as the improvement in variance explained by the nonlinear effects over the linear effects on trust is statistically significant but relatively modest. The nonlinear effects appear to be most pronounced at very high levels of POS.

Discussion

This study examined the roles of POS and trust in the management in change readiness. Results provide broad support for the model, yielding important insight into the importance of the association between POS and change readiness. In addition, the *post-hoc* findings suggest that POS may yield diminishing returns in fostering trust, as the impact of POS on trust becomes attenuated at higher levels. *Post-hoc* results also show that POS has non-linear indirect effects on change readiness. The results have theoretical implications for the change readiness literature and practical implications for the management of change in organizations.

Theoretical Contributions

These findings build on previous work by highlighting the importance of being supportive of employees during organizational change. Extant readiness research suggests change

management processes are highly influential in creating individual readiness for change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Building on previous findings demonstrating that messaging and communication foster positive change recipient reactions, the current study suggests more generalized organizational actions, such as distribution of support, also fosters readiness for change. An implication of this finding is that day-to-day actions by the organization during periods of stasis may have an effect on change recipient reactions when change programmes are later introduced.

Study results also bring the role of trust into clearer focus. Organizational support's linkage with readiness is partially explained by trust, suggesting the delivery of support is associated with building trust towards management. Change recipients may draw upon this reservoir of trust in accepting or rejecting change. As such, the results suggest trust also plays a pivotal role in readiness to change. Yet, trust has been relatively understudied in the change realm. Although this work provides initial insight into its importance, more study of the role of trust in the context of organizational change is warranted. Given the uncertainty surrounding organizational change and the perceived threats change recipients often perceive, understanding trust's role could be vital in gaining insight into broader change recipient reactions to change initiatives.

In addition, this study provides evidence for the association between POS, trust and change readiness beyond alternative explanations, such as one's satisfaction with one's job, turnover intentions, and demographic variables. This finding brings its specific role in the change process into greater relief. POS had a significant impact on change than some of the most common correlates of individual attitudes and behaviours in the organizational behaviour literature, demonstrating its importance in change. This finding suggests that POS and trust are an integral part of an organization's change selling effort. Managers should work to support their employees and build the associated trust in order to have a reservoir of ready change recipients when organizational transformation is inevitably attempted.

While organizational support is associated with increased trust and change readiness, the current study also suggests there is an inflection point (at relatively high levels of POS) where additional POS does not yield substantial increases in trust. These effects provide support for an 'only so much of a good thing' phenomenon, where the effect diminishes at higher levels. Extant POS research as begun to support the notion of that POS's predictive role in outcomes may go beyond direct relationships and include comparison effects (Vardaman et al., 2016), network effects (Vardaman, Allen, & Rogers, 2018; Zagenczyk, Scott, Gibney, Murrell, & Thatcher, 2010), and nonlinear effects (e.g. Burnett et al., 2015). This research extends that view to trust domain, and in so doing informs the change readiness literature.

Practical Implications

This study underscores the notion that organizations need to provide support to employees prior to starting and during an organizational change initiative, as POS is positively related to trust in management and cooperative change attitudes (i.e. readiness). Because POS is based on a history of reciprocated support between the employee and the organization, it is likely to continue yielding benefits for organizations seeking to implement change initiatives. Such investments in employees may counteract the low

rate of successful change initiatives. However, the curvilinear effect suggests that at an inflection point, increased investments will be associated with attenuated trust and change readiness levels. To the extent that these resource investments are finite, once there are high levels of POS within the organization, the investments may be better allocated to other endeavours.

Limitations

This research is not without limitations. First, because responses were gathered from single participants at one point in time and because our study required self-reported data because only the individual employee would be able to adequately report their perceptions of support, trust, and readiness during a change, common method variance is a potential concern. The study employed several empirical and pre-analytical techniques to ease this concern as suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). These included randomizing items and guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity, and testing a single factor model.

Tests of a single factor model yielded significantly poorer fit than the hypothesized model (χ^2 difference = 286.28, df = 3, $p < .01$), suggesting common method variance did not influence the results (De Clercq, Dimov, & Thongpapanl, 2013). However, future research using static cohort or longitudinal designs would strengthen the generalizability of these findings. In addition to testing the causal nature of these relationships, future research might investigate the possibility that organizational change recipient reactions can change over time and influence levels of trust and change readiness. Second, the 17% response rate was also somewhat low (the median in the organizational sciences is between 31% and 51%, depending on the level of the employee within the organizational structure; Anseel, Lievens, Schollaert, & Choragwicka, 2010), and the sample skewed toward female employees. This is likely due to the small incentive provided in this study, which could be augmented in future studies. Future research might seek to replicate these findings among more diverse and larger samples.

Finally, our POS measure was truncated to three items due to survey length constraints of the organization. Although we acknowledge that this is a weakness of our study, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002, p. 699) state, 'because the original scale is unidimensional and has high internal reliability, the use of shorter versions does not appear problematic', suggesting our findings regarding POS are credible in spite of this limitation. Future research replicating or extending this work using additional items might be useful in providing additional assurance about the present results.

Concluding Remarks

This study's findings reveal the continued opportunity for change researchers to tackle the issue of employee responses to organizational change, which remains an important issue across settings and contexts (Vardaman, 2018). The results suggest POS plays a vital role in whether change recipients become ready for change, and extend theory and research on the importance of trust in that process. The *post-hoc* findings also support a turn on the POS literature toward examining nonlinear effects. Findings point toward nonlinear effects of POS on trust, which are particularly attenuated at high levels of POS. Taken

holistically, these findings suggest that organizations should focus on providing adequate levels of support to employees during change, which may help them gain employee trust and buy-in for change.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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