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VISIONS OF CHANGE AS VISIONS OF CONTINUITY

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Despite wide consensus that leader vision is a key vehicle for leaders to motivate followers to support organizational change, it remains far from clear what characterizes an effective vision of change. Research on organizational change that has used a social identity perspective has asserted that one important reason why followers resist change is because change may pose a threat to their subjective sense of continuity of organizational identity. Accordingly, we hypothesize that leaders that communicate visions of change can address this resistance by assuring followers that the essence of the organizational identity will remain unchanged—making their vision of change also a vision of continuity. In line with our proposition that collective continuity is valued because it serves an uncertainty-reduction function, such visions should be more predictive of vision effectiveness the higher follower work-related uncertainty. Across a field study and an experimental study we find support for these predictions.

Scholars have agreed that outstanding leadership is characterized by vision communication (Stam, Lord, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2014) and reflected in effective change (e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Indeed, vision and change seem to be inextricably linked by definition. Leader vision can be defined as a leader description of a future state of the collective (Stam et al., 2014; van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014), whereas change can be defined as realization of such a future state (van de Ven & Poole, 1995). It may therefore come as no surprise that leader communication of a vision of change—defined as the communication of a future image of the collective with the intention to persuade others to contribute to the realization of change—has been identified as a key vehicle in motivating followers toward change (Yukl, 2010). What should be surprising, however, is that it is unclear what characterizes an effective vision of change (Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999; Yukl, 2010).

According to leadership scholars, effective visions of change emphasize the deficiency of the status quo and provide a discrepant and idealized alternative, thereby creating a need for change (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Kotter, 1995; Pawar & Eastman, 1997), providing a sense of challenge (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998), highlighting the existence of opportunities (Conger & Kanungo, 1998), or simply inspiring followers toward change (e.g., Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005). These conceptions of effective visions of change essentially imply that effective visions motivate change by breaking with the past, promoting a new future, discouraging current identities, and promoting new future organizational identities (Fiol, 2002). Yet, while an envisioned break with the past may certainly motivate change support, the unfortunate reality is that many organizational change efforts are prone to failure because employees resist change (e.g., Bovey & Hede, 2001), even under circumstances when they recognize the need for change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), when the change is consonant with their interests (Oreg, 2003), and when they want what is best for their organizations (Reger, Gustafson, Demarie, & Mullane, 1994). Indeed, people in general value a sense of coherence, consistency, or continuity over time—a continuity that could be threatened by a proposed change (Sani, 2010; Shamir, 1991). Existing conceptions of effective visions of change, which seem to argue for framing visions of change by emphasizing a break with the past, clearly fail to address this issue of continuity. The immediate question is: How can leaders mobilize change when employees value continuity?

Several scholars using a social identity approach to explain organizational change have emphasized

that employees resist change because changes in culture, structures, practices, or behaviors may be perceived as a threat to the continuity of employees' sense of self based on the organizational identity, or the defining character of the organization (e.g., Giessner, Ullrich, & van Dick, 2011; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Bobbio, 2008; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Monden, & Lima, 2002). We posit that an effective vision of change is one that can assure followers that whatever is going to change, those aspects that constitute the organizational identity will be preserved. Leaders can communicate such a vision of continuity, for example, if they frame change as a different expression of the organizational identity that preserves identity-defining aspects. Drawing on the recently developed notion of social identity theory that employees in times of uncertainty tend to be motivated to reduce their feelings of uncertainty by relying on their social identities (i.e., including organizational identity [Hogg, 2007, 2012; Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012]) we predict that such visions of continuity will be more effective in mobilizing follower support for change under conditions of high (vs. low) work uncertainty. Specifically, we predict that visions of continuity increase followers' perceived collective continuity (Sani, 2010)—the sense that over time the key features of the organizational identity will be preserved. This, in turn, should ensure follower support for change, in particular when work uncertainty is high.

The contributions of our study are threefold. First, by identifying assurance of collective continuity as a critical aspect of an effective vision aimed at mobilizing change support, we advance our understanding of what constitutes an effective vision of change (see Yukl, 2010), of the theoretical mechanisms that underlie the positive effects of vision communication (see Stam et al., 2014), and of the specific leader actions that are conducive to positive change outcomes in general (see Ford & Ford, 2012). Second, by demonstrating that leaders can, through incorporating continuity in their vision of change, impact employee perceptions of collective continuity, our research advances our underdeveloped understanding of how leaders can shape employee perceptions of the organizational identity in a change context (van Knippenberg, 2016). Third, by showing that the uncertainty-reduction motive (Hogg, 2012) can play a key role in explaining reactions to change, this research adds to the literature that has adopted a social identity perspective in explaining reactions to change—a perspective that so far has mainly focused on the role of organizational identification in explaining reactions to change (Drzensky & van Dick, 2013).

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

A fundamental task of organizations is to change internal systems and accommodate organizational functioning in response to environmental changes (Chemers, 2001). This is especially true in light of the ever-increasing rate and frequency of these changes. Although failure of these change initiatives appears to be the norm rather than the exception (e.g., Beer & Nohria, 2000), there is growing consensus that success of planned organizational change is substantially influenced by whether employees accept the organizational change (Oreg & Berson, 2011; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). Fostering such acceptance is undeniably a key responsibility for organizational leaders (Shamir, 1999; Yukl, 2010), and the question that naturally arises is: What can leaders do to motivate followers to accept change? In answering this question, we conceptualize change as planned organizational adjustment that occurs with a priori intention (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Such change could be of any size and scope, ranging from incremental adaptations (such as the introduction of new leaders or a change in processes) to large-scale transformations (such as mergers or completely new strategies), and could be driven by both external factors (such as market demands or industry trends) and internal factors (such as internal politics or change of leadership).

An inspection of the leadership literature (e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993) seems to suggest that there is one thing in particular that leaders could do to motivate change acceptance: Change acceptance appears to be facilitated by communicating a vision of the change. We note here that in the context of visionary leadership, vision is understood as an image of the future of the collective (organization, team, etc.) that is different from the current state of affairs. Visions in visionary leadership research thus, by definition, are visions of change in that they capture a future state that is different from the current state and that thus requires collective change to

achieve. Remarkably, however, it is unclear how exactly leader vision communication stimulates follower change support (Yukl, 2010). Despite the almost unquestioned ability of leader vision communication to attract followers toward the envisioned future, we were able to identify only one study that actually tested the link between vision communication and change support (Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010). This study found that leader vision communication predicted employee change adaptivity, but only for those who were already open to change. Moreover, while scholars have just recently started to explore the link between transformational or charismatic leadership—a key element of which is vision communication (van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014)—and positive change-oriented follower attitudes (Bommer et al., 2005; Groves, 2005; Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008; Hill, Seo, Kang, & Taylor, 2012; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Shin et al., 2012), these theories have been qualified as "being riddled with major problems" (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013: 45), one of them being that the behaviors proposed to underlie these styles are conceptualized and operationalized in terms of their effects, making it impossible to establish whether and how leader vision communication is responsible for influencing change acceptance (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Thus, the current state of science seems to offer little to advance our understanding of effective visions of change (Stam et al., 2014), an observation that is also reflected in Yukl's (2010: 310) conclusion that "more research is needed to determine what type of vision is sufficient to guide and inspire major change." As individual resistance to change has been pointed out as a major barrier to organizational change (Conner, 2006) a promising starting point may be an examination of what actually causes this resistance among employees.

A variety of sources have been proposed to underlie change resistance (see Burnes, 2015; Shimoni, 2017 for reviews). While one dominant view holds that human beings are programmed to resist change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999), more realistic views argue that employees resist the threats and consequences of change (e.g., uncertainty and loss) rather than change per se (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008), there is variation in employees' dispositional propensity to resist change (e.g., Oreg, 2003), contextual factors may contribute as much to change resistance as do employees (Burnes, 2015; Dent & Goldberg, 1999), and perhaps most likely that resistance to change can be attributed to the interplay of both the employee and change-specific factors, such that employee individual factors (e.g., personality, perceived uncertainty) interact with change-management practices in causing resistance to change (Burnes, 2015; Ford & Ford, 2009). More specific sources of change resistance include such poor change-management practices as change misrepresentation, broken agreements, and justice violations (e.g., Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). More recently, the absence of change readiness of employees (e.g., perceived self-efficacy and perceived personal benefits) has been advanced as a reason for change resistance (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). While many of the above-mentioned sources of resistance can be adequately addressed by such change management practices as high-quality communication (e.g., Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004), change fairness (see Taylor, 2015, for a review), and employee involvement (e.g., Bordia et al., 2004; Kernan & Hanges, 2002), there is one source of change resistance that is receiving increasing attention and that may be addressed in particular by leader vision communication. We will turn to our discussion of this source of resistance in the next section.

Indeed, while many reasons for change resistance exist (Oreg, 2003), there is growing recognition that a significant source of resistance lies in followers' concerns with the potential implications that change poses to their self-concept (e.g., Eilam & Shamir, 2005; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001), in particular the part of the self that is based on organizational membership (e.g., Fiol, 2002; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg et al., 2002, 2004, 2008). According to social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2004; Hogg & Terry, 2000), when employees identify with their organization they incorporate their organizational membership into their identity. This cognitive assimilation of (part of) the self with the organization causes prototypical features of the organization to become self-defining, and organizational activities to be experienced as self-implicating (Pratt, 1998). Given that people value a sense of continuity of core aspects of identity (Sani, 2010; Shamir, 1991), change may be resisted because it is perceived to threaten the continuity of part of employees' basis of self-definition (e.g., Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Importantly, employees may experience these concerns during any type of change, not only during large-scale transformations (e.g., mergers) but

also in smaller-scale change programs, given that any practice, procedure, or behavior could potentially be perceived as reflective of defining elements of the organization (e.g., Ellemers, 2003). Furthermore, we argue that a certain degree of organizational identification, not necessarily a high level of identification, is sufficient to create meaningful collective-based self-definition, and thus the emergence of resistance under threats to identity continuity.

Interestingly, while acknowledging identity concerns as a significant source of resistance, various scholars have advanced leadership strategies for change that foster a discontinuity of organizational identity (see Gioia et al., 2013 for an overview). Fiol (2002), for example, stressed the importance for leaders to engage in deidentification strategies by using rhetoric that negates the organizational identity (see also Chreim, 2002). It has been argued that uncertainty and loss of meaning that ensue from deidentification will make followers more receptive to the change and targeted "new" organizational identity. In a similar vein, others have argued for the importance of creating identity ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Often, these strategies are complemented with an emphasis on portraying an attractive future organizational identity (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Fiol, 2002; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Reger et al., 1994).

These approaches, however, essentially encourage a discontinuity of employees' basis of self-conception, which, from a social identity perspective, is precisely the reason why resistance emerges and changes fail (e.g., Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Indeed, providing support for this perspective, several studies have found that employees support merger plans to the extent that they perceive a sense of collective continuity (Giessner, Viki, Otten, Terry, & Tauber, 2006; Ullrich, Wieseke, & van Dick, 2005; van Knippenberg et al., 2002; van Leeuwen, van Knippenberg, & Ellemers, 2003)—the sense that defining features of the organizational identity are preserved over time. These results also point to an alternative way for leaders to foster change acceptance. Specifically, leaders can generate change support when they frame change in a way that convinces followers that whatever is going to change, the defining features of the organization remain preserved, thus instilling followers with the perception of collective continuity. Arguing that leaders are able to do so, as we do, is consistent with the view that effective leaders define the reality of followers (Fairhurst, 2005; Shamir, 2007; Smircich & Morgan, 1982) and shape their understanding of the organizational identity (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; van Knippenberg, 2016). Unfortunately, while leadership scholars have alluded to the importance for leaders to emphasize continuity, this emphasis has been excluded from theorizing on what constitute effective visions of change.

THE ROLE OF CONTINUITY IN LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

The notion of continuity has been invoked before by leadership scholars in order to understand the leader–follower influence process. For example, Shamir et al. (1993) described how effective leaders create a sense of meaningfulness in followers by articulating how actions and goals are connected to the past and the future (for an example, see Shamir, Arthur, & House, 1994). Likewise, in their rhetorical analysis of effective political leaders, Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) described how leaders attempt to gain support from their followers by providing their own version of the collective identity, the most effective leaders being those that frame the collective identity in such a way that it is perceived as evolving from the past, thus constructing a version of identity that "is no longer one version amongst many but rather the *only* valid version" (Haslam et al., 2011: 178; see also Reicher and Hopkins, 2001).

The relation between continuity and change, however, was highlighted for the first time by Shamir (1999). Reflecting on the emergence of unstable forms of organizations, Shamir argued that planned changes in such environments require that leaders act not only as agents of change but also as guardians of stability. More recently, van Knippenberg et al. (2008) reasoned that group-prototypical leaders should elicit support for change because these leaders embody the organizational identity, and thus are most likely to be seen as guardians of group identity. In support of this prediction, they found that group-prototypical leaders generated more change support than do nonprototypical leaders, an effect that was mediated by the perception of the leader as an agent of continuity.

Given the case evidence that leaders can influence follower interpretations of what defines the collective (e.g., Gioia et al., 2013; Haslam et al., 2011; van Knippenberg, 2016), it seems reasonable to propose that leaders can construe change in such a way that

followers will believe that the organizational identity will nevertheless remain preserved. Despite the plausibility of this proposition, as well as the apparent change-catalyzing role of perceived collective continuity, prevalent conceptions of effective visions of change do not seem to contain any element of (collective) continuity. Effective visions of change are typically argued to be visions that push followers away from the status quo, for example, by emphasizing the shortcomings of the status quo (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998), and pull them toward a better future, for example by portraying an attractive future (Shamir, 1999). While these elements may certainly be important in mobilizing employees to support change, for instance by eliciting the perception among followers that change is needed, we find the absence of continuity elements in these descriptions all the more remarkable when one considers that this perspective emerged to explain effective leadership of change (Conger, 1999; Shamir, 1999; Yukl, 2010) and advanced vision as the key element (van Knippenberg & Stam, 2014). Given this state of affairs, we explore how a vision of change can imbue followers with a perception of collective continuity. In addition, we argue that, and explain why, the apparent power of a sense of collective continuity will be stronger under conditions of high (vs. low) change-induced work uncertainty.

VISIONS OF CONTINUITY AND FOLLOWER WORK UNCERTAINTY

Recall that we refer to a vision of change to emphasize that we are interested in exploring what constitutes effective vision communication in an organizational context characterized by planned change. Against the backdrop of the notion that in the context of visionary leadership, visions by definition are visions of change, we introduce the concept of vision of continuity. We refer to a vision of continuity as the extent to which a vision of change speaks to collective continuity by emphasizing that despite the change, the organizational identity will be preserved. In other words, vision of continuity refers to the degree to which visions of change also stress that the defining features of the organization remain preserved. Vision of continuity is understood as an element of vision of change that need not be present, but can be present to a greater or lesser extent, and that concerns an image of the future state of the collective that captures that within the collective change there is continuity of collective identity. In visionary leadership, vision of continuity thus does not exist independent of vision of change, and a vision of change can differ in the extent to which it incorporates a vision of continuity.

Importantly, a sense of identity continuity need not be antithetical to change when change is specified, for example, as involving practices and organizational features that are not defining of the organizational identity. Consider the case of Charlotte Beers who, as a new CEO of Ogilvy and Mather Worldwide in 1993, developed a vision statement that not only outlined major changes, but also stated that "The values we share, however, the way we do things day-to-day, will remain constant" (Sackley & Ibarra, 1995: 18). In addition to emphasizing the visibility of core values in the future, Beers could have emphasized collective continuity, and thereby addressed a key concern among employees, by construing prospective changes as different expressions of the organizational identity, or as involving features of the organization (e.g., operational activities) that are not defining elements or that are merely means to higher-level organizational goals.

Given the emerging evidence for the change-catalyzing role of perceived collective continuity (Giessner et al., 2011; van Knippenberg et al., 2008), visions of change that include a sense of continuity should, by providing followers with a perception of collective continuity, generate follower support for change. Having established this proposition, the question becomes: Under which circumstances are such visions of continuity more important in generating support for change? We argue that the answer to this question lies in the recently developed proposition by social identity theory that the reliance on one's organizational identity serves an important uncertainty-reduction function. The social identity perspective outlines how individuals find uncertainty aversive, and that the desire to reduce this uncertainty leads them to turn to their collective memberships because this provides them with a consensually validated understanding of reality (Hogg, 2007, 2012). Interestingly, work uncertainty, which can be defined as the sense of doubt about the meaning of a work situation, or of what it will bring in the future (Bordia et al., 2004; Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, & Rich, 2012), often goes hand in hand with organizational changes (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Indeed, work uncertainty has been argued to be "one of the most commonly reported psychological states in the context of organizational change" (Bordia et al., 2004: 509). This may imply that in times of change the perceived continuity of a collective-based sense of self is valued to the extent that employees perceive uncertainty because it is

identity continuity that preserves the uncertainty-reducing function of organizational identity. By implication, if resistance indeed centers on a threat to an important uncertainty-reducing identity for employees, then prospective change will be experienced as threatening and visions of continuity will address resistance to change to the extent that employees experience high work uncertainty. A vision of change that outlines changes but at the same time stresses the preservation of the collective-based source of uncertainty reduction should therefore generate follower support for change, in particular for employees who experience high uncertainty. This leads to the following moderation hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Communicating a vision of change that emphasizes collective continuity results in more follower support for change, which is stronger in the context of higher follower uncertainty.

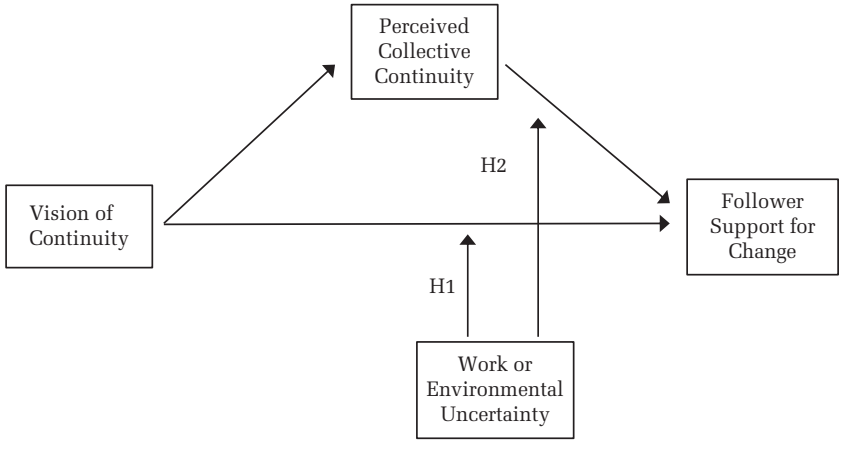
We further argue that perceived collective continuity, or the perception that the defining features of the organization remain visible over time, plays a crucial role in explaining the predicted interaction effect of vision of continuity and work uncertainty on employee support for change. More specifically, the more a vision speaks to collective continuity, the more followers should believe that the organizational identity will remain preserved in the future. In turn, assuming that reliance on one's identification with the organization serves an uncertainty-reduction function, we can expect the impact of perceived collective continuity on change support to be more pronounced for those experiencing high (vs. low) work uncertainty. The reason for this is that it is the reliance on one's degree of identification with the organization—reliance that is sustained by perceived collective continuity—that serves to address employee work uncertainty. Perceptions of collective continuity, cultivated through a vision of continuity, should therefore address resistance to change and increase support for change, especially for employees who experience high (vs. low) work uncertainty. These predictions can be translated into the following moderated mediation hypothesis (see also Figure 1).

Hypothesis 2. Perceived collective continuity mediates the effect of a vision of change that emphasizes collective continuity on follower support for change, moderated by follower work uncertainty, such that the indirect effect of communicating a vision of change that emphasizes collective continuity on support for change, mediated by perceived collective continuity, is stronger with higher follower work uncertainty.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We tested our hypotheses across two studies: one field study (Study 1) and one experimental study (Study 2). We first tested our hypotheses in a field study, which allowed us to assess the validity of our model in an actual organizational change context. Because the ability to generalize across settings (e.g., organizations) requires an understanding of the causal process that underlies a phenomenon (Highhouse, 2009), we subsequently tested our hypotheses in a laboratory experiment high in

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model



experimental realism. As such, the weakness of the one method could be compensated by the strength of the other (Dipboye, 1990), an approach that has proven fruitful in prior studies on leadership (e.g., Giessner & van Knippenberg, 2008; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011; Ullrich, Christ, & van Dick, 2009; van Dijke, De Cremer, & Mayer, 2010). Study 1 provided a first step in testing the validity of our model in an organizational change context by assessing the relationships between employee perceived supervisor communication of vision of continuity, perceived work uncertainty, perceived collective continuity, and supervisor-rated employee support for change. In Study 2 we examined whether a purported vision of change that emphasized continuity (or not) by the dean of a business school impacted student participants' behavioral support of the changes in the education program under different manipulated conditions of work uncertainty.

STUDY 1

Sample and Procedure

Students working on a research project contacted organizations that had recently informed their members about a plan to implement organizational change in the near future. A survey package containing coded questionnaires for both employees and their supervisors were distributed among leader–follower dyads. In total, we received 209 completed leader–follower matched surveys, which represented 74 leaders. The majority of the planned changes in question involved relocations and business expansions (39.2%) and reorganizations (21.1%). Other reported changes concerned strategic changes (9.6%), technical and structural changes (7.7%), product changes (5.3%), changes in leadership (4.8%), mergers (3.3%), and miscellaneous (e.g., loss of a major client). A small minority did not report the type of change (9.0%). Employees were 33.22 years old on average, and had been employed at their respective employer for 4.9 years on average. Employees rated the degree of perceived work uncertainty, their perception of leader communicated vision of continuity, and perceived collective continuity, whereas supervisors rated employee support for change.

Dependent and Independent Variables

All constructs except the control variables were measured using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Employee work uncertainty. To assess employee experienced work uncertainty, we used the 4-item measure that was developed by Colquitt et al. (2012) in order to represent key elements of work and environmental uncertainty. Examples of items are "There is a lot of uncertainty at work right now" and "I cannot predict how things will go at work" ($\alpha = .87$).

Perceived vision of continuity. We developed three items to assess perceptions of vision of continuity. These items are "My direct supervisor often communicates in his or her vision that our team in the future will be a continuation of what we stand for," "My direct supervisor often communicates in his or her vision that our team in the future will be a continuation of our team now," and "My direct supervisor regularly communicates that it is important that our team will maintain its identity" ($\alpha = .87$).

Perceived collective continuity. To assess employees' perception of continuity of the organizational identity we used the 12-item perceived collective continuity scale developed and validated by Sani et al. (2007), and modified it to fit an organizational context. Examples of items are "There is no continuity among different time periods within my company" (reverse-coded) and "Values and beliefs within my company will be maintained over time" ($\alpha = .89$).

Support for change. We assessed support for change with six items. Three items represent behavioral support for change with the organization as target (Herold, Fedor, & Caldwell, 2008), examples of which are "This person does whatever he or she can to help the change be successful" and "This person is supportive of this change." We developed three additional items to ensure our measure captured the three key activities of behavioral change support: participation, facilitation, and contribution (Kim, Hornung, & Rousseau, 2011). These items are "This person promotes the vision of change with enthusiasm," "This person is willing to do more to implement the plans than is required," and "This person puts extra effort in implementing the change" ($\alpha = .94$). A principal component analysis indicated that all items loaded on a single factor, accounting for 77% of the variance and factor loadings exceeding .84.

Control variables. We follow recent suggestions for the inclusion of control variables (Aguinis & Vandenberg, 2014) as recommended by several scholars (Atinc, Simmering, & Kroll, 2012; Becker, 2005; Carlson & Wu, 2012; Spector & Brannick, 2011). Variables were regarded as potential controls when there was reason based on theoretical ground that they could account for any of our proposed relationships (e.g., Atinc et al., 2012). We also inspected zero-order correlations to identify so-called impotent control variables; that is, variables

that share variance with the predictor but not the criterion. We did so because inclusion of such impotent control variables can lead to an unnecessary reduction in statistical power (Becker, 2005; Carlson & Wu, 2011), as well as to an increase in Type I errors (Becker, 2005; Spector & Brannick, 2011).

We considered four potential control variables: Age, tenure, perceived job impact, and wave of data collection[1] indicating which of two time periods different subsets of data were collected (where "0" = first wave, "1" = second wave). The procedure described above led to the inclusion of perceived job impact and wave of data collection as control variables. We controlled for perceived job impact, which was measured using the 4-item scale developed by Caldwell, Herold, and Fedor (2004), because it is likely to share variance with both perceptions of collective continuity and support, an expectation that was in line with the zero-order correlations (vision: $r = -.18$, $p = .01$; perceived collective continuity: $r = -.15$, $p = .03$; support: $r = .17$, $p = .01$). We controlled for wave of data collection because it had significant overlap with vision ($r = .13$, $p = .07$), perceptions of collective continuity ($r = -.29$, $p = .00$), and support ($r = -.20$, $p = .00$). We did not control for age because it did not share any variance with our focal variables of interest, and because it has not been found to relate to change reactions (Oreg et al., 2011). Lastly, while tenure with employer has been reasoned to influence change acceptance (e.g., Rodell & Colquitt, 2009), it was not included as a control as it had overlap only with the mediator and only of a negligible amount of 0.8%.[2]

Results

Descriptive statistics and validation of measures. Summary statistics for all the variables can be found in Table 2. We employed three methods to assess the discriminant validity of our measures of vision of continuity, work uncertainty, perceived collective continuity, and support for change (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Before doing so, we created parcels for perceived collective continuity and support for change in order to maintain a favorable indicator-to-sample-size ratio for planned confirmatory factor analysis (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). As per recommendations by Williams, Vandenberg, and Edwards (2009), we created parcels using the factorial algorithm approach, which has been shown to be superior relative to other approaches (Rogers & Schmitt, 2004). This approach balances the best and worst items across the parcels on the basis of standardized factor loadings from a single-factor model containing all items. Four parcels were created for perceived collective continuity, and three parcels were created for support. Then, as part of the first method, we compared a four-factor model with three alternative models in which the correlation between a pair of constructs was set to .71 by performing χ^2 difference tests to assess whether the hypothesized model had a better fit than each constrained model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982; MacKenzie et al., 2011). Note that we constrained the correlation between pairs of constructs to be .71 rather than 1.00, because the former is a more conservative and appropriate test of discriminant validity, which specifies that the constructs in question share at least 50% of their variance (as opposed to the unrealistically high 100% of their variance [see MacKenzie et al., 2011]). Results (see Table 1) indicated that the hypothesized four-factor model fit the data well, and better than did each alternative model.[3]

Secondly, additional tests revealed that constructed confidence intervals around the estimated correlation between relevant pairs of constructs excluded .71, indicating that it is unlikely that constructs have overlap of at least 50%[4] (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The third and final method involved examining whether each construct accounts for more of the variance in its own indicators than it shares with another construct (Fornell & Larcker,

[1] The second wave took place a year after the first data collection phase, with the purpose of increasing the sample size.

[2] Inclusion of age and tenure with employer did not significantly alter our results. Moreover, as per recommendations by Becker (2005), we ran a model that omitted the selected controls and compared the results with those from our current model. Results were essentially identical to those reported in the results section. Note also that working hours per week was only measured in a subset of our sample. However, it generated essentially identical results when included as a control in this subset.

[3] Support for a superior fit of the hypothesized model was even stronger when the respective interfactor correlation in the alternative models was set at unity (Model 1: $\chi^2 = 355.57$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 216.69$, CFI = .86, RMSEA = .14; Model 2: $\chi^2 = 641.50$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 502.62$, CFI = .71, RMSEA = .20; Model 3: $\chi^2 = 427.04$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 288.16$, CFI = .82, RMSEA = .15).

[4] The results were as follows: vision of continuity versus perceived collective continuity [CI: .40, .64], vision of continuity versus support for change [CI: .10, .38], perceived collective continuity versus support for change [CI: .28, .52].

TABLE 1
Comparison of Measurement Models for Study Variables Study 1

Model	Description	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	RMSEA
Null model	All indicators are independent	2067.78	91			
Baseline 4-factor model	Work uncertainty, vision, perceived collective continuity, and support	138.88	71		.97	.06
Model 1	Four factors. Correlation vision and perceived collective continuity set to .71.	152.77	72	13.89*	.96	.07
Model 2	Four factors. Correlation perceived collective continuity and support set to .71.	174.62	72	37.74*	.95	.08
Model 3	Four factors. Correlation vision and support set to .71.	204.54	72	65.66*	.93	.09

Notes: $n = 209$. *df* = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. In each alternative model the estimated correlation between one pair of constructs was set to .71.

* $p < .05$

1981). A comparison of the average variance extracted for each construct with the shared variance between relevant constructs indicated that this was the case.[5] Together, these results provide strong support for the discriminant validity of our constructs.

Because common source variance may account for observing the independent variable–mediator relationship, we tested for its presence by comparing the fit of a two-factor CFA model with the fit of an identical model except with the indicators of vision and perceived collective continuity also loading on a common source factor (Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009; Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989), thereby using the technique recommended when the source of potential bias is unknown (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). When the latent method factor was added to the model, the improvement in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(9) = 12.90$) fell short of the critical χ^2 value (14.07), indicating a lack of evidence that observed variance in the constructs can also be attributed to common source variance.

Test of hypotheses. Because employees were nested within leaders, we conducted multilevel analyses using the multilevel package in R (Bliese, 2013), and treated the intercept as a random component to account for nonindependence of observations (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). To test Hypothesis 1 we performed a hierarchical regression analysis with change impact, wave of data collection, vision, and work uncertainty as predictors of support for change in step 1, and included the interaction term of vision and work uncertainty in step 2. The interaction term was based on the product of the mean-centered variables vision and work uncertainty (Aiken & West, 1991). Regression results are shown in Table 3.

In step 1, support for change was positively impacted by vision of continuity ($\lambda = .17$, $t = 2.80$, $p = .01$) and negatively impacted by work uncertainty ($\lambda = -.23$, $t = -3.56$, $p = .00$). Of primary interest, in step 2 the predicted interaction effect emerged to be significant ($\lambda = .12$, $t = 2.30$, $p = .02$, Δ pseudo $R^2 = .02$). We conducted simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) to reveal the nature of this interaction effect (see Figure 2). When employee work uncertainty was high (1 *SD* above the mean), the impact of vision of continuity on follower support for change was stronger ($\lambda = .29$, $t = 3.67$, $p = .00$) than when employee work uncertainty was low (1 *SD* below the mean; $\lambda = .06$, $t = .68$, $p = .50$).

Our moderated-mediation hypothesis predicted that vision of continuity has a positive impact on perceived collective continuity, which in turn is associated with behavioral support for change to the degree that follower work uncertainty is high (Hypothesis 2). This reflects a second-stage moderation model in which the mediator-to-dependent variable path of the indirect effect is moderated (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). To test the indirect effect, confidence intervals were calculated using the Monte Carlo resampling approach, which is currently seen as the most viable approach for assessing mediation in a multi-level context (Preacher & Selig, 2012), and which performs similarly or even slightly better than bootstrapping approaches (Biesanz, Falk, & Savalei,

[5] The average variance extracted was .69, .67, and .85 for vision of continuity, perceived collective continuity, and support, respectively. The shared variance between vision and perceived collective continuity was $(.52)^2$, between vision and support $(.24)^2$, and between perceived collective continuity and support $(.40)^2$.

TABLE 2
Summary Statistics Study 1

Variable	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job impact	3.19	0.89						
2. Wave of data collection	0.44	0.50	.15					
3. Work uncertainty	2.84	1.00	−.07	.21				
4. Vision	3.18	1.04	−.18	.13	−.29			
5. Perceived collective continuity	3.50	0.62	−.15	−.29	−.35	.45		
6. Support for change	3.58	0.92	.17	−.20	−.40	.23	.38	

Notes: $n = 209$. Correlations $\geq |.15|$ are significant at $p < .05$.

2010; Falk & Biesanz, 2016; Preacher & Selig, 2012). Thus, we estimated confidence intervals based on 200,000,000 simulated draws or resamplings from the joint distribution of the coefficients that constitute the indirect effect (see Falk & Biesanz, 2016, for further details). At high levels of work uncertainty, the indirect effect equals $.31 \times .40 = .12$ (99% CI = .02 to .24), whereas at low levels of work uncertainty, the indirect effect equals $.31 \times .19 = .06$ (90% CI = −.01 to .13), thus providing evidence for the proposed mechanism as reflected in the moderated-mediation hypothesis.

Robustness checks. As a robustness check we ran several supplemental analyses. Firstly, we reran our analysis but this time controlled for the type of change employees were exposed to by including dummy variables in the analysis to represent the respective type of change. The results that emerged were comparable to those reported above, implying that change type is not a confounder of our results. Secondly, although we were primarily interested in explaining variance in support for change of an individual employee, we reran our analyses after aggregating the data to the leader level, resulting in a sample of 74 leaders, of which 33 leaders had at least two follower-completed surveys. Also here the results were essentially identical to our reported results. Finally, we ran the respective analyses with the aggregated data but only for leaders rated by at least two followers ($n = 33$), and a similar picture of results emerged.[6] Overall, these supplemental analyses demonstrate the robustness of our findings in a field setting.

TABLE 3
HLM Regression Results Study 1

Variable	Supervisory Rated Support for Change
Step 1: Control variables and main effects	
Job impact	.21 (.07)**
Wave of data collection	−.31 (.16)
Work uncertainty	−.23 (.06)***
Vision of continuity	.17 (.06)**
Pseudo R^2	.24
Step 2: Full model including interaction term	
Job impact	.16 (.07)*
Wave of data collection	−.32 (.16)*
Work uncertainty	−.58 (.17)***
Vision of continuity	−.16 (.16)
Vision of continuity × Uncertainty	.12* (.05)
Pseudo R^2	.26

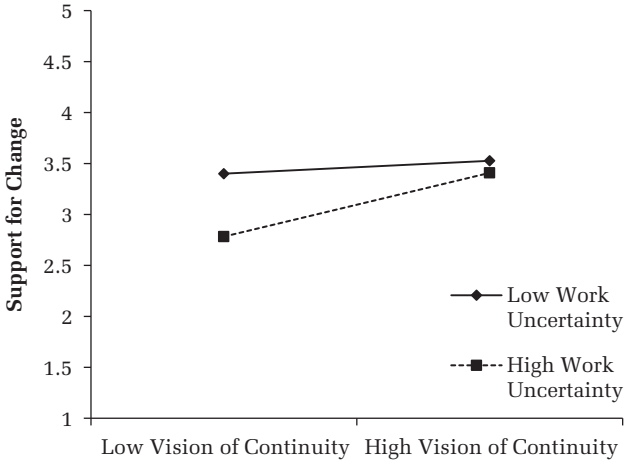
Note: $n = 209$.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Discussion

Results of Study 1 supported our hypothesized process model. Study 1 showed that change support varies as a function of the interaction between vision of continuity and follower perceived work uncertainty. In line with the proposed underlying mechanism of this effect, vision of continuity related positively to perceived collective continuity, which related positively to change support to the extent that work uncertainty was high. As such, these findings provide an important first step in demonstrating the viability of our conception of an effective vision of change. Even so, while Study 1 points to the existence of these effects in an organizational change context, it does not allow us to draw causal inferences. In Study 2, therefore, we

[6] Within-group homogeneity indices were as follows: vision (ICC(1) = .51, ICC(2) = .84, mean rwg = .72), work uncertainty (ICC(1) = .43, ICC(2) = .79, mean rwg = .72), PCC (ICC(1) = .39, ICC(2) = .76, mean rwg = .84), support (ICC(1) = .36, ICC(2) = .74, mean rwg = .76).

FIGURE 2
Interaction Between Vision of Continuity and Employee Work Uncertainty on Support for Change (Study 1)



conducted a laboratory experiment that allowed for establishing causality, which would also enhance our ability to generalize inferences across populations and settings (Highhouse, 2009). Study 2 also employs a behavioral operationalization of support for change in order to explore whether our hypothesized model can be validated for directly observable indicators of change support.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was a controlled laboratory experiment in which student participants were informed about planned changes in the bachelor education program of their university. Vision of continuity was operationalized as a vision statement ostensibly written by the dean of the business school. Uncertainty was operationalized as the amount of uncertainty regarding the consequences of the change. Behavioral measures were used to assess support for change.

A total of 208 international business students from a Dutch business school completed the experiment. Based on feedback obtained through an open-survey question aimed at capturing comments and attitudes toward the study at the end of the experiment, we had substantial reason to believe that three students did not participate in a serious way. Moreover, a total of six participants indicated that they had failed to understand the English content of the experimental material. Thus, analyses were based on a sample of 199 participants, ranging in age between 17 and 27 ($M = 19.40$; $SD = 1.44$). Vision and uncertainty were manipulated variables. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

Procedure

After arriving in the laboratory, participants were placed inside cubicles behind a computer. Participants then learned that the study concerned recent developments within the business school and that the experimenters were interested in these developments, particularly in the reactions of students to these developments. They were told that even though preparations were still being made to announce these developments to students, management had granted permission to the experimenters to investigate the phenomenon, and hence also to announce the developments earlier to some students than was actually intended.

We then introduced the planned changes. Specifically, participants read that their business school was suffering from budget deficits, an actual phenomenon at the time of the study, and that it considered it necessary to cut costs. As a result of this, as of the upcoming year the school would need to provide education to students with fewer teachers. Participants then read that, in order to adapt to this situation, the school had decided not only to eliminate certain courses, but also, and more importantly, to change the education program and to shift to another teaching method. When probed for their initial reaction toward these changes, many students expressed serious concern, indicating that the paradigm was high in experimental realism.

The part that followed intended to make participants aware of the impact the respective change could potentially have on the collective identity of the school. Specifically, participants learned that the decision to implement a completely different teaching method could influence the "identity of a school and its educational programs." We then defined the school's character or identity by citing an actual article that appeared in a magazine in 2010. The article judged the character of the business program in an exceptionally positive way. Moreover, participants read that the program's character is defined by a focus on breadth and depth, as well as by such values as professionalism, fair play, and teamwork—values that we adopted from an existing webpage oriented at prospective business students.

Independent Variables

Uncertainty manipulation. Given the potential difficulties in inducing perception of uncertainty, we manipulated uncertainty by varying the communicated uncertainty regarding the degree of the impact of the changes in question for the school (see Appendix A). Specifically, in the no-uncertainty condition participants read several statements, such as "the changes will not be disruptive and there is no uncertainty right now," "the changes could be seen as having continuity with regard to the atmosphere in the programs and to the way students interact with each other," and "changes can be expected to have continuity with regard to the identity of the educational programs."

In the high uncertainty condition, however, participants read statements such as "the changes could be very disruptive and there is a lot of uncertainty right now," "it could threaten the continuity with regard to the atmosphere in the programs and to the way students interact with each other," and "because of this, although not entirely certain, the changes could be seen as a threat to the continuity with regard to the identity of the program." We ran a pilot study to assess whether uncertainty information was perceived as intended. We recruited 40 employed participants (45% male, average age = 38.42, average working experience = 18.00) via an eLancing marketplace, which is a website where employers and individuals interested in being hired to perform work meet (Aguinis & Lawal, 2013). Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to assess how a draft version of a text was perceived that was about to be communicated to university students. Other than the purpose of the study, the introductory material was the same as for the main study. We randomly assigned participants to either of the two uncertainty conditions (n = 20 for both conditions), and then administered an adapted version of the 3-item uncertainty measure from Study 1 to assess whether our manipulation was successful (e.g., the information implied that it could not be predicted how things will go at *X* (name of the school), $\alpha = .78$). Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the change situation was perceived as more uncertain in the high-uncertainty condition ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .64$) than in the no-uncertainty condition ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .90$), $F(1,39) = 8.81$, $p = .01$ $\eta^2 = .18$. These pilot results indicate that the uncertainty manipulation was successful.

Vision manipulation. We then informed participants in all conditions about an upcoming text ostensibly written by the dean of the school in which he articulated his vision of change (see Appendix A). Participants read that the text was, in essence, comparable with what would ultimately be "formally" communicated to all students. The vision statement of the dean then appeared on the computer screen. In both the vision of continuity condition and the control condition the dean started the vision statement by elaborating on the positive reputation and status of the business school. In the second and third paragraphs, the dean referred to the budget deficits and the changes that the school had to implement as a result of this situation. In the fourth paragraph the dean elaborated on the planned radical changes in teaching program and philosophy. In the fifth paragraph the dean communicated some implementation details. In the sixth and final paragraph the dean expressed his faith and confidence in a successful transition, requested students' acceptance and support of these programs, and emphasized the critical role of students' support for successfully realizing the change.

In the *vision of continuity* condition we manipulated assurance of identity continuity by embedding continuity references in the final three paragraphs. Thus, in the fourth paragraph the dean assured collective self-continuity by saying that: "*Despite these changes, that which has always characterized our program—breadth and depth—will remain central to the program's character."* In the fifth paragraph, participants read that the dean would be responsible not only for the change process, as students read in the control condition, but also for "*preservation of our program's character: breadth and academic depth."* In the final paragraph, after the dean expressed his confidence in the plans, he added: "*Professionalism, fair play, and teamwork—core values within our program—will remain characteristic to our program."* The control condition did not contain these continuity references. We ensured that both visions were equal in length by modifying the wording of the text in the control condition without any loss of meaning.

We conducted a second pilot study to assess whether the vision communication was perceived as intended. Via an eLancing work environment we recruited 39 employed participants (43.3% male, average age = 37.90, average working experience = 15.59) who were told the researchers wanted to assess how a preparatory vision statement of an anonymous company was perceived. These participants were assigned to either the control condition (n = 19) or the vision of continuity condition (n = 20), after

which we administered a modified version of the vision of continuity measure from Study 1 to assess whether our manipulation was effective (e.g., "The vision statement communicated that the future of *X* would be a continuation of what it stands for," α = .80. A one-way ANOVA revealed that the vision was perceived more as a vision of continuity in the vision of continuity condition (M = 3.92, SD = .61) than in the control condition (M = 3.25, SD = 1.06), $F(1,38) = 5.95$, $p = .02$ $\eta^2 = .14$. Thus, we conclude that our vision manipulation was successful.

Dependent Measures

Participants answered all items on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Perception of collective continuity. As in Study 1, we assessed participants' perception of continuity of the collective identity using the perceived collective continuity scale (Sani et al., 2007). We modified the items to fit the current context (e.g., "The *X* programs will keep their defining characteristics in the future"). Cronbach's α was .83.

Behavioral support for change. To develop a behavioral measure of support for change, we relied on earlier work that has employed behavioral operationalizations of vision effectiveness (e.g., Stam, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010; Venus, Stam, & van Knippenberg, 2013). Recall that in all vision conditions the dean stressed that change success was critically contingent on students' support. In the current study, we provided students with the opportunity to express support for change by helping to write a letter to all students with the goal of requesting their support for change. Specifically, participants read that the faculty council had recently expressed its support for the change plans. In accordance with how it is defined by the school in reality, the council was said to represent the students and staff of the school and to be consulted by the school's management team concerning issues related to all educational and research activities. Students then read that the council intended to prepare a letter to convince all students of the need to change and to request their support. To do so, the council needed help from the participants to prepare this letter, as students represent the target group. Accordingly participants read that they could express their support by helping the council write a draft letter to request other students to support the change. We reasoned that to the extent that student participants supported the change plans, they should invest time and effort in writing a draft letter. The validity of these indicators is also reflected in the variance in participants' responses. Whereas some expressed disagreement and consequently showed little effort, other participants did express agreement and consequently provided carefully written draft letters. Thus, both time spent in seconds writing the letter (M = 273.40; SD = 196.68) and the number of characters used to write the letter (M = 460.75; SD = 332.50) were treated as objective behavioral indicators of the construct of change support.

These measures were highly, positively skewed, however, and we relied on Box–Cox power transformation procedures given that they are well suited to deal with skewness (Bishara & Hittner, 2012; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). A maximum-likelihood test for the Box–Cox power transformation indicated that the maximum normality could be attained at 0.50 for time spent and 0.51 for character length, which are close to a square root transformation. Thus, we transformed our measures time spent and character length (plus 1) using the aforementioned optimal Box–Cox parameters and the corresponding transformation procedure (Cohen et al., 2003).[7] In order to create a single measure of behavioral support we combined both indicators into a single variable by taking the average of both variables after standardizing their respective values.[8] We note that this averaging is statistically warranted given the substantial overlap of the measures (when untransformed, r = .85; when transformed, r = .90).

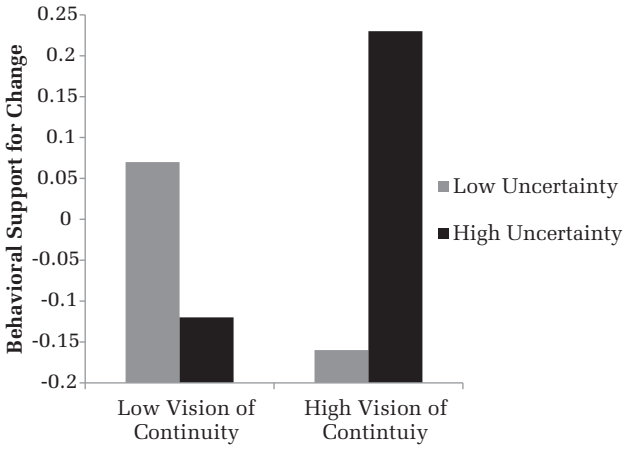
Results

Test of hypotheses. An ANOVA of our behavioral support for change measure yielded neither a main effect of vision, $F(1, 196) = .24$, n.s., nor a main effect of uncertainty, $F(1, 196) = .55$, n.s. However, as in Study 1, a significant interaction was found between vision and uncertainty, $F(1, 195) = 4.45$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .02$ (see Figure 3). One-sided planned contrasts (Page, Braver, & MacKinnon, 2003) showed that when uncertainty was high participants showed

[7] The Box–Cox transformation is given as $Y_i^{Transformed} = (Y_i^{\lambda}—1)/\lambda$, where λ signifies the optimal transformation parameter (see Cohen et al., 2003: 237).

[8] Note that ultimate analyses revealed results that were essentially comparable when the original change support measures were transformed using a log transformation or a squarse root transformation.

FIGURE 3
Interaction Between Vision of Continuity and Work Uncertainty on Behavioral Support for Change (Study 2)



more behavioral support for change in the vision of continuity condition (M = .23, SD = .88) than in the control condition (M = −.12, SD = 1.04), $t(195) = 1.83$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .02$. When there was no uncertainty, planned contrasts did not indicate a significant difference between the vision conditions, $t(195) = 1.16$, $p = .25$.

To test the hypothesis that vision of continuity has a positive impact on perceived collective continuity, which in turn is positively associated with performance to the degree that follower uncertainty is high (Hypothesis 2), bias-corrected confidence intervals were estimated for the indirect effect with a sample of 1,000 bootstrap estimates using the MODMED macro developed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) The indirect effect turned out to be significant when uncertainty was high (.39 × .44 = .17; 95% CI = .01 to .39), but not when there was no uncertainty (.39 × .05 = .02; 90% CI = −.14 to .17), thus supporting our moderated-mediation model.

Robustness checks and exploratory analyses. We conducted some supplementary analyses to assess the robustness of our findings. Firstly, it is possible that our results are partly due to differences in perceptions of the size of the communicated change. While the statement that a vision of continuity may negatively impact the extent to which the respective change is perceived as disruptive is consistent with our model in the sense that a perception of collective continuity should coincide with lower change impact perceptions, we nevertheless addressed this issue by measuring change size with three items at the end of the experiment (e.g., "The vision statement communicated that the change would be very small," α = .68). Accordingly, we reran our analyses with change size as a control variable and found little difference compared to our prior results. Results revealed that the interaction effect between vision and uncertainty on behavioral change support was still significant $F(1, 194) = 3.86$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Moreover, the indirect effect was also still significant when uncertainty was high (.34 * .38 = .13, 90% CI = .01 to .29). These results demonstrate that our results are robust against change size as an alternative explanation.

Second, although the function of perceived collective continuity as an uncertainty reducer took center stage in our model, the idea that collective continuity could be more meaningful to those higher (vs. lower) in collective identification is also consistent with social identity approaches of change (e.g., Hogg, 2012). In order to explore this option we looked at the moderating role of social identification in our model. That is, to explore the validity of this complementary possibility we measured student participants' identification with the business school prior to the experiment with six adapted items from Mael and Ashforth (1992); e.g., "When someone praised *X*, it felt like a personal compliment," α = .76. First, we included collective identification as a control variable in our analyses, which revealed results that confirmed our predictions regarding both the interaction between vision and uncertainty on change support, $F(1, 194) = 4.32$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and the indirect effect when uncertainty was high (.39 × .44 = .17, 95% CI = .01 to .38). More importantly, we then ran an ANOVA with the interaction of vision and collective identification on change support. Results revealed a nonsignificant interaction between vision and collective identification, $F(1, 194) = .00$, $p = .96$. Thus, collective identification did not turn out to moderate the effect of vision of continuity on change support, at least not in the current experiment.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 again corroborated our proposed process model. Importantly, because we included a behavioral operationalization of support for change in Study 2, and given that the strength of experimental studies resides in their ability to test the validity of a proposed causal

process (Highhouse, 2009; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), the results from Study 2, in combination with those from our field study (Study 1), provide us with strong confidence in drawing causal conclusions regarding the role of visions of continuity in recruiting follower support for change.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although vision communication is considered to be important in leading change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Conger & Kanungo, 1998), it remains unclear what characterizes an effective vision of change (Yukl, 2010). The aim of the current study was to examine how leader vision communication can address resistance to change—a primary barrier to change success (Conner, 2006). Drawing from social identity analyses of change (e.g., Hogg, 2012; Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg et al., 2008), which suggest that perceived identity discontinuity threats are an important cause of resistance to change, we proposed that visions of change that emphasize continuity will motivate follower change support, to the extent that follower perceived work uncertainty is high, by shaping the perception that despite the change the core of the organizational identity remains preserved. We found support for these predictions in a field sample involving supervisor–employee dyads (Study 1), and in a controlled experiment where student participants read a vision of change regarding educational program changes (Study 2). We found these results when supervisors rated employee support for change (Study 1) and when a behavioral measure of support for change was used (Study 2). Finally, our results turned out to be robust in various supplemental analyses and against complementary explanations. Together, these findings support the conclusion that visions of continuity add to the effectiveness of visions of change in the sense that they result in more support for change compared to visions of change that do not speak to continuity of identity.

Theoretical Implications

By providing consistent evidence that the willingness of followers to contribute to change is catalyzed by visions that engender a perception of collective continuity, our research contributes to various literatures. The most significant contribution of our research lies in its implications for the study of leadership, and in particular visionary leadership (Stam et al., 2014; Venus, Johnson, Zhang, Wang, & Lanaj, 2018). We offer a conception of what constitutes an effective vision that mobilizes follower support for change (Yukl, 2010) wherein the explanatory power is based on the theoretically grounded and empirically supported notion that identity concerns are the underlying sources of resistance to change (Rousseau, 1998; van Knippenberg et al., 2008). Second, our results advance our understanding of the ill-understood mechanisms of effective vision communication by illuminating perceived collective continuity as a mechanism through which effective visions mobilize followers toward action. Third, and lastly, our results contribute to the leadership and change literature in general. After reviewing the literature, Ford and Ford (2012: 22) concluded that while "leaders have a significant influence on organization change," it is unclear "what leader actions and interactions are responsible for it." Given that our research is based on a solid body of evidence that employees value a sense of continuity, we believe leader vision communication of identity continuity qualifies as a specific leader action that stimulates support for change.

Our findings add to the literature on organizational change, and specifically the part of that literature that investigates identity processes, in three major ways. First, one common theme in the literature is how leaders are capable of shaping employees' perceptions of the organizational identity (see van Knippenberg, 2016, for a review). By providing empirical evidence that leaders can communicate visions that shape followers' perception of identity continuity, and, as a corollary, the organizational identity, we extend existing qualitative research that has described successful leadership attempts to influence understandings of organizational identity in an organizational change context (e.g., Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). Second, one persistent debate in this literature is whether organizational identity should be seen as something that is enduring or more changeable—an issue that has been described as the most controversial pillar of the identity concept (Gioia et al., 2013). By showing that it is employee *perception* of collective continuity that matters, our results are completely in line with the proposition by Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) that it is the appearance of stability that matters, as well as with the response from Gioia et al. (2013) that the question should be rephrased into "whether people think it is enduring (. . .) even if it is not" (Gioia et al., 2013: 26). Third, there

appears to be conflicting evidence concerning the relationship between organizational identification on the one hand, and employee reactions to change on the other (see Drzensky & van Dick, 2013 for a review). This state of affairs is consistent with our null finding with respect to the moderating role of collective identification in Study 2 (even though we still believe it is warranted that this be subjected to empirical tests in field settings as well). More importantly, perhaps, is that our findings point to the importance of taking into account the uncertainty-reduction function of social identity processes (Hogg, 2012) when studying change reactions. It may be the case that an increased focus on the role of uncertainty alone, or in combination with other concepts derived from the social identity perspective, may advance our understanding of employee reactions to organizational change.

Limitations and Future Directions

The major strength of the current research lies in the combination of different research methods to provide a balance of external and internal validity (Dipboye, 1990). A controlled experiment (Study 2) allowed us to establish causality (Shadish et al., 2002), after a field study (Study 1) allowed us to establish the existence of a positive relationship between vision of continuity and support for change in the field. As for Study 1, one may raise the issue of common method and common source variance, which is typically associated with self-report data. Note, however, that the effect between the independent variable and the mediator is replicated in Study 2, for which this issue does not apply. When taken as a whole, therefore, our studies tend to offset each other's weaknesses and strengths. Furthermore, while common method bias inflates main effects, it tends to deflate interaction effects. Thus, by revealing significant interaction effects, which represent our effects of interest, our results indicate that method bias cannot account for these findings (Evans, 1985; Podsakoff et al., 2012; Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010). Moreover, related concerns are unequivocally ruled out by the results of Study 1, which relied on data from multiple sources, as well as by the results of Study 2, which relied on multisource data in its experimental set-up. Our confidence in the internal and external validity of our results notwithstanding, we encourage researchers to assess the extent to which our results can be generalized to other change outcomes. It would be valuable to see whether future studies could extend our findings to other change-relevant outcomes, such as employee satisfaction, trust in management, and turnover intentions. Along with this issue, considering the powerful, catalyzing role of perceived collective continuity in leading change, it behooves researchers to explore the various framing strategies leaders may employ to establish a sense of continuity—an issue we turn to in more depth in the following section.

We discuss several specific, interrelated strategies that can be used in combination with each other. The first way to do so is to emphasize that those aspects that constitute the defining features of the collective will remain preserved and continue to exist in the future. This approach may be complemented by one in which leaders frame changes as changes in lower-level features, such as concrete goals or plans. Such lower-level features tend to provide the means by which such higher-level features as the organizational mission and the organizational identity are enacted (Klein, 1989). As such, followers may sense that it is not the identity itself, but rather the expression of it, that changes. An application of the combination of these aforementioned strategies can be found in the vision of continuity as manipulated in Study 2.

Another strategy involves the creation of a link between the past and the future, a strategy that seems to be used often by political leaders (Haslam et al., 2011; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Shamir et al., 1994). By referring to traditions and past actions of older generations, as well as by linking these with the present, leaders may inculcate in followers the feeling that the collective identity must be so self-evident and timeless that it will remain unchanged over time. Importantly, in order to be such effective entrepreneurs of identity (e.g., Haslam et al., 2011), leaders may need to make use of their own versions or constructions of identity and history, which may sometimes even lead to a reconstruction of identity. In this regard, we speculate that yet another means of assuring collective continuity resides in the ability of leaders to envision change such that it will be seen as *required* for a preservation of the collective identity. More specifically, by framing change as necessary for a reaffirmation or reinforcement of identity, leaders may convince followers that nonchange will actually threaten, rather than preserve, continuity of identity (see also van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

Apart from the just-mentioned framing techniques, nonverbal techniques may also be considered. For example, research has shown that leaders can use emotional displays to trigger mindsets in

followers that make them more receptive to the respective leader message (Venus et al., 2013). Actions need not be limited to the communication domain, however. Leaders may foster a sense of continuity or increase the impact of their vision of continuity by means of the structure and design of work (e.g., working projects, organizational symbols) if these are strongly or easily connected to the organizational identity. With regard to organizational symbols, an interesting example would be the United and Continental Airlines merger in 2010, which led United Airlines to keep its name and Continental to keep its logo. On the one hand, this may represent an ideal solution if United employees perceive its name to be strongly indicative of its identity and Continental employees consider its logo to be strongly linked to identity. It is not clear, however, whether this was the best way to ensure a sense of continuity for employees of both companies, given that United's history, and therefore identity, is strongly associated with the logo (the distinctive U) that it had for over 30 years (Walker, 2010). Lastly, when reflecting on which factors are conducive to the translation of visions of continuity into employee perceptions of collective continuity, we believe that the leader–follower relationship should be taken into account. Specifically, the degree to which a vision of continuity fosters a sense of collective continuity may be contingent on the quality of the leader–member exchange (LMX) relationship. Previous research has shown that the strength of LMX can shape employees' interpretation of the credibility of leader behavior in a change context, thereby influencing the effectiveness of change-targeted leadership behavior on employee reactions to change (Furst & Cable, 2008). Based on these findings, we expect the relation between vision of continuity and perceived collective continuity to be especially strong under high-quality LMX relationships. Taken together, there may be various ways through which leaders can develop visions of continuity and strengthen the impact of this on perceptions of collective continuity. We hope future research will investigate these variables.

Evidently, there are other interesting extensions that would bolster the main idea that a sense of identity continuity is important in change contexts. First, as noted before, uncertainty has often been put forward as a consequence of change and a source of resistance (e.g., Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Interestingly, the need to reduce uncertainty has also been related to a sense of meaning and control (Hogg, 2007, 2012), and we would argue our model also has value in addressing such sources of resistance as loss of control (e.g., Bordia et al., 2004) and loss of meaning (e.g., McKinley & Scherer, 2000). Specifically, we would expect a vision of continuity to facilitate change acceptance also to the extent that employees experience a fear of loss of control and meaning, or any other aversive state that may reflect a threat to one's meaning-making framework.

However, a sense of continuity may also be relevant because of motives unrelated to uncertainty. For example, perceptions of collective identity continuity directly imply continuity of perceived core organizational values. Interestingly, employee perceived value congruence, through impacting organizational attraction, smoother communication, and trust in the organization, has such positive effects on employees as job satisfaction and intent to stay (Edwards & Cable, 2009). A sense of continuity, therefore, could be important not only by reducing uncertainty, but also by retaining the positive effects of value congruence. Future research may therefore test whether visions of continuity and perceptions of collective continuity are effective, especially for those employees who perceive high value congruence. Moreover, although size perceptions did not appear to play an explanatory role in our experimental study, we believe a more thorough investigation is needed before excluding the possibility that size perceptions play a role in explaining the effects of perceived collective continuity on change support. It stands to reason, for instance, that perceptions of collective continuity may directly translate into perceptions that the change is "smaller" and therefore more manageable. In other words, the perception of collective continuity may "shrink the change," a notion coined by Heath and Heath (2010) in their book *Switch: How to change when change is hard*, which relies on behavioral science principles to develop suggestions for managing change.

Finally it may be worthwhile to reflect on some potential boundary conditions of the positive effects of visions of continuity on change reactions. First, as discussed before, some conceptions of effective visions of change have emphasized a discrepant and idealized future (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998). It may be important to note that visions of continuity do not preclude a message that focuses on such elements. Indeed, emphasizing collective identity continuity may go well with emphasizing shortcomings of the current situation and improvements

in this regard, thereby eliciting a need for change. We would like to add, however, that such visions can only coexist if the shortcomings and envisioned improvements refer to aspects that are not perceived by employees as central to organizational identity. Even so, an interesting question would be under which circumstances employees prefer to hear about how existing shortcomings will be addressed than to hear about identity continuity. We therefore urge researchers to identify potential contextual factors that speak to the relative higher importance of emphasizing discontinuity over continuity.

Second, one may raise the question of whether visions of continuity are still relevant when organizational change concerns changes in identity. Our primary response would be to question whether it can be objectively determined whether a change implies a change in identity. Of course, although in general a process change will be less likely perceived as an identity change than will a merger, core to our theorizing—and demonstrated by our results—is that understandings of organizational identity are subjective and socially constructed, and therefore shapeable by leaders. There are also various anecdotes of leaders who, in similar situations, were capable of creatively framing changes and identity in such a way that ultimately a sense of continuity was perceived by followers (e.g., Haslam et al., 2011; see also van Knippenberg, 2016; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Our main point here is that even though some changes inherently imply identity changes, or at least identity threats, it is possible for leaders—and effective, as our research demonstrates—to shape employee understandings of identity, and as such, identity continuity—a viewpoint that is consistent with the notion of leaders as entrepreneurs of identity (Haslam et al., 2011), as well as with the notion of effective leaders as managers of meanings (Shamir, 2007). But what if organizations really desire change to be targeted at changing identity? Also here our primary response is to question whether organizations should try to do this, given the role identity threats play in evoking resistance to change and given that a sense of continuity is required for successful change. More importantly, identity continuity will still play an important role in such situations in the sense that perceived identity threats will be high, and therefore small variations in perceptions of collective continuity should positively predict support for change. That said, it may be challenging for leaders to convincingly create strong visions of continuity in these respective situations. This not only points again to the importance of exploring the ways leaders could convey a sense of continuity, but also suggests that future research may need to explore whether there are change situations for which visions of continuity may not cultivate a sense of collective continuity as strongly as in other situations.

Third and lastly, while we believe the power of visions of continuity in harnessing support for change can be generalized across a range of change situations, it may be possible that these positive effects vary across other contextual factors (e.g., company industry). It could be, for instance, that some companies operate in relatively low turbulence, causing change situations to be more salient and to have higher impact. In such situations visions of continuity may have stronger effects than in situations where employees are relatively often exposed to change situations. On the other hand, identity continuity appeals may elicit more positive reactions when change is happening on a frequent basis. Evidently, such questions can only be answered by future research.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important managerial implications. Unlike engaging in strategies that have been commonly suggested in the literature, such as creating a dissatisfaction with the status quo, and consequently, a need for change (e.g., Kotter, 1995), and portraying change as highly attractive (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998), managers ought to emphasize also that which is not going to change. If unwillingness to contribute to change is rooted in concerns about a potential discontinuity of the central aspects of the organizational identity, then managers ought to assure employees that this will not be a concern. Arguably, this critical shift in focus requires that development programs teach managers not how to frame or rationalize change in the most positive way, but rather how to frame change such that it will be perceived as a continuation, reaffirmation, or preservation of who "we " are as a collective. To do so, programs may assist managers in getting to know how the organizational identity is perceived by employees, and then help them to see how planned changes may be perceived as threatening to this organizational identity. Managers, then, need to find creative ways to frame the change as leaving the organizational identity unharmed.

CONCLUSION

While the importance of leader vision for change seems to be unquestioned, the current state of

science leaves us in the dark as to which vision mobilizes followers to contribute to the realization of change, and how it does so. In an effort to disambiguate part of this elusive phenomenon, we demonstrated that leader vision can facilitate change when assuring a continuity of the organizational identity. Although this insight advances our understanding of how vision impacts support for change, further exploration is needed of the potential ways through which leaders can create visions of continuity.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY 2—UNCERTAINTY AND VISION MANIPULATIONS

No Uncertainty Condition

This is what can be said about this right now.

- At *X*, changes to identity are likely to be absent
- Because of this, the changes can be expected to have continuity with regard to the identity of *X*'s programs

- And, because of this, it could be seen as having continuity with regard to the atmosphere in the educational programs and to the way students interact with each other.
- All in all, the changes will not be disruptive and there is no uncertainty right now.

High Uncertainty Condition

This is what can be said about the situation right now.

- At *X*, changes to identity, although still unclear, could be very big.
- Because of this, although not entirely certain, the changes could be seen as a threat to continuity with regard to the identity of *X*'s programs
- And, because of this, contintuity could be threatened with regard to the atmosphere in the bachelor's and master's programs and to the way students interact with each other
- All in all, the changes could be very disruptive and there is a lot of uncertainty right now.

Low Vision of Continuity Condition

Dear students,

For many years *X* has offered high-quality educational programs that are not only regarded as some of the best in the Netherlands, but that also enjoy an excellent reputation abroad. It is no coincidence *that X* welcomes 900 new first-year students each year. The school is currently suffering from budget deficits, however, which necessitates us to reevaluate our educational programs. The theme of this letter, therefore, concerns the future of these programs.

X will be able to provide less student supervision in terms of contact hours and seminars. To somewhat mitigate the negative effects of this, there will be a reduction in the supply of minors and electives. This will allow us to keep the losses from fewer contact hours within limits. More information will be provided about this later. Much more important, though, is that there will also be changes in the way we provide education.

Next year a new approach to teaching will be introduced that has a completely different focus. The new program and philosophy of teaching will be different from what we are used to, and will therefore require adjustment. In short, changes are inevitable.

Currently further details are being determined. You will be kept informed about these changes. We will remain responsible for the change process.

We believe in these plans and have confidence in a smooth transition. We ask you to accept and support these change plans. Without your support and collaboration, these plans cannot be realized. To a better future of *X*!

High Vision of Continuity Condition

Dear students,

For many years *X* has offered high-quality educational programs that are not only regarded as some of the best in the Netherlands, but that also enjoy an excellent reputation abroad. It is no coincidence that *X* welcomes 900 new first-year students each year. The school is currently suffering from budget deficits, however, which necessitates us to reevaluate our educational programs. The theme of this letter, therefore, concerns the future of these programs.

X will be able to provide less student supervision in terms of contact hours and seminars. To somewhat mitigate the negative effects of this, there will be a reduction in the supply of minors and electives. This will allow us to keep the losses from fewer contact hours within limits. More information will be provided about this later. Much more important, though, is that there will also be changes in the way we provide education.

Next year a new approach to teaching will be introduced that has a completely different focus. The new program and philosophy of teaching will be different from what we are used to, and will therefore require adjustment. In short, changes are inevitable. But do not forget: Despite these changes, that which has always characterized our programs, breadth and depth, will remain characteristic of our programs. It is only their expression that will change.

Currently further details are being determined. You will be kept informed about these changes. We will remain responsible for the change process, as well as for the preservation and continuity of the identity of *X*.

We believe in these plans and have confidence in a smooth transition. Professionalism, fair play, and teamwork—core values within our programs—will remain visible in the future. We ask you to accept and support these change plans. Without your support and collaboration, these plans cannot be realized. To a better future of *X*!