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## Unlocking the black box: Exploring the link between perceived organizational support and resistance to change

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### ABSTRACT

Past studies have inferred an indirect relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change. Making clear the “black box” between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change is crucial to predict the success of organizational change. Drawing upon organizational support theory and conservation of resources theory, this research was conducted in an attempt to offer a systematic analysis on employees' positive psychology in organizational change. The total valid sample consisted of 288 employees from Taiwanese consumer electronics manufacturing which were undergoing organizational change. The theoretical framework was analyzed by LISREL model. Results showed that Readiness for Change had negatively direct effects on Resistance to Change, and indicated that Readiness for Change mediated the relationships between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change, and Readiness for Change also mediated the relationships between Positive Psychological Capital and Resistance to Change. Finally, this study proposes managerial implications and highlights future research suggestions.

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### 1. Introduction

In the turbulent business environment, enterprises execute organizational changes, intervention and reengineering frequently, and these practices are required to survive (Ferlie, Fitzgerald, Wood, & Hawkins, 2005). As organizations attempt to deal with an increasingly turbulent economic future, they will increasingly depend on their employees to adapt to organizational change. Employees may feel supportive of, resistant to, or ambivalent toward organizational change (Deetz, 2008; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Thus, managers must first confront and reduce employees' *Resistance to Change*, because this disposition is an obstacle to successful organizational change (Furst & Cable, 2008). In this circumstance, top management teams should help employees mentally prepare for change (Furst & Cable, 2008). Therefore, the enterprise needs long-term investment to achieve

and form positive and supportive organizational climates. According to *organizational support theory*, organizations are willing to reward employee's work effort and will also pay attention to their socio-emotional needs (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Szamosi & Duxbury, 2002). Organisational support theory also emphasises that psychological processes constitute the basis for producing *Perceived Organisational Support* (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Past studies have inferred an indirect relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change (Furst & Cable, 2008; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011). Likewise, prior research has mentioned that the psychological status and perceptions of the impact of change have significant effects on employee reactions to change (Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004; Herold, Fedor, & Caldwell, 2007; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). Notably lacking from these literatures, however, are explicit attention to employees' psychological perceptions and transfers between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change. Hence, this is literature gap of our research question. The relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change is something of a “black box”: clarifying it will be crucial to predict the success of organizational change.

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Employees' positive behavior, emotional capability and *Positive Psychological Capital* play critical roles in the organizational change process (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Huy, 1999). Positive Psychological Capital is a "state" that has scalability and plasticity, and can be developed through training (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006). Furthermore, according to *conservation of resources theory* (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2002), individuals will accumulate resources they can apply to overcome challenges and threats. They might accumulate personal resources (such as Positive Psychological Capital) and condition resources (such as organizational support) (Hobfoll & Vaux, 1993). Therefore, we need to develop and test a theoretical framework and explore that how firms can successfully and smoothly execute organizational change while managing the trade-offs in employees' psychological status and *Readiness for Change*.

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the dynamic between employees' positive psychology and organizational change, focusing on the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Resistance to Change. This study contributes to the research question by firstly discussing organizational support theory and the relationship among Perceived Organisational Support, Readiness for Change, and Resistance to Change. Secondly, based on conservation of resources theory, we will discuss the relationship among Positive Psychological Capital, Readiness for Change, and Resistance to Change. Finally, we establish a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical model among Perceived Organisational Support, Positive Psychological Capital, Readiness for Change and Resistance to Change in the context of organizational change, supported by human resource practices. We also suggest several implications for organizations and future research.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. The relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and Positive Psychological Capital

Perceived Organisational Support is defined as the degree to which employees believe that their employing companies value their contributions, appreciate their efforts, and care for their well-being (Edwards & Peccei, 2010; Eisenberger, Hungtington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). According to relevant literatures, we have suggested that Perceived Organisational Support can be divided into five sub-dimensions in which organizations pay careful attentions to: employees' welfare, employees' personal objectives, employee contributions, assist employees in career/professional development, and proud of employees' efforts (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

Positive Psychological Capital is a positive psychological state of individuals, which includes four dimensions (Luthans et al., 2006): (1) self-efficacy: when people, in the face of challenges, can confidently make the necessary efforts; (2) optimism: people can make a positive contribution to present and future achievements; (3) hope: people can consistently move towards goals and (4) resilience: when a person can withstand and recover from failures to fight on. When employees have more Positive Psychological Capital, their performance, satisfaction and commitment will be higher; absenteeism will be reduced (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006).

Perceived Organisational Support will make employees tend to have more Positive Psychological Capital and a positive work environment (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008). When employees have perceived organisational support, they can transform it into hope. By setting goals, employees can complete organizational tasks. Similarly, a supportive organizational climate can enhance employee resilience and enable individuals to rapidly

recover from setbacks (Luthans et al., 2008). For example, when employees feel frustrated by their own mistakes in a relatively supportive organizational climate, they are more likely to quickly recuperate because they are less likely to worry about being punished. In addition, this supportive organizational climate also gives employees more optimism (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Therefore, we can propose that:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Perceived Organisational Support is positively related to Positive Psychological Capital.*

### 2.2. The relationship among Perceived Organisational Support, Readiness for Change, and Resistance to Change (based on organisational support theory)

Organisational support theory states that organizations are willing to reward employee's work effort and will also pay attention to their socio-emotional needs (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Szamosi & Duxbury, 2002). Organisational support theory also emphasises that psychological processes constitute the basis for producing Perceived Organisational Support. Perceived Organisational Support will strengthen employees' beliefs, identities, rewards, and also enhances employees' performance. These processes should produce favorable outcomes for employees (Shore & Shore, 1995).

When employees have Perceived Organisational Support, they believe that organizations are concerned about them and have a higher sense of trust in them. The organization then promotes change: employees will support the organization if the change is legitimate and rational (Self, Armenakis, & Schraeder, 2007). Readiness for Change is reflected in organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the implementation and necessary extent of changes, and the organization's capacity to successfully execute organizational changes (Armenakis & Bedian, 1999; French, Bell, & Zawacki, 2004). Eby, Adams, Russell, and Gaby (2000) found a significant relationship between Perceived Organisational Support, trust among peers and Readiness for Change. Weber and Weber (2001) also argued that the higher the degree of support in the work environment, the higher Readiness for Change becomes. Therefore, social support and interaction are the positive elements of organizational culture, and such a culture can enhance Readiness for Change (McNabb & Sepic, 1995). Madsen, Miller, and John (2005) have also argued that organizational support and trust can improve Readiness for Change.

Moreover, Resistance to Change means that organizational members may evoke considerable anxiety and resistance about putting down the known and moving to an uncertain future, including technical resistance, political resistance, and cultural resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Cummings & Worley, 2009; Oreg, 2003). If Readiness for Change exists, an organization is primed to embrace change and employee Resistance to Change is reduced, thereby promoting change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Rafferty & Simons, 2006). Even so, those employees are willing to actively participate in and support organizational change. The reason why employees support change is they share the value embodied in change or believe that organizational change will bring success (Shapiro & Kirkman, 1999). In conclude, when members perceive organizational support, they will believe that firms are concerned about them (Self et al., 2007), and members' beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding the organizational changes are needed (French et al., 2004). Finally, organizational members may reduce the anxiety and resistance about moving to an uncertain future (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Therefore, we can propose that:

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