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Leadership, Change & Employee Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract:

Change leadership is the engine of change, it's about urgency, vision, empowering people, and seizing opportunity. Emotional intelligence is an important skill set in leading, hence leaders identified to be effective have an appreciable level of the skill set. Change can be exciting and stimulating in an organization, but it is often met with fear and resistance. How leaders manage the change still seems to be a challenge. Scholars and leaders have for long acknowledged the importance for transformation. This paper focuses on the impact of employees' emotions on organizational change following a qualitative methodological approach through critical literature review of the role of emotions during change and the significance of emotional intelligence in leading effective change. The research posits that regardless of the quality of the change plan a leader might have, if the team he relies on to carry that change isn't committed to do so, then the plan could meet its demise.

Keywords:

Leadership, Change, Emotional Intelligence, Performance, Impact

1. Introduction

According to Ashkanasy et al., 2000, Druskat & Druskat, 2006 [2], in the last decade, the concept of emotional intelligence has generated an increasing interest, many efforts have been done by scientists and leaders to understand and explain the nature and the origin of the emotion and its impact on the professional and personal life. It is important to have a forward-looking, strategic and intelligent leader in developing company and business sectors. Change is usually concerned with the shifting or evolving of one phase to another. It usually entails the dismantling of previous structures and the creation of new ones. Motivations for change may be a response to the changes in its external environment, a need to upgrade its internal structure for better performance or to pre-empt the introduction of a new product or service in the market. Rekha Dhingra [20] in her study 'Relational Analysis of Emotional Intelligence and Change management' notes how 'change is generally stressful for the people involved' as it naturally ushers in 'a source of feeling pressure, uncertainty, frustration, isolation and anxiety' [20]. These emotions tend to be reflected through resistance towards the change the leader aims to implement. In past

times, resistance to change was seen as an inherent trait in human, it was believed that people do not like to change and be futuristic, so it is the duty of leaders to force change on their resistant employee [15]. However, the adoption of sociology and psychological theories in the study of organizational change gave another twist to employee resistance during change. The aspect of emotions was introduced into the study of employee resistance to change and change leadership literature became saturated with unveiling the role of emotion during organizational change [45]. A substantial connection was established between employee emotions and resistance to change. It was discovered that positive emotions contributes largely to a successful organizational change while negative emotions lead to its demise.

Contrary to traditional belief that resistance to change is an inherent human behavior, resistance is a reaction arising from negative emotions which can be linked to fear, confusion or uncertainty. Whereas, this reaction if not well managed makes change difficult or unattainable [45]. This research therefore examines emotions as they affect the success of organizational change and the required skills needed by leaders to turn these emotions into an instrument of change.

1.1. Emotional Intelligence in Different Levels of the organization

The continuous growing external changes have imposed a higher requirement to the top ranked people for the survival of their organisation. It's reflected through the rely on the workers expertise (Osterman et al., 2001 as cited in [56]) due to a big interest given to the evolution and achievement of the organisation and the quality of services offered to customers. However, when it's about integrating the Emotional Intelligence to reach their goals, many of them tend to fail due to the poor understanding and the insignificant importance given to the vital role and the contribution of Emotions and social skills in leadership. (Wendy Morton, 2012 as cited in 55).

For the purpose of investigating how the Emotional intelligence can vary according to the level of employment, a study was conducted at different levels of organisations (Simon & Schuster 2005 as cited in [51]). The statistical results come to support the claim that top position people and leaders of organisation (CEO, VP, Senior Executive) fail to develop the necessary emotional intelligence which is justified by the low engagement in the social life, but it's considered to be in favour of managers and supervisors in developing a high emotional intelligence through the constant exposure to different situation and human interaction. A quick decline in term of emotional intelligence was noticed at the title of director which reflects the beginning of divergence in terms of emotional intelligence among the hierarchical position of an organization [58]. The lowest emotional intelligence was recorded at the level of traditional employees and explained by a high involvement in their respective specialised area where personal qualification are the first criteria which often lead to a neutrality in term of extraneous forces. Unsteadiness in emotional intelligence was detected in the student's profile and interpreted by the continuous developing process of the social skills, considering the student still in the learning phase and at the starting point of his professional career which is a subject of variation in time from a student to another. The quick and high students in developing emotional intelligence in the early stage, have an advance though the employment levels and might be a potential and well-suited for high positions in the future [58]. The study results propose that according to emotional intelligence, leadership style behave differently within each level of employment. They also show distinct pathways for development within an employment level, although a deeper EQ understanding, and involvement is

suitable for all levels of employment, the patterns of development areas and strengths are indicators of potential compatibility between employees and organizations, which will be advantageous in the future career of the individual and job-related decision-making [58].

1.2. Purpose of the study

This paper aims to review literature on the influence emotional intelligence has on leaders in order to successfully manage organizational change initiatives. Firstly, the paper shall establish the connection between organizational change and emotion, then highlight the role of emotions in organizational performance during change. Secondly, it will highlight the emotional intelligence needed to account for such reactions. Lastly, it will show how emotional intelligence can be used to motivate change, and also gauge the success of the implemented change.

2. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Effective Leadership

Emotional intelligence is an increasingly important topic in leadership research. Psychologists Salovey and Mayer introduced the theory of emotional intelligence in the 1990. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is strongly related to leadership, and they interact with each other. Leadership needs to be fully understood by those involved in the environment in which the organization operates [41]. Having great leadership means that leaders tend to lead team to achieve goals and common vision through positive influence. According to Figure 1, John Maxwell 2011 [20] describes five levels of leadership to discuss their strengths and weaknesses and how to put them into practice. The five levels include: position, permission, production, people development and pinnacle. Maxwell describes that top leaders who show good abilities are trusted to represent the team. Employees follow leaders may be because of their character, character, ability and the goals and ideals they represent.

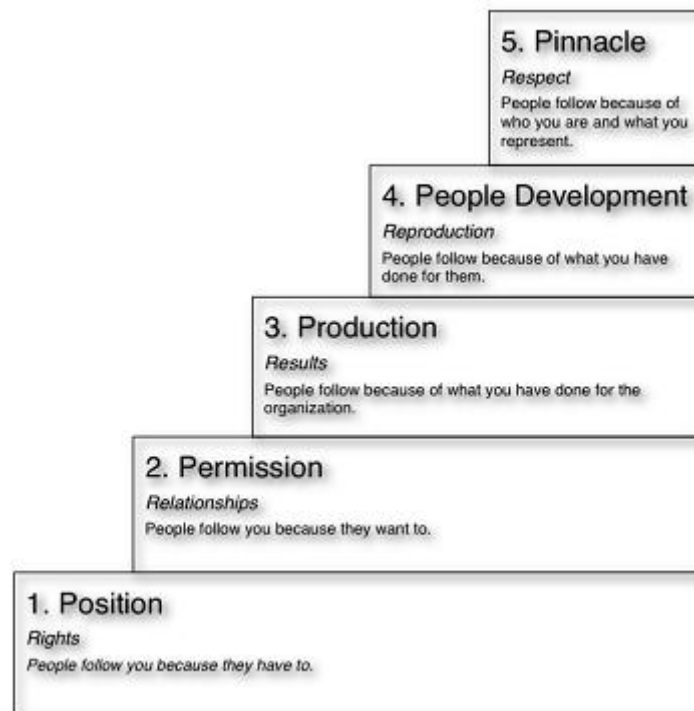


Figure 1. John Maxwell 5 Levels of Leadership.

Similarly, Collins, 2011 [as cited in 20] in his book *Good to Great* discusses how a good firm develops a promising firm (Figure 2). The book divided leadership into five levels including highly capable individual, contributing team member, competent manager, effective leader and executive. What is worth mentioning is that the effective leader are the people who inspiring followers to pursue a clear and bold vision and inspiring higher performance standards. On the top of the pyramid is the executive level, leader could combine personal humility and professional dedication to create lasting greatness.



Figure 2. Jim Collins's Level 5 Leadership.

In 1997, Daniel Goleman, a psychologist specializing in the brain and behavioural sciences, put a large amount of work to bring the concept to wider public attention, providing a useful preliminary framework for understanding EI [27]. In 1996, Goleman reveals that EI is possibly to be more important than IQ. EI model is a set of broad abilities and skills that can drive the performance of leadership, including five key elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills [27]. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) also claim the importance of EI in leadership, discusses the characteristics and leadership styles in excellent leadership, and outlines how EI effects on the growth of effective leaders [42]. Gorman (2014) believes that human emotions are mostly dependent on contact with others. More specifically, people rely on connections with others to determine emotions [20]. The reason is what scientists call the open-loop nature of the limbic system -- our emotional centres. Closed-loop systems control self-regulating, while open-loop systems rely on external resources for management. Furthermore, it is also shown that the emotions of leaders affect those around them. Emotions may be contagious [36] and leaders' emotions influence the performance of the team. Acorrding to Barsade (2002), the Ripple Effect claims that the group who has positive emotion has a better productivity [41].

Effective and successful leader may have different philosophies of leadership; however, some traits might be similar. The emotions and behaviours of leaders may influence the emotions and behaviours of the staff in the organization. Smart leaders build culture and comfortable work environment. Research shows that high levels of emotional intelligence in leaders can create an environment conducive to information sharing, mutual trust, risk taking and learning progress. Goleman (2000) in his article *Leadership That Gets Results* in *Harvard Business Review* indicates that the organizational climate is likely to determine the growth of a company's financial

performance revenue, which includes key business performance indicators such as revenue growth, return on sales, efficiency and profitability [23]. It is obvious that leaders are the main driving force of organizational climate. According to Goleman (2002), about 50-70% of employees' perceptions of the organizational climate can be attributed to the actions and behaviours of leaders. The leaders create determines how people feel in the office, which in turn affects their productivity and engagement. People's moods in workplace depend in large part on whether the leader is committed to creating a positive environment. Sanofi, the French pharmaceuticals company, grew 12 per cent as it focused on the emotional intelligence skills of its sales team. Another example, in the case of Motorola company, after the company offered EI training to employees at a manufacturing plant, the productivity of more than 90% of the trained employees increased [29].

On the contrary, Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee in 2001 indicated that a grumpy and ruthless leader may have a negative impact on the development of the company [33]. Highly narcissistic leaders can lead to abuse of power; narcissistic leaders are self-centred and see themselves as entitled and superior. Their tendency to be aggressive in the face of criticism, and to demonstrate self-worth by belittling others, may lead others to believe they are abusing others [25]. Dr. Tony Hayward, the former head of BP oil company, did not take quick response to the oil spill in BP at that time and did not coordinate the relationship between all parties [20]. Dr. Tony Hayward was very professional in engineering and had worked in BP for many years and formed perfect standards. But in the face of emergencies, he lacked sensitivity and adaptability, resulting in environmental damage, animal damage, and BP's own crisis. In addition, low levels of EI leaders create anxious and fearful climate. While stress and fear can make employees very productive in the short term, and companies may do well as a result, that could be very short-sighted. For instance, Harvard professor J. Richard Hackman (2002) in his research points out that although some enterprises have abundant additional resources, it does not determine team performance [55]. This is sometimes due to problems of coordination and motivation in the team, which can undermine the progress of work and the development of business. Leaders takes primarily responsible of coordinating and motivating. Therefore, it is a crucial role of realising the situation or observing emotions in the team because it impacts the enterprise development.

3. An Organizational Change is An Emotional Experience

Change has become a constant factor in organization today [45]. Most scholars see organizational change as very important in today's evolving and highly competitive world for various reasons. Some see it as essential in gaining competitive advantage [53,19] while some others see it as an inherent organizational function to survive and remain successful in business [40,38,44]. Although, the topic about the need for organizational change and how to lead one has received a lot of scholarship, research shows high number of unsuccessful organizational change [5,42]. Consequently, leadership scholars and practitioners have begun to look at ways at which leaders can effectively influence the success of organizational change.

Accordingly, there have been attempts by scholars and researchers towards unravelling the mystery behind achieving a successful change leadership (Senge et al, 2002). One of the leading causes of unsuccessful organizational change discovered is employee resistance to change [14,11,22]. Employee resistance to change was considered by conventional human resource practitioners as a form of conflict

between top management and employee [43,15]. But subsequently, an aspect of sociology and psychology was adopted for better understanding of resistance in organizational change. As a result, researchers began to see resistance as a natural and emotional response to change which is born out of the fear of uncertainty [21,36,32,33] or out of the belief that change is unnecessary [22] here has also been indirect evidence that the outcome of the emotional experiences during organizational change can persist for long periods, even after the change has been made [52]. Thus, recent literature is attempting to explain the need for leaders to capture the minds and heart of their employees, as well as make good use of their emotions in order to get the right attitude needed for the change process [45,44].

The Contribution of emotions in the organizational performance during change:

Recent studies on leadership during change have established a connection between employees' emotions and their response to change [28,3]. These studies classify emotions as either positive or negative [36,25,31,45]. While positive emotion is mostly associated with feelings such as, joy and excitement, negative emotions on the other hand is linked with feelings such as, grief and fear [36]. In the case of organizational change, Positive emotion is seen as a feeling of confidence and trust about change, it is believed to help employees cope with the complexities and stress during the change period [36,3,34]. Whereas, negative emotion is considered as a feeling of mistrust, insecurity and uncertainty leading to passiveness during change [53,32,12,57] worthy body of research indicates that positive emotions for the organizational change fosters into prosocial behaviors such as supporting and cooperating with others [17]. Thus, organization members experiencing positive emotions are highly likely to demonstrate supportive and cooperative behaviours during, and long after, the organizational change [24]. Alternatively, negative emotions can tends to surface through various forms of resistance behaviors, such as retraction from the change initiatives or malicious sabotaging of the change to cause it to fail [24,47].

Although, some scholars argue positive emotions contributes to successful change [57] and that skepticism towards change is a negative emotion [47,56] Nevertheless, negative emotions do not always mean fear or resistance to change [39,31] as much as it could be detrimental to achieving a successful organizational change, negative emotions can be a sign of warning to an improper work plan which can be threat to the success of change [55]. Therefore, negative emotions also help improve change [31,33]. Recent studies have also shown that negative emotional experiences stemming from change can remain virtually unchanged for as long as several years. Whereas positive emotions deteriorate relatively faster overtime. For these reasons, Some scholars believe, the ability to understand individuals' behaviors and emotions is a prerequisite to successful performance during change [41].

4. Leadership During Organizational Change

The concept of leadership has enjoyed a lot of scholarship from past time till date. overtime, the question of what makes a successful leader has been a topic of interest among researchers. While some scholars view it as the ability to direct employee through work process and laid out plans without altercation [6,30]. Some on the other hand, see it as a leader's ability to make effective change through strategies that would meet the future need of the company [51]. However, some scholars are of the opinion that a leader's ability to understand individuals' behaviors and emotions is a

prerequisite to successful performance [17]. Early leadership studies reviews conducted by [6] and [37] discovered that intelligence has a big role to play in leadership effectiveness during change. Though, traditional studies of effective change leadership concentrated more on academic intelligence [46,54]. This type of intelligence according to critics, does not consider certain circumstances, such as employee emotions that could affect leadership effectiveness [47] Consequently, [26] presented Emotional intelligence as essential for effective leadership as it addresses the issue of emotions and attitudes. Since then, many researches have examined the significance of EI in leadership.

5. The Importance of Emotional Intelligence During Change

According to Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie Mckee, contrary to the general belief that strategy, vision or powerful ideas make a great leaders, being an effective leader is quite primal, it requires leading through emotions [20]. [25] argues that emotional intelligence enables leaders to motivate and convert team members into an instrument of change. According to him, leaders need four aspects of emotional intelligence:

The first being the need to be self aware so that the can be able to appraise the emotions of others without prejudice which helps to establish relationship with others and empathy. The second is the need for leaders to develop skills in understanding different emotions. Leaders should be able to understand different emotions regarding work process. They should be sensitive to negative emotions pointing out failure embedded in work process. The ability to regulate emotions to get the best attitude and behavior that would trigger creativity and commitment. Finally, leaders need the capability to manage their own emotion and that of others. The emotion a leader displays has a great effect on their employees' emotions and performance. Also, Lewis (2000 as cited in [36] argued that emotions displayed by leaders can be contagious leaders positive emotion can lead to positivity among team members during change while negative emotions may lead to assumptions, such as vulnerability, weakness or ineffectiveness by their employees or team members. Hence, the need to be emotionally adept as it helps to manage effective leadership by using emotions to manage strong and complex relationships during work performance and even organizational change [36].

5.1. Using Emotional Intelligence to Gauge Success of the Change

Crucial to managing most change strategies is the progress measuring efforts made after the change has been introduced [38,31]. There has been ample attention given to the tools leaders can use to manage the change, with large consulting companies such as PWC and McKinsey charging significant amounts for such strategies. Less addressed, however, is how leaders can exercise emotional intelligence to gauge the success of the change.

[31] in his 'Emotional Capability, Emotional Intelligence, and Radical Change' analysis highlights how leaders can learn from the outcomes of the changes they enact from the receptivity stemming from behavioral change. [31] goes on to highlight how 'emotion provides the primary feedback mechanism that alerts the [leader] that various set goals are not being achieved, and this, in turn, motivates behavior' [31]. The study, which aims to 'present a multilevel theory of emotion and change', notes the importance of gauging receptivity and judging mobilization when considering

making organizational change. At the organizational level, Instead defines receptivity as the 'organization's members willingness to [collectively] consider proposed changes and to recognize the legitimacy of such proposals [31]. At the organizational level, mobilization 'refers to the process of rallying and propelling different segments of the organization to undertake joint action and realize common change goals' [31] in addition to gauging change, emotionally intelligent leaders are also able to set challenging goals and take calculated risks during the change process [20]

Along with the management of emotional intelligence, leaders need to take into account the organization's culture when managing change. Often, in order to successfully implement that change, the organization's culture would be subject to change as well. Difficulties facing the leader when aiming to change an organization's culture lie in the complex, at times, unwritten systems which dictate an organization's primary and subcultures [19,23]. The inability of the leader to demonstrate acute emotional intelligence regarding the organization's culture could affect their subordinates and ultimately deem the intended change a failure (Elfenbein, 2007 as cited in [23] he leader thus needs to be competent in understanding the emotional linkage to the organization's culture. Smollan and Sayers in their 2009 qualitative study 'Organizational Culture, Change and Emotions' identify numerous ways in which organizational culture and emotions are linked. Specifically: a) Organizational culture is imbued with emotion and, therefore, cultural change is especially emotional. An organization's affective culture influences how these emotions are experienced and expressed. There might be specific elements of a culture that an employee likes or dislikes and these attitudes influence emotional responses to various types of change. b) The emotional connection of employee to culture is further highlighted by [12] who notes that the relationship is 'deep-seated, largely unconscious, and intimately connected to the so development of identity; and have emotional content' [12]. Thus a change in the related culture can lead to an emotional response such as anxiety and grieving . c) An emotionally unintelligent leader could ignore the importance of the organization's corporate culture when managing change, and effectively offend those who relate to it [12]. However understanding the emotional connection the organization's employees have with the culture will allow an emotionally intelligent leader to communicate favorable and supported change strategies (Gill, 2010 as cited in [27]).

Therefore, it is imperative for a leader to be aware of the organizational culture as it can assist in the effective management of change [12,41]. Especially given the noted link between culture and emotional intelligence. A leader displaying competent emotional intelligence will thus be able to pander the change strategies in a culture-appearing manner, thus increasing the likelihood of success.

5.2. Are There Other Competencies for Leading Change?

Some studies however have looked to analyze the extent to which emotional intelligence will influence a leader's effectiveness to manage change. Studies such as [18] 'Competencies For Managing Change' notes how projects which bare 'high requirements for behavioral change' will require the leader to exercise emotional intelligence in their communication skill. Crawford and Nahmias note the primary role of leaders exercising change management is; 'communicating to engage stakeholders, sell change, enlist champions, facilitate political diffusion and manage stakeholder expectations" [18]. Conversely, change that will require high levels of

strategy and technicality will require leaders to manage the program/project itself as opposed to the people [18].

Other studies have attempted to weigh the importance of various competencies for transformational leaders and leaders who initiate organizational changes. Studies such as Flavia Cavazotte's 'Effects of leader intelligence, personality and emotional intelligence on transformational leadership and managerial performance' have aimed to highlight the direct and indirect functions that categorize successful change focused leadership [13]. Traits such as conscientiousness were proven to carry more weight for transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness in managerial roles [13]. Other traits such as extraversion and openness were also found to have significant correlations [13,8,9,10].

[7] in her 2010 study 'Leadership competencies for implementing planned organizational change' highlighted how varying leadership styles inherently require varying competencies when managing organizational change. [7] adopts the task-oriented and person-oriented theories to portray the predominant types of leaders. Identifying 'the ability to clarify task requirements and structure tasks around an organization's mission and objectives' as being critical competencies for task-oriented leaders. With emotionally intelligent competencies such as the 'consideration' and 'self awareness' being the key competencies for person-oriented leaders.

5.3. A critical Approach

Despite the scholars' attention, the link between emotional intelligence and change leadership has received, there are still scholars who cast doubt on the methods used to measure the correlations found [2]. Specifically questioning the studies designed to test effects of emotional intelligence on leadership. Noting the restrictions in the study designs regarding controlling for ability and personality or correcting for measurement error [2]. Factors some scholars state do not comply with evidence based principles [48]. Thus, their theoretical and practical recommendations are undermined [13]. Critics note how the absence of the appropriate controls when conducting emotional intelligence & leadership correlation tests can lead to inflated results which subsequently lead to doubtful conclusions made under those circumstances [29].

6. Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence in the organization is an emerging research topic and in the next decades, this area will progress along with the continuous effort devoted to the development, evaluation and analysis of different theories and practices. The variety of the current Emotional Intelligence conceptualizations gave birth to different understanding and approaches to this concept. This has not, however, prevented the fact that they agree and share same views and similar results. The topic of emotional intelligence in the organization was a subject of many criticisms where several arguments was provided against it because some people are still sceptical about validity, accuracy and the exactitude of the conducted studies and researches. It was considered that intellectual skills have a higher importance in the workplace, describing the emotional intelligence as an individual trait and personal character which cannot not be, develop effectively due the human nature with different external and internal changes and instabilities. This research posits that regardless of the quality of the change plan a leader might have, if the team he relies on to carry that

change is not committed to do so then the plan could meet its demise [1]. Commitment to change in this case refers to the degree of organizations willingness and desire to support the change [45]. Affective commitment to change refers to the desire to support the change based on a belief in its inherent benefits [3]. Normative commitment to change is the support for the change resulting from a sense of needing to reciprocate positive treatment received from the organization [45]. The early effective communication and motivation can positively impact both forms of commitment to the change [52]. Research has proven that early levels of commitment tend to last over time [30,39,40,49,50]. Thus it is critical for a leader to demonstrate emotional intelligence in identifying the applicable emotional language to motivate his team to carry that change.

[35] note how a leader's 'ability to use emotions is assumed to be linked to inspirational motivation'. Thus leaders who exercise emotional intelligence may use their knowledge to generate positive emotions towards the change which in turn will motivate for more successful results [35]. The correlation between positive employee attitudes and emotions with organizational change success is explored in [3,4] study 'Can Positive Employees Help Positive Organizational Change?'. The study surveyed 132 employees from a various fields and found that 'positive psychological capital and positive emotions are important in countering potential dysfunctional attitude and behaviours relevant for organizational change'. Specifically, how positive emotions may combat the negative reactions which tend to surface given organizational change [3]. A similar 2011 study by Alina Maria Andries in the *Global Journal Of Human Social Science* also notes how 'positive emotions, by organizing and constructive effects, optimize the quality of work [1]. However [1] notes how there are negative emotions in the workplace that can become functional 'in that it promotes more efficient cognitive processing of information and perceptions more realistic' [1]. As made evident by [1] study, there is a rather complex range of emotions employers can use to motivate employees towards efficient execution of organizational change. A leader's emotional intelligence will equip him to identify the accurate combination of emotions needed to motivate the desired organizational change [1]. Since emotions provoke certain behavior or reaction towards change regardless of the type of change [3] it is therefore important for leaders to acquire the necessary skills needed to understand different emotions and to turn emotions into the right energy needed for change.

Given the complex emotional and technical management of change required for it to be successful, we recommend that leaders should also focus on empowering managers and employees to be agents of the change in the early stages of the change initiative. With significant leadership support, managers can transfer enthusiasm, optimism for change, and confidence to employees on a personal level [52,8,9,10,11]. Also, the individualized attention managers are able to give their subordinates can alleviate negative emotions that tend to arise during organizational change [32,33]. With regards to the employees, the initial affective experiences at the early stages of the change will influence their commitment to change [24]. This would entail increasing employee emotional intelligence in order to be self-aware committers and gauges of change. Yet, surprisingly little work has examined the direct role of employee emotions in determining their commitment to change, even though logic and indirect findings clearly suggest a linkage between these two variables [52,10]. Further, successful implementation of organizational change requires to some extent, employee creativity in order to develop new approaches and behaviors following the

change. This creativity has also been found to lead to extended attention, thinking and behavioral repertoires [23].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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