BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE WORKERS' PRE-IMPLEMENTATION ATTITUDES TOWARD AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Camille Reculet, & Evelyne Fouquereau
Université de Tours/QualiPsy, UR1901 (France)

Abstract

Over the past five years, the covid-19 and the emergence of edge-cutting technologies have led to sudden changes in workplaces worldwide. Consequently, organizational transformations have become essential to adapt to the ever-changing environment. Since the 1950s, organizational changes have been extensively studied and authors have shown that depending on the quality of the implementation, it can be correlated positively or negatively with measures of workers' health, quality of life at work and performance (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2016). But globally, it has been estimated that 30% of organizational changes fail to reach their goals within the timeframe and means allocated (Michel, Todnem By, & Burnes, 2013). Researchers have underlined the role of employees' attitudes towards change in changes' successes or failures (e.g., Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). They show that the changes supported and endorsed by employees are significantly more likely to have a range of positive outcomes than those met with opposition and resistance. This study aimed at creating a tool based on the *Push, Pull, Anti-push, Anti-pull* model (Mullet at al., 2000) to assess the complex psychosocial motives underlying pre-implementation attitudes toward an organizational change. The 2P2AP model has already been used in professional contexts to predict attitudes toward career transitions such as retirement (Fouquereau et al., 2018) but never to explain individuals' attitudes towards organizational changes. This multidimensional model postulates that individuals' attitudes can be explained by looking simultaneously at four underlying factors: Push and anti-push factors refer to considerations of the *present* situation that lead respectively to positive and negative attitudes toward the new event or situation while pull and anti-pull refer to considerations of the *future* situation that lead respectively to positive and negative attitudes toward it. We used a two-step method to create an *ad hoc* tool. First, an in-depth literature review was made using databases (e.g., Google Scholar, Wiley Open Library) and keywords such as "employees' attitudes" and "organizational change". We then conducted 11 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with questions based on the 2P2AP model. Altogether a set of 48 items was generated, based on the scientific literature and the interviews. This *ad hoc* questionnaire was then administered to 700 French employees of a subdirection undergoing a transformation. An exploratory factorial analysis provided support for the reliability and validity of the four-factor structure of the tool. Using this tool and this model in the future should allow for a better understanding of workers' pre-implementation attitudes toward change.

Keywords: Organizational change, Push Pull Anti-push Anti-pull model, employees attitudes toward organizational change.

1. Introduction

Organizational changes have been a hot topic in organizational psychology since the mid-20st century. From the very first studies conducted by Kurt Lewin (1948) to the meta-analysis published nowadays (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015), two similar observations remain: First, organizational change is an inevitable process for any organization that wishes to survive and second, these changes represent high-risk, precarious phases. Indeed, although the topic has been researched for decades, implementation in the fields is not a seamless process. Globally, it has been estimated that 30% of organizational changes fail to reach their goals within the timeframe and means allocated (Michel, Todnem By, & Burnes, 2013). It has also been shown that when poorly implemented, organizational changes can lead to a wide range of negative consequences for employees and companies such as employees' deterioration of health and quality of life at work and a decrease in companies' global performance (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2016; Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). On the other hand, a well-implemented organizational change could lead to

better interpersonal relationships, better support among colleagues and better global performances (Long et al., 2008; Sykes, 2015).

Over the last decades, an important field of the organizational change literature has focused on the part of employees' attitudes and behaviors in such contexts. It has been shown that employees' adhesion or refusal of change is a primary factor of success or failure (Chiaburu et al., 2022; Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). Workers' attitudes toward change have also been shown to be not only an antecedent to change success but also a mediator explaining the relationship between change success and several antecedents such as leadership practices or quality of communication (Peng, Li, Wang & Lin, 2020). As it has been proven that individual positive attitudes toward change lead to implementation success, authors are also aiming at identifying antecedents to these attitudes toward change. Marinova et al. for example put to light a positive correlation between enriched job characteristics (autonomy, job complexity and task significance) and change oriented behavior on the one hand and a negative correlation between unenriched job characteristics (routinization and formalization) and change-oriented behavior (2015). Different processes have also been underlined as major antecedents to positive attitudes toward change such as clear communication or co-construction of the change project (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011; Choi, 2011). The roles played by several major antecedents has been studied extensively. However, the complexity of the subjective psychological reasons underlying these antecedents has not been considered through the lens of an integrative model.

Our study aimed at using the *Push, Pull, Anti-push, Anti-pull* model (Mullet et al., 2000) to shed light on the complexity of the reasons underlying the various attitudes toward an organizational change. This multidimensional model postulates that individuals' attitudes can be explained by looking simultaneously at four underlying factors:

- Push refers to considerations of the present situation that are viewed as repelling and therefore lead to positive attitudes toward the future situation.
- Pull refers to considerations of the future situation that are viewed as appealing and lead to positive attitudes toward the future situation.
- Anti-pull refers to considerations of the future situations that are viewed as repelling and therefore lead to negative attitudes toward the future situation.
- Anti-push refers to considerations of the present situation that are viewed as appealing and therefore lead to negative attitudes toward the future situation.

This model has been used in professional contexts to predict for example attitudes toward career transitions such as retirement (Fouquereau et al., 2018) but never to explain individuals' attitudes towards organizational changes. Thus, the aim of our research was to develop a new instrument to assess the complexity of the reasons underlying workers pre-implementation attitudes toward change, based on the 2P2AP model (Mullet et al., 2000). The first study's goal was to create a pool of items intended to constitute the frame of our *ad hoc* scale for subsequent testing. The second study involved a test of the factor structure and the construct validity of the items among a pool of 700 French employees.

2. Study one: Item screening and development

2.1. Method

This study was conducted in a subdirection of a telecommunication company, in France. This subdirection composed of 3760 people was about to undergo a major internal restructuration. Departments and teams were going to be split up and reorganized in a different, more centralized way. In order to generate items to elaborate an *ad hoc* questionnaire for this context, we combined two approaches. First, following Hinkin's guidelines regarding validation studies, we performed a systematic literature review to list the psychological reasons underlying attitudes toward organizational change, using databases such as Google Scholar, Wiley Open Library or PsycNet (1998). Keywords used were "employees' attitudes", "organizational change", "attitudes toward change" or "organizational transformation". Then, we conducted a series of face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 11 employees of the subdirection.

Interview questions were based on the 2P2AP model: (1) "Regarding the present situation, what leads you to be favorable to the future transformation?"; (2) "Regarding the present situation, what leads you to want to maintain this current organization?"; (3) Regarding the transformation, which aspects do you find appealing?"; (4) Regarding the transformation, which aspects do you consider problematic?". The interviews lasted approximatively an hour each. Interviewees were asked to answer freely to the four questions. Follow up questions were sometimes added to prompt participants to give more detailed answers.

2.2. Population

11 employees (8 men, 3 women) were interviewed to collect data about the motives behind their attitudes toward the organizational change to come. Their ages ranged from 26 to 60 years old (M_{years} = 46,18 years old; SD_{years} = 9,89). They worked in 7 different entities out of 11 in total.

2.3. Analysis and results

To begin with, a set of individual psychological reasons underlying attitudes toward change (i.e., manager support) was identified from the literature review. Then, each interview was scanned to identify reasons underlying attitudes toward change in this particular context. Combining extracts from the interviews and inputs from the literature review, fifty-seven items were generated. Thirteen items seemed to be related to the push factor (e.g. "*In the current organization, I feel like my role isn't clear enough*"); 12 items seemed to refer to the Pull factor (e.g. "*In the future organization, I hope to gain new job opportunities*"); 12 items seemed to refer to the Anti-push factor (e.g. "*In the current organization, I like the autonomy I have*"); and 20 items seemed to refer to the Anti-pull factor (e.g. "*In the future organization, I worry that I may not get the recognition I deserve*"). All items were echoing topics mentioned in interviews and their relevance with the topic of organizational change was confirmed by the scientific literature.

Clark & Watson's guidelines were followed to ensure clarity and precision of the items (1995). All 57 items were then presented to a new set of ten employees, during a new set of interviews. Each participant was asked to point out which of the following items they found unclear or difficult to understand. For each item that was flagged, the interviewer asked follow-up question such as "What do you find unclear about this item?", "Do you have suggestions to make it clearer?". Using these feedbacks, minor changes were made to some of the items, either to improve the phrasing or to use a lingo closer to the companies' culture (e.g., "*entities*" was replaced by "*teams*"; "*change*" and "*organizational change*" were replaced by "*transformation*"). Several items were deleted because they were redundant (e.g. "*I feel like I work efficiently because in the current organization, I belong to the same team as the people I must collaborate with*" = "*In the current situation, I feel like collaboration is facilitated by the fact that people working together belong to the same teams*". In the end, 48 items were kept and constituted the initial version of this *ad hoc* scale.

3. Study two: Initial content validity

3.1. Method

The goal of this second study was to test the factorial composition of the scale. To do so, the scale was sent to the 3760 employees.

3.1.1. Population.
Among the 3760 employees, 700 employees answered the questionnaire (18,62%). Among them, 526 participants were men (75,14%) and 174 were women (24,86%). The average age was 47,03 years old (SD = 10). The average seniority in the company was 21,2 years (SD = 13,24), the average seniority in the department was 7,76 years (SD = 6,33) and the average seniority on their current position was 5,39 years (SD = 4,93). Historically, the company we conducted the study in was a public service. Over the last 30 decades, it transitioned to being mostly privately owned. Among the respondents, 195 still had a civil servant status (27,86%) and 505 (72,14%) were private-sector employees. Finally, 102 respondents (14,57%) occupied a management position.

3.1.2. Measure.
The participants answered the 48 items from the 2P2AP scale. The instructions were worded as follows: "Regarding each of the following reasons, how much would you say each of them impacts your attitudes toward the ongoing transformation?" (1 = It doesn't impact my attitudes toward the transformation at all; 5 = It heavily impacts my attitudes toward the transformation).

3.2. Analysis and results

In accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell's (2013) recommendations, we started by checking for outliers, univariate (i.e., |z| < 3.29, p < .001, two-tailed test). None were found. We then performed an exploratory factorial analysis on the 2P2AP 48 items. Since we cannot rule out the fact that some of the four factors may be correlated, as proven in other contexts, we used an oblimin rotation (Chevalier et al., 2013; Fouquereau et al., 2018). The initial solution identified was composed of 8 factors with eigenvalues over 1 and explained 59,8% of the variance. Following Boateng's guidelines, we erased items that weren't loading on any factors as well as those that were cross loading (2018). We obtained a four-factor model composed of 27 items, which explained 57.03% of the total variance. Finally, we removed four

items that had the weakest loadings. The final four-factor model explained 59,77% of the total variance for the 23 items. As advised by Tabachnik & Fidell, all item's loadings were over .32 (2013).

An examination of the interpretability of the factors showed that the first factor matched the Anti-pull dimension. It was composed of 8 items with loadings ranging from .63 to .73. (e.g., "*After the transformation, I fear that the organization won't be efficient in terms of client satisfaction*"). The second factor corresponded to the Pull dimension. It was composed of 6 items with loadings ranging from .61 to .80 (e.g., "*After the transformation, I hope collaborating with other employees will be easier as we will be united in the same team*"). The third factor matched the Anti-push dimension. It was composed of 5 items with loadings ranging from .56 to .79 (e.g., "*Currently, I appreciate the diversity of my missions on my position*"). Finally, the fourth factor corresponded to the Push dimension. It was composed of 4 items with loadings ranging from .48 to .70 (e.g., "*Currently, I don't always know what is expected of me, in my job*".

4. Discussion and conclusion

The role played by workers' attitudes toward change in the success and failure of an organizational transformation implementation is widely documented (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). But while many elements were shown to play a role in the rise of attitudes toward organizational change, it still seemed important to analyze some of them in a deeper manner. Thus, we aimed to understand how, at medium term, different individual motives interact with each other to explain the rise of several attitudes toward change rather than evaluating their role one by one. To reach this goal, we developed in the present study a new instrument based on the 2P2AP model (Mullet et al., 2000). To date, this questionnaire is the first one to provide practitioners with an overall view of the motives, which can lead employees to be psychologically ready to accept or not an organizational change. More globally, our approach helped demonstrating the complexity that characterizes the psychosociological factors underlying individual pre-implementation attitudes toward organizational change.

Thus, it shows the relevance of the 2P2AP model to enrich the knowledge in this research area. Indeed, authors have to date only examined isolated factors and have not used an integrative framework to better understand employees' attitudes toward organizational changes. Future studies are underway to examine how these motives work together and to assess the percentage of variance explained by these psychosociological dimensions beyond the one explained by other factors such as organizational characteristics.

Moreover, as of now, the creation of this *ad hoc* scale should allow companies and counselors for more specific interventions, that would cater specifically to the type of factors at play. For example, a negative attitude explained by the prevalence of Anti-pull reasons, such as the fear of endorsing a new role may benefit from being addressed specifically, differently from a negative attitude explained by the attachment to one's previous team. In the first case, efforts could be made to highlight the attractive and the positive aspects of the new role, while in the second case, communicating about the shortcomings of the previous situation and the necessity to have it evolve would be more appropriate.

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