

## Summary

# Motivation, Openness to Experience, and Affective Commitment: The Mediating Role of Attitudes towards Change

Sait Gürbüz

Social Sciences University of Ankara

Mehmet Emin Bayık

Yıldırım Beyazıt University of Ankara

*“The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die.  
As well the minds which are prevented from  
changing their opinions; they cease to be mind.”*  
**Friedrich Nietzsche**

Drawing from the quote by Nietzsche, the change itself is inevitable, continuous, and furthermore, necessary. Beer and Nohria (2000) posited that 70% of all change initiatives fail (for counter-arguments see Hughes, 2011). Most of these failures are attributed to the change agents' negligence of the key role played by the individuals within the organization and especially these individuals' attitudes towards change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; George & Jones, 2001; Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Hall & Hord, 1987; Isabella, 1990; Lau & Woodman, 1995; Oreg, 2006). If an organization aims its change efforts to be successful, it should not confine itself to focusing only on the organizational-level issues and neglect the individuals who experience the change itself intensively (Elias, 2009). However, most of the research on organizational change has focused on the organizational-level or macro-level phenomena (e.g., Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004) and overlooked the micro-level variables, such as the psychological processes of the individuals and how these processes function together (Elias, 2009; Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Additionally, employees' attitudes towards change play a crucial role on whether the organizational change initiatives would end in success (Elias, 2009). For the organizational change efforts to be supported by the employees, their attitudes towards change should be improved and directed in the affirmative or desired way (Antoni, 2004).

### Theoretical Background

Rather than attitudes in general, specific attitudes serve as the antecedents of relevant specific behaviors

(Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the organizational change literature, though limited, the focus has been on the individuals' attitudes towards change (Choi, 2011). Grimm and Smith (1991) found that younger managers were more likely to adapt themselves to changing environmental factors by modifying their plans than were older managers. Therefore, it is expected that the older the person gets, the more negative his/her attitudes towards change would become.

*Hypothesis 1a:* There will be a negative relationship between age and attitudes towards change.

Iverson (1996) reported a negative relationship between the employees' tenure and their attitudes toward change. Grimm and Smith (1991) observed that managers with lower tenure adapted themselves to the changes more easily than did managers with higher tenure. Thus;

*Hypothesis 1b:* There will be a negative relationship between tenure and attitudes towards change.

In the organizational change related studies, education level of the employees was found to be positively related to their attitudes towards change, such that the higher the education level, the more positive the attitudes towards change (Iverson, 1996; Vakola et al., 2004). Cordery, Sevastos, Mueller, and Parker (1993) showed that acceptance of change was higher among the employees with higher education than it was among the employees with lower education. Thus;

*Hypothesis 1c:* Attitudes towards change will differ in accordance with the educational level. Acceptance of change will be higher among the employees with higher levels of education.

Affective commitment is defined as the individuals' emotional attachment to, identification with, and desire to stay with their organization, as well as striving for the good of their organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Kartopu & Gürbüz, 2016). It was revealed that affective commitment had a positive effect on attitudes towards change (Iverson, 1996; Kwahk & Kim, 2008; Kwahk & Lee, 2008; Madsen, Miller & John, 2005; Yousef, 2000). Moreover, Martin, Jones, and Callan (2005) and Elias

(2009) found that employees' attitudes towards change predicted their affective commitment. Thus;

*Hypothesis 2:* Attitudes toward change will have a positive relationship with affective commitment.

Intrinsically motivated employees are the ones who continuously and eagerly seek work assignments that help them develop new skills and that give them opportunities for exercising creativity (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994). Thus;

*Hypothesis 3:* Intrinsic work motivation will have a positive relationship with attitudes towards change.

Miller (2002) posits that individuals high in internal motivation deeply commit to their organizations. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found a correlational relationship between internal motivation and organizational commitment. Eby, Freeman, Rush, and Lance (1999), Moon (2000), and Elias (2009) reported that internally motivated individuals were more affectively committed to their organizations than those that were not. Additionally, Elias (2009) found evidence for the mediator role of attitudes towards change on the relationship between intrinsic work motivation and affective commitment. Thus;

*Hypothesis 4:* Attitudes towards change will mediate the relationship between intrinsic work motivation and affective commitment.

In an empirical study, it was found that employees with high level of openness to experience were more likely to make rational decisions than were those with low level of openness to experience (LePine, Colquitt, & Erez, 2000). In terms of organizational change, those highly open to experience were found to be more open to change initiatives, to be more successful at coping with organizational change (Judge et al., 1999), and to have more positive attitudes towards change (Vakola et al., 2004). Thus;

*Hypothesis 5:* Openness to experience will have a positive relationship with attitudes towards change.

In a meta-analysis of 50 different studies, Choi, Oh, and Colbert (2015) found that all of the Big Five personality factors were positively related to affective commitment. In accordance with the findings of this recent meta-analysis and the empirical findings on the relationship between openness to experience and attitudes towards change, it is expected that attitudes towards change will mediate the relationship between openness to experience and affective commitment.

*Hypothesis 6:* Attitudes towards change will mediate the relationship between openness to experience and affective commitment.

For the success of any organizational change attempt, there is a high need for individuals with high level of growth need strength (GNS) and for those who see the

change efforts as golden opportunities to open up new horizons (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). GNS, as the extent of the individuals' need for personal development, overlaps with the idea of seeing the organizational change efforts as an opportunity to learn new things (Elias, 2009). Elias (2009) found that GNS has a positive relationship with attitudes towards change. Similarly, Fok, Hartman, Patti, and Razek (2000) observed that low GNS individuals were more resistant to change efforts in terms of job enrichments conducted for adopting total quality management applications. Thus;

*Hypothesis 7:* Growth need strength will have a positive relationship with attitudes towards change.

High GNS employees will be more committed to their organizations if their organizations offer them personal development opportunities (Elias, 2009). On the other hand, because low GNS employees would perceive the novelties and additional effort requirements brought by the organizational change efforts as a threat or burden for themselves, their affective commitment to their organizations might be affected negatively in accordance with their worsened attitudes towards change (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Nijhuis, 2001). Elias (2009) found that employees' attitudes towards change fully mediated the relationship between GNS and affective commitment. Thus;

*Hypothesis 8:* Attitudes towards change will mediate the relationship between growth need strength and affective commitment.

## Method

### Sample

In the current study, we used convenience sampling technique; and the participants were the officers ( $n = 783$ ) in the Turkish Land Forces. Of the 783 participants; 13 (1.17%) were women and 770 (98.3%) were men; 463 (59.1%) had undergraduate degree, 290 (37.1%) had master's degree, and 30 (3.8%) had PhD. Participants' average age was 37.3 years ( $SD = 12.7$ ) and their average tenure was 14.5 years ( $SD = 7.9$ ).

### Measures and Data Collection Procedures

**Attitudes towards Change.** Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings, and Pierce's (1989) 18-item Attitudes Towards Change Scale was used to measure participants' attitudes towards change (sample item: "I look forward to changes at work."). The items that loaded on unexpected factors in exploratory factor analysis were eliminated from the scale (i.e., items 1, 2, 3, 5, 11, 16, and 17). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .91.

**Affective Commitment.** Participants' affective commitment levels were measured using Meyer, Allen,

and Smith's (1993) 6-item Affective Commitment Scale (sample item: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization."). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .88.

**Intrinsic Work Motivation.** Hackman and Oldham's (1974) 4-item Intrinsic Work Motivation Scale was used to measure participants' intrinsic work motivation (sample item: "I feel a great sense of personal satisfaction when I do this job well."). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .86.

**Openness to Experience.** Openness to experience, a factor of the Big Five Model, was measured via the 10-item openness to experience sub-scale of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). A sample item from the scale is "... am original, come up with new ideas." In order to maintain the factor structure of the scale, the fifth, sixth, and ninth items were eliminated from further analyses. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .81.

**Growth Need Strength.** Hackman and Oldham's (1980) 6-item Growth Need Strength Scale was used to measure participants' growth need strength (sample item: "Opportunities to learn new things from my work."). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated as .86.

## Results

SPSS 24 was used for descriptive statistics, correlation, and reliability analyses. The proposed model was tested via path analyses in AMOS 24 program. The correlation between participants' age and attitudes towards change was negative but not statistically significant ( $r = -.07$ ;  $p = .09$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was not supported. The correlation between tenure and attitudes towards change ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was statistically significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was supported. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to figure out whether attitudes towards change differed in accordance with the educational level. The one-way ANOVA results indicated that participants' attitudes towards change statistically differed among the educational levels ( $F_{(2, 780)} = 4.705$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As a result, Hypothesis 1c was supported.

The relationships between the variables other than demographics were analyzed via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analyses. The relationships between the variables were analyzed using SEM where attitudes towards change played a mediation role between its antecedents and affective commitment. Because the results of the SEM analysis indicated that the full mediation model offered a poor fit to the dataset [ $X^2(3, N = 783) = 128.356$ ,  $p > .01$ ,  $X^2/df = 42.785$ , RMSEA = .23, CFI

= .89, SMSR = .17], a modified model was tested by removing the insignificant paths from the previous model (Jöreskog, 1993). The modified model's fit indices provided that the new model demonstrated a good fit to the dataset [ $X^2(2, N = 783) = 3.828$ ,  $p > .01$ ,  $X^2/df = 1.91$ , RMSEA = .03, CFI = .99, SRMR = .02]. In order to figure out whether the fit indices of the modified model were statistically different from the former model, a  $X^2$  difference test was conducted. The  $X^2$  difference statistics ( $\Delta X^2 = 124.528$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggested that the original model and the modified model were different from each other and the difference was statistically significant. As a result, the remaining hypotheses were assessed using the modified model. Because the coefficient of the path from attitudes towards change to affective commitment was found to be positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Hypothesis 2 was supported. Likewise, the paths from intrinsic work motivation ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ), openness to experience ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and growth need strength ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ) to attitudes towards change were all statistically significant, supporting Hypotheses 3, 5, and 7.

The results of the path analysis with bootstrapping demonstrated that the indirect effects of intrinsic work motivation ( $\beta = .011$ , %95 CI [.003, .024]), openness to experience ( $\beta = .037$ , %95 CI [.008, .069]), and growth need strength ( $\beta = .019$ , %95 CI [.005, .040]) on affective commitment via attitudes towards change were significant, revealing support for Hypotheses 4, 6, and 8.

## Discussion

In the current study, the demographic characteristics of employees as well as their intrinsic work motivation, openness to experience, and growth need strength were taken as hypothetical antecedents of their attitudes towards change; and it was investigated whether employees' attitudes towards change played a mediating role between those antecedents and affective commitment. It was found that the employees' age did not have any effect on their attitudes towards change, whereas their tenure and education level were significantly related to their attitudes towards change. The SEM results demonstrated that openness to experience, intrinsic work motivation, and growth need strength were antecedents of the attitudes towards change, such that individuals with high openness to experience, high intrinsic work motivation, and high growth need strength had more positive attitudes towards change than had those with low openness to change, low intrinsic work motivation, and low growth need strength. Attitudes towards change mediated the relationships of intrinsic work motivation and openness to experience with affective commitment.

The finding that intrinsic work motivation is an antecedent of attitudes towards change and that it affects those attitudes positively, is consistent with previous findings (Amabile et al., 1994; Elias, 2009; Houkes et al., 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It can be stated that those employees with high openness to experience have more positive attitudes towards change because these employees enjoy jobs that add to their personal developments by making them set goals (Amabile et al., 1994). The direct and indirect positive relationships between employees' intrinsic work motivation and affective commitment is in line with the previous findings of studies on different samples (Eby et al., 1999; Elias, 2009; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Moon, 2000). Openness to experience, as one of the Big Five personality factors, is associated with intelligence, creativity, comprehension, imagination, culturedness, curiosity, originality, broad-mindedness, and artistically sensitiveness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Goldberg, 1992) and was found to have a positive effect on employees' attitudes towards change. The finding that openness to experience plays a role as an antecedent of attitudes towards change is consistent with the findings reported in previous studies with different samples (Judge et al., 1999; LePine et al., 2000; Pulkos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000; Vakola et al., 2004). Finally, employees' growth need strength was found to be an essential component for the development of positive attitudes towards change, as in the previous studies (Elias, 2009; Fok et al., 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Houkes et al., 2001; Loher, Noe, Moeller, & Fitzgerald 1985).

Individuals' attitudes towards change are of great importance for managers and change agents in assessing the success of the change efforts. If individuals' attitudes towards change are identified as negative, it is the managers' or change agents' duty to minimize those undesirable attitudes (Antoni, 2004). Considering the negative effects of tenure on attitudes towards change, individuals with longer tenure are to be the focal employees targeted in informing and awareness raising activities before, during, and after the organizational change. The applicants who are more open to experience and have higher levels of intrinsic work motivation and growth need strength are suggested to be recruited to the organizations that are in constant change. It is highly suggested that those who are not open to experience and have low intrinsic motivation and growth need strength are spotted and given special attention when preparing employees to organizational change.

The current study has some limitations and offers avenues for future research. First, the data were collected from a single source, via self-report, and in a cross-sectional design, all of which increase the possibility of

common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Additionally, the self-report questionnaire might have been answered in a socially desirable way. Future studies may collect data from different sources. Second, rather than rigid or stable personality characteristics, more malleable or trainable personal characteristics can be chosen as the antecedents of attitudes towards change. Those kinds of variables might help the practitioners to manipulate individuals' attitudes towards change more easily.