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Employee attitudes toward organizational change in the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in the Gaza Strip

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to identify employee attitudes toward organizational change in the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility in the Gaza Strip and factors affecting these attitudes.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used descriptive and analytical methods to investigate the phenomena. The study population includes all the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility employees. The population number was 128. A semi-comprehensive survey was used. A close-ended questionnaire was considered as a main tool for data gathering from the field.

Findings – The study concluded that employee attitudes toward organizational change were positive but weak, which could elicit some supportive behaviors. Employees hold ambivalent cognitions; they believe that change benefits all employees and would increase work efficiency, but they do not see themselves or their departments as contributors to this improvement. In addition, they hold moderate positive emotions of happiness, excitement, relief, and hope. Moreover, employees hold moderate intentions to support the change passively by complying with, and showing acceptance of change. Multiple regression analysis indicated moderate prediction of attitude toward organizational change by four predictors: organizational support, self-efficacy, quality of information, and threat appraisal. The model explained 52.0 percent of variance in employee attitudes toward organizational change.

Practical implications – The paper provides a managerial framework for applying change to organizations successfully and generating a positive employee attitudes and behavior toward change.

Originality/value – This research is the first to be conducted in Palestine and to consider a practical and empirical approach to evaluate management of change in one of the most important service provider institutes in the Gaza Strip.

Keywords Management of change, Change management, Employee attitudes toward change, Employee attitudes, Palestine, Water supply

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In today's rapid change business environment, the unique competitive advantage of organizations appears to be its ability to adopt and adapt to change (Lawler and Worley, 2006). Affected by new public management, many public sector organizations engaged in change initiatives. Among the most recognized change events are: restructuring, introduction of new top management teams, and adopting best practice management models such as total quality management and management by objectives.

Organizational change is characterized by the introduction of new organizing and working arrangements (Dawson, 2003). It has potential significant impacts on people working in organizations. On the one hand, it can provide opportunities for growth and development; on the other hand, there can be threats from establishing new relationships, skills, and activities (Kiefer, 2005). So, many organizational change efforts fail to meet the proposed objectives leading to negative impacts on

organizations and employees such as wasted resources, sunk costs, and low productivity. Many researchers indicated a high failure rate of 70 percent for all change initiative (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Argyris, 2004).

When implementing changes in structure, system, or process; individual change has a mediating role because change starts with individual change, and unless the majority of individuals change their attitudes or behaviors, no organizational change occurs (Alas, 2007). Attitudes and behaviors about organizational change are often cited as a crucial factor in determining the success of organizational change (Herold *et al.*, 2007). Attitudes toward organizational change are described as the employee's overall evaluative judgment of the change implemented by his or her organization (Elias, 2009).

Organizational change theories have been characterized for sometime by its focus on culture and change process issues at the expense of other contextual elements (Hempel and Martinsons, 2009). Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) suggest that a comprehensive theory of organizational change must address four fundamental dimensions: process, content, context, and the outcome(s) of change. Instead of the traditional focus upon organizational outcomes, individual level outcomes received more attention after behavioral change became recognized as a prerequisite for organizational change to success. In addition to these dimensions, Judge *et al.* (1999, p. 107) suggest that change success may lie "within the psychological predispositions of individuals experiencing the change." Similarly, Armenakis *et al.* (2007) suggest considering personal differences in the organizational change research. Consequently, there is a need to attain understanding of employee attitudes toward organizational change and the role of the content of change, the process by which change is managed, the context in which the change happened, and the predispositions of the individuals experiencing the change.

This study tackled aspects in the reactions to organizational change research that had received less research attention. First, the published studies during the time interval from 1993 to 2007 that considered "attitude toward change" as a construct for both the negative and positive psychology were "a few" (Bouckenooghe, 2009, p. 15). Second, previous research has focussed attention on attitudinal outcomes such as commitment and satisfaction, while less attention has been placed on how individual attitude toward organizational change is formed along its cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions (Piderit, 2000). Third, there is a lack in organizational change studies in the Arab region countries (Rees and Althakhri, 2008), and there is a scarcity in organizational change studies in Palestine. So, this study is expected to contribute to the Arabic literature of organizational change. The conceptual model of this study is integrated, practical, and will help readers and practitioners to easily capture a snapshot of organizational change on individual level.

In developing countries, an increased interest is devoted to adopt public-private partnership as a policy tool in infrastructure service delivery to allocate risks to the partners who are best able to manage them (Jamali, 2004). Recently, public private partnership (management contract) has been adopted by the Palestinian National Authority for water service delivery in the Gaza Strip. This partnership imposed alterations in the organizational setup of the water service provider. Major changes were initiated in the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility Regional Office of Rafah City (RCMWU) since July 2008. These changes included changing the organizational structure, introducing new top management team, introducing customer service department, changing billing collection policies, rebranding and relocating the main office.

Since no research was conducted to understand employee attitudes in the RCMWU, this study is attempting to answer the following research question: what are the employee attitudes toward organizational change in the RCMWU and factors influencing these attitudes?

Importance and objectives of the study
Rafah city in the Gaza Strip is in a critical water condition. With a total population of about 171,363 inhabitants, the actual water supply is about 63 liters per capita per day which is the lowest supply rate in the Gaza Strip and lower than the minimum World Health Organization quantity requirements for drinking purposes (112 liters per capita per day). Only 37 percent of the pumped water fits within World Health Organization drinking limits. The Palestinian Water Authority argues that institutional and legal reforms in the water sector could provide key interventions to implement an integrated approach for water resources management in the Gaza Strip (The Palestinian Water Authority, 2009).

Since organizational change is the tool for adopting the public private partnership in the coastal water utility, it needs deep understanding through change literature and field studies. Like most organizational change initiatives, driving and impending forces interactions may have negative impacts on the utility and employees leading to different employees' attitudes. Because it is analyzing the most important factors in shaping employee attitudes, this study is expected to help the managers in the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility to better manage the subsequent changes in other utility's regional offices. This study aims to assess the cognitive, affective, and intentional attitudes toward organizational change; to examine the impact of content, context, process, and personality traits on attitudes toward organizational change; and to examine the possible cause-effect relationships between variables in these domains and attitudes toward organizational change.

Theoretical background and hypotheses
Defining attitudes toward organizational change
Employee attitudes toward organizational change is defined as an employee's psychological tendency expressed by overall positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change (Lines, 2005). It is also described as a continuum ranging from strong positive attitudes (e.g. readiness for change, openness to change) to strong negative attitudes (e.g. cynicism about organizational change, resistance to change) (Bouckenooghe, 2009). Attitudes toward organizational change could be viewed as a complementary to the traditional (bottom line) outcomes, such as survival and profitability (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999). The possible cognitive, affective, and intentional responses to organizational change depend on many factors pertaining to the change itself, the individuals, the process of change, and the organizational context.

Understanding of the structure and functioning of attitudes toward organizational change is important for predicting reactions to change, and for suggesting interventions that minimize negative reactions to change. The sensitivity of the formed attitudes toward the change may be attributed to the difficulties in altering them once they formed (Lines, 2005). The assumption of this study assumes that evaluative judgments are influenced by cognition as well as affect. According to the cognitive appraisal theory employees first appraise the significance of the change event for their well-being. Thus, favorability and valence of change outcomes become critical. Secondary appraisal triggers emotional responses when people consider

causes of the change and use their personal theories in doing so. Attributions such as support and threat appraisal, for example, can provoke positive and negative emotional reactions (Smollan, 2009).

(a) The cognitive dimension

When an organization undergoes changes, organizational members develop different interpretations and expectations about these changes in the form of mental maps or change schema (Chiang, 2009). Change schema has three general dimensions identified as: change salience, change valence, and change inference. These dimensions serve as a framework for understanding the antecedents, significance, and consequences of change (Liu *et al.*, 2009).

Change salience is a cognitive affirmation of the need for change and the willingness to help make changes. Usually, an individual's assessment of change necessity involves a subjective comparison between his/her perceptions of the organization's current state and its desired state (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Change valence refers to an individual's perceptions of the meaning and significance of a particular change. If employees perceive the change valence, they will be more supportive for the change process (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Change inference describes the process by which individuals come to conclusions concerning the antecedents of the change, and estimate the probability of outcomes that will emerge from the change (Liu *et al.*, 2009).

The concept of change schema was used by Chiang (2009) to assess how employees perceive organizational change. He found that the perceived organizational changes had positive effects on both attitudes toward organizational changes and organizational commitment. Liu *et al.* (2009) studied the relation between individuals' participation in organizational change and individual change schemas. Results showed that individuals' perceptions of the change situation affect their subsequent change-related behavior.

(b) The affective dimension

Affective processes are usually operationalized as emotions and feelings related to actions. Because emotions are focussed on a specific cause, they have come to be regarded as discrete. The discrete emotions approach has identified "basic" or primary emotions, including joy, love, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise. The primary emotions are similar to the emotions experienced during organizational change (Bovey and Hede, 2001a).

Emotions are central components of human reactions to many types of stimuli; they can directly initiate specific behaviors, as well as indirectly influence behavior by their effect on physiological, cognitive, or social processes (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006). Emotions are commonly explained in terms of expectancy violations. Positive emotions occur when experiences exceed organizational members expectations (focussed on both outcomes and process of change), whereas negative emotions occur when expectations are not met (Kramer and Hess, 2002).

(c) The intentional dimension

Positive responses occur when employees believe that the changes will be beneficial. Positive cognitions of the advantages of change, should lead to positive emotions of different intensities from enthusiasm to pleasure (Antonacopolou and Gabriel, 2001). On the behavioral level, employees would engage in the tasks expected of them and may even attempt to exceed performance expectations. Regarding negative responses,

Piderit (2000) asserted that resistance to change must be viewed from cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives. When employees experience negative cognitive responses, accompanied by negative emotions, such as fear or anger, they reject the changes (Kiefer, 2005). Reactions to some change events might be neutral. Mixed or ambivalent responses are probable when there are mixed thoughts and feelings. Change is often experienced as having both positive and negative aspects, and some aspects might be resisted and others supported (Piderit, 2000).

Bovey and Hede (2001a, b) developed a matrix for measuring behavioral intentions along axes of active-passive and overt-covert forms of behavior. Each of the four quadrants has keywords for supportive and resistant behaviors. Supporting behaviors: active-overt actions are initiating and embracing change; active-covert reactions are supporting and co-operating; passive-covert responses are giving in and complying, while passive-overt behaviors are agreeing and accepting. In terms of negative responses, active-overt actions are opposing, arguing and obstructing; active-covert reactions are stalling, dismantling and undermining; passive-covert responses include ignoring, withdrawing and avoiding; and passive-overt behaviors are observing, refraining and waiting.

Factors influencing attitudes toward organizational change
Factors influencing attitudes toward organizational change are briefed in the following.

Personal factors
Individuals within organization might react differently to the same change because of their own characteristics such as locus of control and self-efficacy.

Locus of control. Locus of control is a personal disposition that represents the degree to which individuals tend to attribute what happens to them to internal factors (e.g. skills, efforts) or to external factors like (e.g. chance, powerful other people) (Bouckenooghe and Devos, 2006). Some studies found that because people with an internal locus of control believe they have control over their environment (change events) and their personal successes; they would continue to engage in activities that would reinforce their beliefs. For instance, Elias (2009) found that locus of control is an antecedent to attitudes toward organizational change, and found that an internal individual will believe that he or she has control over the change event and will not experience the negative consequences associated with an external locus of control:

H1a. Internal locus of control is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Self-efficacy. The difference between self-efficacy and locus of control is that self-efficacy involves the individual's perception that he or she possesses the skills necessary to execute the required response, whereas locus of control refers to whether the consequences of such efforts are within the person's control. During times of organizational change, low self-efficacy presents a negative effect since individuals who judge themselves as incapable of coping with change demands will magnify the severity and difficulty of the change which creates stress and impairs performance. On the other hand, high self-efficacy will focus attention to the demands of the change and initiate greater effort to succeed (Bernerth, 2004). Armenakis *et al.* (1993) (cited in Susanto, 2008) state that perception of self-efficacy has an effect on the organizational

change readiness, as the change recipients would consider the proposed change to be more achievable. They also state that the undesirable resistance to changes may result if employees believe the effort to exceed their coping capabilities:

H1b. Change self-efficacy is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Change content factors
The reaction of employees to changes might be influenced by how a specific change could affect their lives (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999).

Threat appraisal. Threat appraisal is defined as individual's concerns over future negative or harmful losses. In the context of organizational change, threat appraisals are related to both affective and behavioral employee reactions. For instance, appraisals of a corporate merger predicted negative emotions and coping problems (Fugate *et al.*, 2010). In their study, Devos *et al.* (2007) found that openness to change is facilitated by a non-threatening organizational change. Also, they concluded that when changes threaten the job security of employees, it can have a destructive effect on morale, attitudes, and well-being, even when the employees' own jobs are not being threatened:

H2. Threat appraisal is negatively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Change process factors
Change process deals with actions taken to influence employees for effective implementation of organizational change (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999).

Management support. Managements' support exhibited during organizational change involves enhancing aspects necessary for individuals to support the change process such as management commitment, skill training, and sufficient project budgets (Susanto, 2008; Njie *et al.*, 2008). According to management support perspective, individuals' reactions to change result from management's demonstrated commitment to the change (Cooper, 2006). The study of Caldwell (2003) found that management support for the change is important for highly competitive individuals participating in the change. Although support activities may have some degree of psychological effect on individuals, commitment of employees generated by management support would be more of a reciprocal commitment (normative) resulting from individual's duty than a change in alignment of individual's goals and values with that of the organization resulting from individuals' desire (affective). This is in contrast to perceived organizational support (context-related variable) that creates affective commitment because employees feel valued and cared for by organizations (Caldwell, 2003):

H3a. Management support is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Change participation. Participation encompasses a broad range of activities through which employees can affect decision making, from consultative or informative (involvement) mechanisms, to participation mechanisms where workers are major parties to the final decisions (Hodgkinson, 1999). The rationale for participation is that

it will foster the organization's planning and problem solving and help to motivate constructive behavior during the transition phase (O'Brien, 2002).

Some researchers indicate that employees' participation increase their performance and commitment to change, reduce resistance to change, increase organizational adaptability, increase acceptance of organizational change, and prevents the development of cynicism against organizational change (Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Chawla and Kelloway, 2004; Boonastra, 2004). However, participation will not work with people who are passive and may take comfort from following centrally determined rules and regulations (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979, cited in Wanberg and Banas, 2000):

H3b. Change participation is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Change communication. Communication means the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning (Gilley *et al.*, 2009). The most important factor for failure in change attempts is the managers' inability to persuade organization members to support the change (Fox and Amichai-Hamburger, 2001). High level of information adequacy and quality is associated with positive change attitudes such openness to change. Perceived high quality of information could reduce employee uncertainty about the change, and make the change more acceptable emotionally (Qian and Daniels, 2008).

Communication has two main components: a rational component and an emotional component. Armenakis *et al.* (1993) (cited in Susanto, 2008) argue that readiness for change can be created through effective communication of the message for change (rational component). Fox and Amichai-Hamburger (2001) further emphasize the importance of using emotional elements when delivering information about the change because of their persuading role to overcome resistance to change depending on the strength of the relation between cognitive and emotional facets, affecting the emotions will lead cognitive elements to align with them (strong relation), or at least minimize the employees' emotional objection to the change (weak relation).

A study by Chawla and Kelloway (2004) showed that openness to change is directly and indirectly influenced by communication. Nelissen and Selm (2008) studied the role of communication in a planned organizational change and found that positive responses increased and negative responses decreased during the process of organizational change:

H3c. Change communication is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Change context factors
Internal context of change includes factors that influence organizational effectiveness such as, organizational politics, organizational norms, organizational values, group cohesion, rules, and regulations.

Change politics. The politics of change refers to the political activity of consultation, negotiation, and conflict, which occurs at various levels within and outside an organization during the process of managing change (Dawson, 2003). Internal political activity can be in the form negotiations between consultants (working within the organization) and various organizational groups, and between managerial,

supervisory, and operative personnel. These individuals or groups can influence decision making and the setting of agendas.

In public sector bodies, restructurings have been driven by the political agenda alongside with management choice. The morale of many public sector workers is reported to be low because change not only poses real challenges, but can also be completely outside of managers' ability to control (Holbeche, 2006). Change politics has been shown to adversely influence attitudes toward change and impede the implementation of change. Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999), found that if employees view politics as negative practices, they will be less inclined to trust managerial communication about change and more likely to have negative attitudes toward it:

H4a. Change politics is negatively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Organizational support. Perceived organizational support refers to employees' perception that the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. This perception of organizational support should trigger feelings of affect toward the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986).

Perceived organizational support is highly relevant to performance in fixed pay contexts where exerting effort to attain high level of performance is a prime way to release felt obligation toward a supportive organization (Pazy and Ganzach, 2009). High perceived organizational support is expected to impact one's reaction to the impending change such that it is perceived as less threatening, and may influence one's overall schema for organizational change such that the change is viewed more favorably (Eby *et al.*, 2000). The study of Armstrong-Stassen (2001) found that the perceived support from the organization was significantly related to the positive acceptance of change process and the use of active strategies toward coping change:

H4b. Organizational support is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Group cohesion. Cohesion refers to the extent of cooperation and trust in the competence of team members. It is the perception of togetherness or sharing within the organization setting, including the willingness of members to support each other (Frenkel and Sanders, 2007). During times of change employees must often acquire new skills, assume new responsibilities, and learn new procedures, this may be demanding and require significant effort. The extent to which individuals feel their co-workers can help them through this process would influence their reactions to the change. Lau *et al.* (2002) show that perceptions of cohesion are positively related to the degree to which employees feel positive about change, and have reduced skepticism of the results of change:

H4c. Group cohesion is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change.

Integration of change factors
The model. The selection of content, process, and context subset variables is based on four criteria for inclusion borrowed from Bouckenooghe *et al.* (2008, p. 5): each variable includes: a measure of perception, includes both describing and evaluating activities, is not a measure of organizational structure nor job design, and is relevant to human relations criterion for attitudes toward organizational change. The study conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.
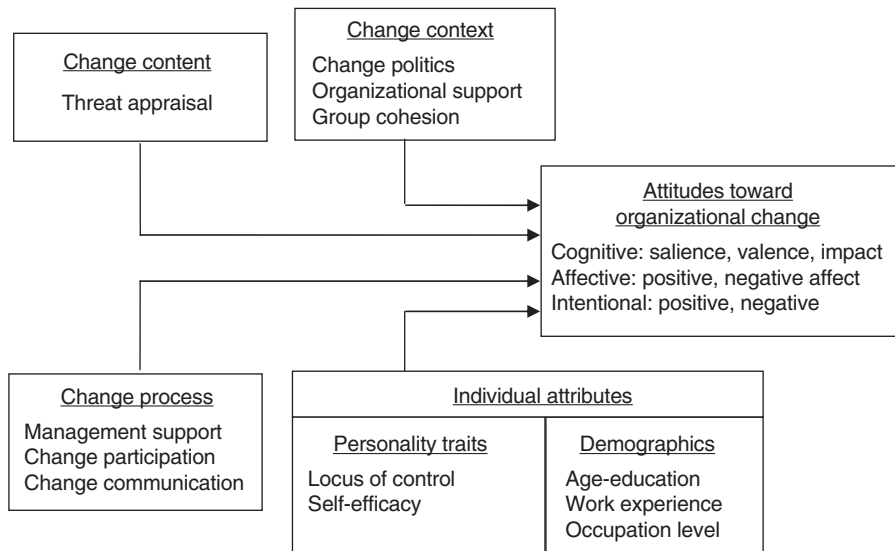
Source: Armenakis and Bedeian (1999)

Figure 1.
Conceptual model of
attitudes toward
organizational change

Methodology
This research employs descriptive and analytical methods involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Secondary data were obtained from journals on organizational change, organizational behavior, psychology, and general management. Many thesis and dissertations were accessed through universities electronic theses and dissertations initiatives. Internal documents from the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility were used in providing information about the utility. Primary data were obtained from a questionnaire specifically designed for this research.

Research instrument
The research adopted self-administered, delivery, and collection questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire comprised two parts. The first part of the questionnaire investigated socio-demographic variables for the employees. Employees were asked about their age, education, job position, and work experience. The socio-demographic variables were assessed using an item from multiple options.

The second part was divided into two sections to assess the dependent variable and the independent variables. The first section of the questionnaire covered antecedent variables related to respondent's perceptions for the content, process, context of change, and variables related to personality traits. The second section covered the dimensions of employee attitudes toward organizational change. Employees were asked to indicate their agreement with a particular item by using a ten-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (10).

Some scales of variables were adapted from measures in prior studies to ensure content validity. Appropriate modifications were introduced to fit the current study. The original English language version of the questionnaire was translated into Arabic

through a back-translation procedure because most problems are likely to be discovered using this procedure (Saunders *et al.*, 2003).

The questionnaire was reviewed by board of referee to assure the content validity. Responses validated the design of the study questionnaire. Moreover, pilot study was conducted with a sample of 30 employees to ensure the internal validity, structure validity, and the reliability of the questionnaire. After all, the questionnaire was found to be valid and reliable for conducting the survey.

Study measures

The items that were used to measure each construct are listed in Appendix.

Employee attitudes toward organizational change was operationalized as the degree to which an employee has positive or negative evaluation of organizational change along the cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions. In this research, the coefficient α was 0.88.

The cognitive component was measured using nine items. These items represented the extent to which an employee perceives how change occurs, the meaning and significance of change, and how change impacts the employee. In this research, these items produced coefficient α of 0.86.

The affective component was measured using eight items of common emotions in the organizational change. These items represented the extent of positive and negative emotions. Coefficient α was 0.61.

The intentional component was measured using eight items adapted from Szabla (2007). These items represented the extent to which an employee intended to support or resist the change. Coefficient α was 0.74.

Locus of control was measured using nine items developed by McCormick and Barnett (2007). These items represented the extent to which an employee attributed what happens to them to their skills and efforts (internals), or to chance and powerful others (externals). Coefficient α was 0.76.

Change self-efficacy was measured using six items adapted from Holt (2002) (cited in Holt *et al.*, 2007). These items represent the extent to which an employee feel that he has the skills and will be able to execute the tasks that are associated with the implementation of the change. Coefficient α was 0.84.

Threat appraisal was measured with seven items from Fugate *et al.* (2010). The scale assessed threat pertaining to work elements often affected by organizational changes: job stability, relationships with supervisors and co-workers, desirability of one's job, personal job opportunities at current employer, pay and benefits, and general working conditions. Coefficient α was 0.88.

Management support was operationalized as the demonstrated management commitment to change directed for individuals to support the change process. It was measured using six items developed by Bigelow (2006). These items represented the extent to which an employee felt that top management is committed to change and exerts its most support to make it succeed. Coefficient α was 0.80.

Change participation was measured with the four-item scale developed by Wanberg and Banas (2000). This scale measured the extent to which an employee perceived that he had involved in the change process. Coefficient α was 0.79.

Change communication was operationalized as the perceived quality of information about change which focusses on information exchanged or the quality and reliability of the information. It was measured based on the quality of information six items scale developed by Miller *et al.* (1994) (cited in Wanberg and Banas, 2000). The scale

measured timeliness, usefulness, appropriateness, adequacy, and favorableness of information. Coefficient α was 0.76.

Change politics was measured using six items adapted from Gadot and Drory (2006). This scale measured the extent to which an employee perceived that change served the interests of certain groups or employees. Coefficient α was 0.79.

Organizational support was measured using six items adapted from Eisenberger *et al.* (1986). The scale comprises statements concerning the organization's valuation of the employee, and actions it would be likely to take in situations that affected the employee's well-being. Coefficient α was 0.71.

Group cohesion was measured using five items adapted from Bouckenooghe *et al.* (2008). The scale comprises statements concerning cooperation and trust in the competence of team members, perception of sharing, the willingness of members to support each other. Coefficient α was 0.48.

Participants and procedure
The target population consisted of 128 employees in RCMWU. A comparable sampling frame of 112 employees was elicited from the target population by excluding 12 drivers and four servants and care takers. The drivers were excluded from the study population because their work tasks are inseparable from the interventions by their previous employer; the municipality of Rafah city. These interventions would have consequences on their psychodynamic stage. Servants and care takers were considered ineligible to respond to the questionnaire statements as no extra efforts are required by them and change have a minor impact on them. Questionnaire was delivered to employees in different work locations and collected during one week in June 2010. Extensive follow up was made by phone calls and field visits to encourage employees to respond and assure respondents anonymity. An overall response rate was 78 percent (88 of 112 employees).

Respondents profile
Respondents were (100 percent) males. More than one-third of the respondents (36.4 percent) were in their 40s. Approximately one-tenth (9.1 percent) of the respondents were in their 20s. Regarding work experience, 43.2 percent of the respondents had 15 years of experience and more, while 12.5 percent of the respondents had less than five years of experience. Approximately half of the respondents (47.7 percent) were well guards and units operators, while approximately one-tenth (12.5 percent) were officers of units, heads of sections, and managers of departments. The largest group (42.0 percent) among the respondents had less than the General Secondary Certificate. Almost one-fifth of respondents had a university degree. The main characteristics of the sample are presented in Table I.

Data analysis and hypothesis testing
Employee attitudes toward organizational change
Table II shows employee attitudes toward organizational change in RCMWU. It is clear that employees hold positive but relatively weak attitudes toward organizational change (mean = 6.67, test-value = 4.74, and *p*-value = 0.000). Despite their beliefs about change as meaningful and beneficial (valance), they do not anticipate work improvements at unit level or change of their way of work (impact). This ambivalent cognition is associated with moderate scores of positive emotions. At the same time, employees register weak negative emotions as indication of their anticipation of low

	Frequency	(%)		Frequency	(%)
Age			*Work experience*		
Less than 30 years	8	9.1	Less than 5 years	11	12.5
From 30 to less than 40 years	22	25.0	From 5 to less than 10 years	19	21.6
From 40 to less than 50 years	32	36.4	From 10 to less than 15 years	20	22.7
50 years and more	26	29.5	15 yrs and more	38	43.2
Occupation level			*Educational qualifications*		
Manager of department	5	5.7	Less than general secondary certificate	37	42.0
Head of section	3	3.4	General secondary certificate	10	11.4
Officer of unit	3	3.4	Diploma	25	28.4
Technician	19	21.6	Bachelor or postgraduate degree	16	18.2
Office work employee	16	18.2			
Unit operator and well guard	42	47.7			

Table I.
The main characteristics of the sample ($n = 88$)

No.	Paragraph	Mean	Test value	*p*-value
1.	Change salience	5.66	−1.55	0.062
2.	Change valence	6.41	1.85	0.034*
3.	Change impact	5.26	−3.24	0.001*
4.	*The cognitive dimension*	*5.77*	*−1.27*	*0.103*
5.	Positive affect	6.07	0.28	0.390
6.	Negative affect	2.87	−14.31	0.000*
7.	*The affective dimension*	*7.10*	*5.61*	*0.000**
8.	Positive intentions	6.26	1.27	0.103
9.	Negative intentions	2.75	−17.40	0.000*
10.	*The intentional dimension*	*7.25*	*10.13*	*0.000**
11.	*Employee ATOC in the RCMWU*	*6.67*	*4.74*	*0.000**

Note: *The mean is significantly different from six

Table II.
Employee attitudes toward organizational change (ATOC)

negative outcomes of the change. Employees positive intentions were moderate and negative intentions were weak.

Table III summarizes the findings for factors influencing attitudes toward organizational change. In general, employees perceive higher levels of personal variables (locus of control, self-efficacy, and group cohesion) and lower levels of organizational variables concerning organizational change (participation, communication, politics and organizational support). This is an indication for the lack of management attention to the organizational factors during the organizational change.

Discussion
The cognitive dimension. Employees in the RCMWU experience a mix of both positive and negative beliefs. Employees stated that the change is meaningful and beneficial; they believed that change benefits all employees and would increase work efficiency.

Variable	Mean	SD	Pearson correlation coefficient*			
			Cognitive	Affective	Intentional	ATOC
Locus of control[a]	6.33	1.70	0.29	0.17	−0.04	0.20
Self-efficacy	7.14	1.50	0.40	0.48	0.58	0.56
Threat appraisal	3.06	1.56	0.09	−0.23	−0.24	−0.13
Management support	6.29	1.45	0.50	0.40	0.52	0.55
Change participation	4.01	1.84	0.50	0.27	0.26	0.42
Change communication	4.95	1.64	0.42	0.29	0.42	0.44
Change politics	4.97	2.12	−0.05	−0.10	0.13	−0.03
Organizational support	5.45	1.64	0.52	0.53	0.34	0.57
Group cohesion	7.70	1.34	0.11	0.27	0.40	0.28

Notes: [a]Analysis revealed that employees in the RCMWU are internals. So, the analysis was restricted to the internal dimension of locus of control. *All correlations with an absolute value $\geqslant 0.18$ are significant at $p < 0.05$

Table III.
Pearson correlation coefficient between each variable and ATOC

However, employees do not anticipate work improvements on department level or alteration of the way they do their work. As a result, their beliefs about the change were contradicted on the cognitive level. This is probably due to inadequate change communication (especially formal communication), vague change message, low change participation, limited change knowledge and experience. This finding is supported by prior theory and research. Piderit (2000) asserted that ambivalent attitudes could occur within the cognitive dimension. By contrast, these findings were inconsistent with study of Alanzi (2004) which found consistency between positive officer's perception of change appropriateness and salience, and their intentions to support it.

The affective dimension. Employees hold positive emotions of happiness, excitement, relived, and hopeful. These positive emotions are probably attributed to the high significance and the low impact of change in relation to employees' expectations. So, it can be concluded that employees appraise the outcome of a change event as positive and activate their pleasant feelings. They also hold low negative emotions of sadness, anger, fear, frustration because they perceive low impact of change on their jobs. Consequently, it is expected that employees would show supportive attitude to organizational change.

These findings are consistent with research which proposed that during organizational change, individual responses register "at either extreme of the pleasantness dimension" (Mossholder *et al.*, 2000, p. 224). These findings are supported by the study of Smollan (2009) which confirmed that organizational change is an emotional event, and that these emotions arise from a host of factors that have individual, social, and wider contextual origins.

The intentional dimension. Employees hold passive intentions. They intend to support the change by complying with organizational change, and by showing their acceptance of change. This may be attributed to employees perception about change benefits to all employees and the low unfavorable impact to their jobs, along with their moderate positive emotions. Regardless of the ambivalent cognitions, and moderate positive emotions, employees stated weak intentions to try to modify changes. This may be attributed to their work ethics which insisted on honesty and self-monitoring.

Based on Bovey and Hede's behavioral intentions matrix (2001a, b), employees positive intentions were moderate covert and overt ones. By contrast, employees' negative intentions were weak covert. These findings are supported by Bovey and Hede (2001b) study which found that higher the individual's perception of feelings about the change impact, the greater the association between these irrational thoughts and resistance.

In general, findings about attitudes toward organizational change are supported by Szabla (2007) which found that members of the power-coercive group had both positive and negative beliefs indicating they believed the change would improve operations, but would not satisfy their job-related needs. Members of this group reported feelings of anger and frustration, but indicated they would support the change despite their beliefs and feelings. The researcher suggested that the social and cultural system of the organization may lead to member support despite their negative beliefs, but did not explain that. The study was conducted during the resistant stage of change, so negative emotions were dominated.

Hypotheses testing
Table III shows significant correlation between internal locus of control and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.196. These results support *H1a*, which stated that internal locus of control is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is supported by prior theory and research. It was found that individuals with internal locus of control report more positive attitudes in organizations experiencing change (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005; Devos *et al.*, 2007). Also, this finding is supported by Wanberg and Banas (2000) study which assessed the variable (perceived control) similar to locus of control with individual differences variables, and context-specific variables as predictors of employee openness to reorganization. Among other findings, the study found that (perceived control) was related to higher levels of change acceptance.

Table III further shows that self-efficacy is significantly correlated with attitudes toward organizational change where r value was 0.56. These results support *H1b*, which stated that change self-efficacy is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is supported by Wanberg and Banas (2000) study. Among other findings, the study found that change self-efficacy was related to higher levels of change acceptance. Also, this finding is supported by the results of Judge *et al.* (1999) study which found that change self-efficacy was related to an individual's success in coping with organizational change as well as an individual's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and career success, including both salary and job performance.

Table III shows that there is insignificant relationship between threat appraisal and employee attitudes toward organizational change where r value was −0.13. These results do not support *H2*, which stated that threat appraisal is negatively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is not supported by the study of Devos *et al.* (2007) which found that openness to change was facilitated by a non-threatening organizational change. Possible explanation is that openness to change is change-specific attitudes concerned with positive attitudinal outcomes, while attitudes toward organizational change are encompassing both positive and negative dimensions of attitudes which alter the correlation. Threat appraisal was related to both affective and intentional attitudes. These findings are in agreement with study of Fugate *et al.* (2010) which found that appraisals of a corporate merger predicted

negative emotions and coping problems. Also, these findings are supported by Kiefer (2005) study which found that ongoing change did elicit negative emotions when employees perceived the results of these changes to be impacting unfavorably on their jobs.

Table III further shows a significant correlation between management support and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.50. These results support *H3a*, which stated that management support is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is consistent with theory and research. The higher the level of management support, the more the participative behavior is expected to result in positive outcomes like increase in performance (Caldwell, 2003). This finding is supported by Rees and Althakhri (2008) study which found that the successful implementation of change in Arab contexts requires strong support from senior management, especially those who have power position within the organizational structure. Findings of the current study suggest that the least correlation was between management support and the affective attitudes toward organizational change. This is consistent with the literature which suggest that commitment of employees generated by management support would be more of a reciprocal commitment (normative) resulting from individual's duty than a change in alignment of individual's goals and values with that of the organization resulting from individuals' desire (affective) (Caldwell, 2003).

Table III further shows a significant correlation between change participation and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.42. These results support *H3b*, which stated that change participation is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is consistent with research and studies. According to Parys (2003), involvement programs increase employees' support for workplace changes. Further support for this finding is provided by Durmaz (2007) study which studied organizational change in the Turkish National Police and found that participation and quality of information were the strongest predicators of attitudes toward organizational change. By contrast, this finding was not supported by Chiang (2009) study which tackled the organizational change in Taiwan hotels and found that only communication (not participation and training) has a strong influence on organizational change. This may be attributed to the specific characteristic of the implemented change where employees were frontline employees and perceive themselves as incapable and could not provide real contribution to decision-making process. So, employees were not concerned with the participation level of change process.

Furthermore, Table III shows significant correlation between quality of information and attitudes toward organizational change where r value was 0.44. These results support *H3c*, which stated that change communication is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is supported by Wanberg and Banas (2000) study which found that the information received about the changes was predictive of higher levels of employee openness to the changes. Also, this finding is supported by Jung (2003) study which found that participation and quality of information were the strongest predicators of attitudinal outcomes (job satisfaction and affective commitment). Further support is provided by Durmaz (2007) study which found that quality of information and participation were the strongest predicators of attitudes toward organizational change.

Table III shows insignificant correlation between perception of change politics and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.03 and the p-value was 0.39. These results do not support *H4a*, which stated that change politics is negatively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is not supported by the

study of Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) which found that if employees view politics as negative practices, they will be less inclined to trust managerial communication about change and more likely to have negative attitudes toward change. It is probable that the organizational change in the RCMWU was not a political process because it did not threaten individuals or groups of interest. In this situation, it is probable that employees and management were striving toward the same goals, so the impact of perception of politics on attitudes is lessened. This justification is supported by Obaid (2009) study which found that structural change in Al-Shifa medical complex in the Gaza Strip was not clear because it served personal benefits for a particular group, and there was ambiguity in the lines of authority and the responsibilities that led to overlap in the responsibilities. It is concluded that when there is change in threat or conflict and striving toward different goals, the impact of perception of politics on attitudes is magnified.

Table III further shows significant correlation between organizational support and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.57. These results support $H4b$, which stated that organizational support is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is supported by Jung (2003) study which found that perceived organizational support was correlated with readiness for change. This finding is also supported by Kiefer (2005) study which found that perceptions of inadequate working conditions; and perceptions of inadequate treatment by the organization were antecedents to negative emotions in ongoing change. Further support for this finding is provided by Szabla (2007) study which found that group members who perceive the normative-reeducative – leaders were collaborative and involved individuals in decisions – leadership strategy held the most positive beliefs, experienced the most positive emotions, and had the highest intentions to support the change.

Furthermore, Table III shows a significant correlation between group cohesion and attitudes toward organizational change where the r value was 0.28. These results support $H4c$, which stated that group cohesion is positively related to attitudes toward organizational change. This finding is supported by the study of (Lau *et al.*, 2002) which showed that for Chinese companies, perceptions of cohesion is positively related to the degree to which employees feel positive about, and have reduced skepticism of the results of change. Moreover, this finding is supported by Jung (2003) study which found that co-worker support was correlated with readiness for change but to a lesser degree than process variables and personality traits.

Regression analysis
To test the proposed model for this study, multiple regression analysis was conducted using the stepwise regression method. In this method each variable is entered in sequence and its value is assessed. If adding the variable contributes to the model then it is retained, but all other variables in the model are then re-tested to see if they are still contributing to the success of the model. If they no longer contribute significantly they are removed. Thus, this method ends up with the smallest possible set of predictor variables included in the model. An advantage of using this method is that it results in the smallest number of predictors in the model when there is large number of variables (Brace *et al.*, 2000).

In this study, R is a measure of the correlation between the attitudes toward organizational change reported by employees and the levels predicted for these attitudes by the four predictor variables. R^2 is the square of this measure of correlation and indicates the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable which is accounted for by the model. The significance of R^2 is determined by the F-test, which

is the same as testing the significance of the regression model as a whole. If the probability of obtaining a large value of $F < 0.05$ then the model would be considered to be significantly better than would be expected by chance and it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable.

As shown in Table IV, the Durbin-Watson test statistic is very close to 2; indicating that the adjacent residuals are independent and there is no autocorrelation. Also, Table VI shows that multicollinearity does not cause any problem. Multicollinearity exists if variance inflation factor (VIF) is greater than ten which indicate a strong relationship between predictors (Brace *et al.*, 2000). Table IV shows that the prediction model explained 52.0 percent of the variation in "Attitudes toward organizational change in the RCMWU." In addition to that, Table VI indicates only four of the casual relationships between the variables proposed in our model are highly supported. Independent variables of organizational support, self-efficacy, quality of information, and threat appraisal, are contributing significantly toward attitudes toward organizational change at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table V shows the ANOVA for the regression model. As $p = 0.000$, so there is a significant relationship between the dependent variable "Attitudes toward Organizational change in the RCMWU" and all of the four predictors.

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.721[a]	0.520	0.497	0.94244	1.914

Note: [a]Predictors: constant, organizational support, self-efficacy, quality of information, threat appraisal

Table IV.
Model summary

	Sum of squares	df	M^2	F	Significance
Regression	79.939	4	19.985	22.501	0.000
Residual	73.720	83	0.888		
Total	153.659	87			

Table V.
Analysis of variance for the regression model

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance	Collinearity statistic
	B	SE	β			VIF
Constant	0.993	0.694		1.431	0.156	
Organizational support	0.305	0.073	0.378	4.192	0.000	1.407
Self-efficacy	0.358	0.074	0.404	4.835	0.000	1.206
Quality of information	0.193	0.070	0.238	2.740	0.008	1.308
Threat appraisal	0.162	0.072	0.190	2.263	0.026	1.221

Note: The regression equation: Attitudes toward organizational change $= 0.993 + 0.305 \times$ (organizational support) $+ 0.358 \times$ (self-efficacy) $+ 0.193 \times$ (quality of information) $+ 0.162 \times$ (threat appraisal)

Table VI.
The regression coefficients

Table VI shows the regression coefficients and their p-values. The data analyses presented in Table VI reveals that four variables; organizational support $\beta = 0.378$, self-efficacy $\beta = 0.404$, quality of information $\beta = 0.238$, threat appraisal $\beta = 0.190$ significantly contributed to the model. Based on t-test, the most significant variable is self-efficacy, followed by the organizational support, quality of information, and threat appraisal, respectively. Self-efficacy and organizational support pertained to personality attributes and change context which are deeply rooted in the organizational settings.

The explanatory power of this study model is comparable to that of Jung (2003) study in which the independent variables (positive affect, negative affect, perceived organizational support, perception of co-workers, participation and quality of information) explained significant variance accounting for 42 percent of the variation in job satisfaction and 50 percent of the variation in affective commitment.

Durmaz (2007) study model of 11 independent variables significantly predicted officer attitudes toward organizational change ($R^2 = 0.448$). The study revealed that receptivity to change ($B = 0.243$) was the most influential variable in predicting officer attitude, while (commitment to organization) and demographic variables were not significant contributors in predicting officer attitude. The Officer Attitude Model (without demographics) developed by the study explains 43.7 percent of variance in officer attitudes.

Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations. One limitation is that the sample is confined to a limited number of employees of the RCMWU which might limit the generalizability of its findings and conclusions. However, the researchers are confident that employees profile is truly representative of the remaining branches of the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility. Another limitation is concerning possible non-response bias. Common problem with this bias is the possibility that non-respondents will differ from respondents leading to biased estimates. Third limitation is the common method bias. Due to the nature of this study and the small size of organization under investigation, it was impossible to implement alternative data collection methods. This limitation raised concern of common methods bias since both criterion and response variables were collected at the same time.

Conclusions

This study provided understanding of attitudes toward organizational change in RCMWU along with its three dimensions. The role of emotions in understanding reactions to organizational change was emphasized. Employees in the RCMWU hold positive but weak attitudes toward organizational change. As attitudes are widely accepted as antecedents for behavior, it is concluded that employees would show some supportive behavior. Employee perceptions about change were contradicted on the cognitive level due to inadequate change communication, vague change message, low change participation, and limited change experience. Employees hold moderate positive emotions toward change because they appraise the outcome of change event as positive which activates their pleasant feelings. Employees intend to support the organizational change passively by complying with, and showing acceptance of change. These moderate supportive intentions may be attributed to the ambivalent cognitions and moderate positive emotions. Employee's intentions not to resist change may be attributed to the low level of negative emotions and the tradition of work ethics

which stress on honesty and self-monitoring. It is clear that the affective dimension was a crucial factor in eliciting the positive attitudes toward organizational change. The conceptual model was supported to a great extent by the multiple regression analysis. The study model explained 52.0 percent of variance in employee attitudes. The predictors found in this study were self-efficacy, organizational support, quality of information, and threat appraisal. Manipulating these predictors may cause employees to support or resist the change. The most significant predictors were self-efficacy, and organizational support pertained to personality attributes and change context which are deeply rooted in the organizational settings.

Recommendations

RCMWU management is recommended to provide adequate change communication. Change communication should be viewed from both cognitive and affective dimensions. Open communication could be the key to enhance other predictors in the model. Change message should communicate five key components: self-efficacy that builds confidence in a group's ability to successfully implement the change, principal support which suggests that key organizational members are committed to the successful implementation of the change, discrepancy which reveals a gap between the current and ideal state, appropriateness which attempts to convince organizational members that change is the correct reaction to the discrepancy, and personal valence which clarifies the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of the change.

Emotions should be used in the change message through five methods: the use of metaphor for symbolic realities and emotionally connotative words of success in the core messages about the change, the use of pictures, slogans, color in packaging the change messages, the emphasis on the credible, fair, likeable characteristics of the change leaders while they interact with their employees, and considering cohesive group and ceremonies as preferred setting in which communication takes place.

Top management is also recommended to improve its support to change by encouraging employees to embrace change, exerting all possible support, and show senior managers commitment to change. Moreover, it is recommended that top management expand the bottom up communication, and to involve employees who have potential capability to influence the change process or to provide real input for future decisions.

As a personal extension of the organization, supervisors are recommended to show employees that the utility values their contribution. The management should provide its attention to the human factor through favorable rewards, and better job conditions. The insignificant relation of change politics with attitudes toward organizational change is not an indication for tolerable political practices. This could be specific for non-threatening change that has benefits to all employees and has organizational governance setup.

It is recommended that future studies be conducted longitudinally in different time intervals to reveal the causal relationships among the independent variables and attitudes toward organizational change. Also, future research should study the relations between the predictors, and the possible mediation between theses predictors and attitudes toward organizational change. It is highly recommended that future research explore the RCMWU employees' behaviors after the completion of change and link it to employee attitudes toward organizational change revealed by this study.

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Wanberg, C.R. and Banas, J.T. (2000), "Predictors and outcomes of openness to changes in a reorganizing workplace", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 89 No. 1, pp. 132-42.

Further reading

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Appendix

Individual measures
Internal locus of control
I can much often accomplish whatever I set out to accomplish
When I get what I want, it is usually because I worked hard for it.
What happens for me depends on my actions
Self-efficacy
I do not expect any problems adjusting to the work I have because of this change in the CMWU
I feel I can handle this change with ease
When I set my mind to it, I can learn everything that will be required by this change
There are some tasks that are required by this change I do not think I can do well (R)
I have the skills that are needed to make this change work
My past experience makes my confidence that I will be able to perform successfully after this change is made
Content measures
Threat appraisal
Due to the change, to what extent do you feel that each of the following is threatened
Job security
Relationships with your co-workers

In this utility favoritism, not merit gets people ahead
I can usually get what I want around here if I know the right person to ask
Organizational support
The utility is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability
Even if I did the best job possible, the utility would fail to notice me (R)
The utility cares about my opinion
The utility cares about my general satisfaction at work
The utility really cares about my well-being
Group cohesion
It is difficult to ask help from my colleagues (R)
There is a strong rivalry between colleagues in my department (R)
I doubt whether all of my colleagues are sufficiently competent (R)
I have confidence in my colleagues
My department is very open
Attitudes toward organizational change measures
The cognitive dimension
I can see the potential advantages of this change

(continued)

Table AI.
Items used to measure each construct

Relationships with your supervisor
Desirability of your job (i.e. aspects you like)
Personal job opportunities within your organization
Your pay and benefits
Your general working conditions
Process measures
Management support
The CMWU top management has encouraged all of us to embrace these changes
Our utility's top decision makers have put all their support behind this change
Every senior manager has stressed the importance of change
I think we are implementing change that does not match senior managers' priorities (R)
This organization's senior managers are committed to such changes
Management has sent a clear signal that the organization will adopt structural changes that will improve efficiency
Participation
I was able to ask questions about this change
I was able to participate in the implementation of this change
I had some control over the changes that were proposed
I could have input into the decisions being made about organization future programs
Quality of information
The information I received about the organizational change was timely.
The information I received about such changes has adequately answered my questions
The information I received about such changes helped me understand the change
I am thoroughly satisfied with the information I receive about changes at the utility
The people who know what is going on at here do not share information with me (R)
Context measures
Change politics

There is an influential group that always gets their way in this organization

I know the relationships between this change and other events on this utility
This change seems likely to improve my satisfaction with my job
Efficiency improvement is the clear meaning of this change
Change has benefits to all employees
I have full confidence on change in the CMWU
This change is improving the way this department works
This change affects my way of doing things
This change affects the way we (I and my colleagues) do things here
The affective dimension
Positive affect
When I think about change in the CMWU I feel happy
When I think about this change I feel excited
When I think about this change I feel relieved
When I think about this change I feel hopeful
Negative affect
When I think about this change I feel sad (R)
When I think about this change I feel angry (R)
When I think about this change I feel frightened (R)
When I think about this change I feel frustrated (R)
The intentional dimension
Positive intentions
I intend to suggest ways in which to carry out this change
I intend to encourage others to make this change effective
I intend to speak up about the advantages of this change
I intend to comply to organizational change in the CMWU
Negative intentions
I intend to encourage others to resist implementing this change (R)
I intend to oppose the implementation of this change (R)
I intend to suggest that others not participate in this change (R)
I intend to try to modify this change as it is implemented (R)

Table AI.

Note: (R) following the item indicates that the item was reverse scored prior to any analysis

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