Chapter II

Change-Supportive Employee Behavior: A Career Identity Explanation

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore how career identity informs employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change initiatives.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper draws on the findings of a qualitative case study exploring the experiences of 29 employees involved in a planned “bottom-up” organizational change initiative. At the time of the study, all interviewees were employed in a Dutch non-profit organization.

Findings: Drawing on protean career theory and the literature on other-oriented work values, we show that career identity informs both how employees make sense of the respective organizational change and their willingness to engage in it. The authors found that proactive career behavior and a focus on other-oriented work values inform higher levels of employees’ engagement in the change, while passive career behavior and self-centered work values inform employees’ lower levels of involvement in the change initiative. Based on the findings, the authors conclude this paper with a conceptual model which captures the cyclical relationship between career identity and employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change initiatives.

Research limitations/implications: Future research should consider both the individual characteristics of employees involved in change initiatives and content or contextual factors when exploring willingness to engage with change.

Practical implications: Organizational change consultants and managers need to be aware of the influence of career identity on employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change and use this information during the implementation of change initiatives.

Originality/value: The paper explores employees’ willingness to engage with organizational change initiatives through the lens of career identity.

Keywords: Sensemaking, Non-profit, Bottom-up organizational change, Proactive behavior, Subjective career, Work values

2.1. Introduction

Why do some employees support and actively engage with organizational change initiatives while others are more circumspect or even resist them? Although organizational change has been the focus of much scholarly interest, employees’ individual reactions to change initiatives are less well understood (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011; Kim, Hornung, & Rousseau, 2011; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). Extant research has identified multiple influences on employee responses to change, for example, the work context (e.g., Ghitulescu, 2013), management support (e.g., Rafferty & Griffin, 2006), and trust in management (e.g., Oreg, 2006). Some scholars have also identified the impact of individual factors, focusing primarily on personality traits and dispositions (e.g., Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Hornung & Rousseau, 2007). These insights are clearly important. Yet, other sources of potential influence also need to be explored, especially those emerging from recent changes in the landscape in which contemporary careers evolve.

One of the most important changes impacting on contemporary careers is the putative change in the psychological contract between employers and employees (Rousseau, 1995), which has shifted the locus of work identification from organizations to individual careers (e.g., Albert et al., 2000; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). This has meant that behaviors enacted in the work context are more likely to be influenced by individual career goals and aspirations. Moreover, individuals’ career orientations now have an increasingly important influence on the meanings that they ascribe to their work experiences (Rosso et al., 2010). This could explain why contemporary employees often express concerns about the potential impact of change initiatives on their respective career opportunities (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). For example, some individuals may see an organizational change as derailing their career plans as might be the case with an organizational downsizing. On the other hand, organizational change may also create new career
opportunities as might be the case with organizational expansion or changes in strategy offering opportunities for new skill development. That said, some scholars have shown that job loss can be an opportunity for career development because it encourages individual career exploration (Zikic & Richardson, 2007). Given the changes in contemporary careers, we will show how the contemporary careers literature, and specifically literatures explaining motivations behind different career patterns, provides a useful lens through which to augment our understanding of employee responses to organizational change.

Specifically, in this paper we aim to enrich our understanding of employee responses to organizational change by drawing on the concept of career identity. Whereas a number of different approaches have been used to define career identity (e.g., Schein, 1978; LaPointe, 2010), for the purposes of this paper we adopt Fugate et al.’s (2004) definition where career identity describes “who I am” or “who I want to be” and operates as a cognitive compass that motivates individuals to adopt behaviors that allow them to realize (or create) opportunities that match their career aspirations (p. 17). Moreover, we ascribe to the view that just as our career identity guides our career development; it also influences how we view our work and how we behave in the workplace. Therefore, drawing on a qualitative study of a planned “bottom-up” organizational change (i.e., a change that is planned by management but organized through employees), we suggest that employees’ career identities may also inform their involvement in and responses to organizational change. More specifically, we explore how career identity informs the “actions [that] employees engage in to actively participate in, facilitate, and contribute to a planned change initiated by the organization” (Kim et al., 2011).

The paper will add to existing knowledge about employee responses to organizational change by building a model showing how career identity informs employees’ willingness to engage in change-supportive behavior as well as the form that
such behavior takes. As we will demonstrate, the model is predicated on contemporary theory on attitudes (Piderit, 2000), sensemaking (Weick, 1995), protean careers (Hall, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) and other-oriented work values (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). First, however, we review the literature on career identity and connect it to contemporary theory on the protean career.

2.2. Theoretical Background

2.2.1. Career Identity and Protean Careers

Our career identity, then, can be best understood as comprising of the career aspirations, values and beliefs that inform our self-concept which enable us to answer the question, “Who am I?” It provides us with a sense of meaning through which we can approach, enact, and experience our work and workplace behavior (Rosso et al., 2010). The sense of meaning we derive from our work, however, is also impacted by our work values, understood as “the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realize through working” (Nord et al., 1990, p. 21). Yet, the relationship between our work values and the meaning we derive from our work is recursive (Rosso et al., 2010). While work values can be understood in a number of different ways (e.g., Schwartz, 1992), in this paper we differentiate between “other-oriented values” (i.e., concern for the welfare of others) and “self-centered values” (i.e., concern for personal gains and acting according to self-serving goals to maximize expected personal outcomes) (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino and Korsgaard, 2004). The value of adopting this understanding is that it allows us to extend current scholarship (e.g., Grant & Mayer, 2009; Grant & Rothbard, 2013), by exploring the impact of pro-social motivation on support for, or resistance to, organizational change.
Acknowledging that our work values comprise part of our career identity is important because it engages with current career theory and especially the idea of the protean career (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) as a contemporary career form. Existent research clearly signals the close connection between protean career behaviors and proactive personality (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006). It has also shown how protean career behaviors enable individuals to successfully navigate insecure job contexts (Briscoe, Henagan, Burton, & Murphy, 2012). According to Briscoe and Hall (2006), the protean career is “a career in which the person is 1) values-driven in the sense that the person’s internal values provide the guidance and measures of success for the individual’s career, and 2) self-directed in personal career management – having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands” (p. 8). Based on these two characteristics, Briscoe and Hall (2006) identify four categories of career behavior – dependent, reactive, rigid, and protean – which are presented in Table 2.1, below. Individuals with a “dependent” career orientation are neither values-driven nor self-directed. They are also unable to define their career priorities and actively engage in self-career management. In contrast, individuals with a “reactive” career orientation engage in high levels of career self-management but lack awareness of their values, which limits their opportunities to experience a sense of success. Individuals with a “rigid” career orientation are values-driven but are unable to direct and shape their careers. Individuals with a “protean” career orientation, on the other hand, are values-driven where their values drive both their career priorities and career identity. They are also self-directed in their career management in the sense that they take personal responsibility for their career outcomes.
Table 2.1. Protean perspective on individual career (adapted from Briscoe & Hall, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career orientation</th>
<th>Dependent</th>
<th>Rigid</th>
<th>Reactive</th>
<th>Protean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values-driven</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed career management</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We turn now to sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) to consider how it might be used to understand individual willingness to engage in change-supportive behavior.

2.2.2. Sensemaking, Career Identity and Change-Supportive Behavior

Sensemaking is a “meaning making” or “feeling making” (Schwandt, 2005) process that draws on prior knowledge to assign meaning to new information. It is facilitated by placing stimuli (information) into sensemaking frameworks (schemata or knowledge structures) (Huff, Huff, & Barr, 2000) that reduce the complexity of the information received, allowing individuals to associate it with past actions and meanings (Weick, 1995; Schwandt, 2005), which facilitates understanding. When individuals encounter organizational change, they rely on sensemaking to understand and better manage what may be a period of uncertainty and ambiguity (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009; Weick, 1995). Specifically, they try to make sense of the new information and experiences they encounter during the respective period of change. Schwandt (2005) suggests that the essence of sensemaking lies in the interaction of three basic components: (1) cues (i.e., information from one’s environment) that act as triggers to signify that meaning is required; (2) frameworks (i.e., knowledge structures) comprising a set of elements, rules or

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2 For the purpose of our study, we approach sensemaking as an individual cognitive process. However, we do acknowledge that there has been increased recognition of sensemaking as a social process in which organizational members interpret their environment in and through their interactions with others (e.g., Maitlis, 2005).
values that guide understanding; (3) relationships (i.e., scripts) that link the new information to the respective framework.

This paper will, therefore, explore the extent to which employees’ reactions to organizational change are guided by how they make sense of the respective change. Moreover, given that how we make sense of a work situation is impacted by our career identity (Weick, 1995), it will also explore whether how employees make sense of organizational change is also informed by their career identity. Indeed, according to Stebbins (1970), when activated “products of past experiences impinge upon our awareness, they equip us with a specific view on the world, and guide behavior in the immediate present” (p. 35). Therefore, it may be that when career identity is activated by organizational change within the work environment, it heightens employees’ awareness of the situation, helps them make sense of it, and informs their subsequent behavior.

Having considered the potential connections between work values, career identity, sensemaking and organizational change, we turn now to the study upon which this paper is based.

2.3. Research Method

Given our intention to explore individual responses to organizational change initiatives, we elected to use a qualitative research method, focusing on a specific case study and using in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013). Using a specific case study allowed us to incorporate the contextual influences within which the organizational change was evolving (Yin, 2003) and provided for consistency in the sense that all interviewees were exposed to the same kind of change (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008).
2.3.1. Research Context

This study was conducted in a Dutch non-profit organization \( N = 59 \) providing support and legal advice for volunteer caregivers and organizations. To retain confidentiality, we will refer to the company as MCare. Given the research objectives of the study, we were concerned to use an organization that was implementing ‘bottom-up’ organizational change as a “weak situation” (Mischel, 1973) where employees may exhibit different responses according to their own values and preferences (Shamir, 1990) rather than a “strong situation” in which organizations provide specific guidelines for employee behavior (Caldwell and Liu, 2011). Implementing ‘bottom-up’ organizational change may reduce potential resistance (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Yet, it is a relatively rare phenomenon with most change initiatives being ‘top-down’. In this sense, we see our study context as a “revelatory case” (Yin, 2003) because it focuses on a relatively unique organizational situation.

At the time of the study, MCare was undergoing an organizational change in order to enhance its work processes and performance outcomes. The management team (hereafter the MT) had initiated the change but they had also brought in an outside consultancy firm (hereafter the CF) to implement it. Together, they held several meetings to plan the respective change project and identify key employees who would be involved. They then organized a meeting with employees to explain the change and discuss opportunities to self-nominate as members of the change teams. These change teams would be responsible for leading the overall change project. After this meeting, ten employees were selected to join one of two teams (five in each team) with responsibility for implementing the change. Members of the change project teams were selected from those employees who had been identified previously as ‘key players’ in the change initiative.
Each change team was responsible for developing their own plan to support the change initiative with the assistance of a dedicated consultant from the CF. They were also expected to act as “change champions” encouraging support from other employees. Employees who were not members of the change teams were also encouraged to contribute to the change project by sharing their ideas with team members. However, their participation was not mandatory. So, although the change was originally initiated by the management team, it was ‘bottom-up’ because employees had primary responsibility for implementing it.

2.3.2. Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 employees approximately two months after the organizational change teams were formed. We interviewed eight members of the change project teams, and a further 21 interviews with other employees who were not members of the change teams but who were nonetheless impacted by the change initiative. Given our interest in whether employees’ careers impacted on their change-support behavior, we asked interviewees about their careers and perceptions of the organizational change (see Appendix A). All the interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately one hour. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We began the interviewee selection process by liaising with the HR manager, who provided additional initial information about the employees (e.g., department, function, etc.). Drawing on this information, we used a purposeful sampling strategy to select employees with potentially different experiences of the change process (e.g., employees from different departments, with different functions, and different kinds of membership in the change project). The final sample comprised employees at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy as it was their responses to change that we were particularly
interested in. We also interviewed a departmental manager and the HR manager to get an insight into their perspectives on the change. Table 2.2, below, provides information about interviewees’ organizational positions and their level of involvement in the change project. Our sample was predominantly female (only three males), which was representative of the organization as a whole, and comprised employees ranging from 29 to 60 years old.

Table 2.2. Overview of the interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee No.</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Official status in the organizational change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>regional advisor</td>
<td>member of the change team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>operator of the consulting line</td>
<td>member of the change team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>regional advisor</td>
<td>member of the change team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>policy officer</td>
<td>member of the change team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>policy officer</td>
<td>member of the change team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>communication officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>communication officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>policy officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>policy officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ICT coordinator</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>service desk officer</td>
<td>member of the work council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>project leader</td>
<td>member of the work council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>member of the MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>program manager</td>
<td>member of the MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CEO secretary</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>administrative support officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>project officer</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>web editor</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.3. Data Analysis

We drew on some of the key elements of grounded theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Locke, 2001) and the existent literature on case studies (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989) to inform our data analysis. We also used ATLAS.ti, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software system to support thematic analysis, as discussed below.

First, we ‘open-coded’ each of the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to understand how interviewees felt about their careers (i.e., their career goals and aspirations) and the organizational change initiative more broadly. Once we had coded all of the transcripts into ‘first-order codes’ we started axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to search for relationships within and between our first-order categories to convert them into the second-order themes. This process required iteration between the data and the existing literature, searching for theoretical concepts that would allow us to capture the essence of our data (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). Drawing on contemporary research on the tripartite theory of attitudes (Piderit, 2000) as a lens to understand employees’
experiences with organizational change, we identified three second-order themes: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral change responses. We also drew on protean career theory (Hall, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) and research on other-oriented work values (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004) to incorporate the career-relevant data into our analysis. Using this approach allows us to identify two second-order themes: subjective career views and work values.

In the final phase of our analysis, we assembled the second-order themes into an aggregated theoretical model to understand how emerging themes are linked. Given our focus on employees’ career identities and how they inform responses to organizational change, we also drew on themes from the career and the organizational change literatures. This allowed us to identify two theoretical dimensions. First, change-supportive versus change-inactive employee behavior and second, career identity. We also drew on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) to understand how career identity informs employees’ responses to organizational change.

We recognize that ensuring rigor in qualitative research located in an interpretive paradigm requires different criteria to those which might be applied to quantitative research, located within a positivist paradigm. Limitations of space do not allow us to expand on the full range of criteria we used to ensure that our study and emerging data are rigorous. However, in brief, we drew on the advice of a number of key qualitative scholars, namely Gioia et al. (2012), Sandberg (2005) and Gephart (2004) to ensure that our study meets requisite standards of trustworthiness, credibility and plausibility.

2.4. Findings

Below we report our findings, focusing first on the specific types of change-supportive and change-resistant behaviors we identified. Next, we explain how career
identity informed how employees made sense of the respective organizational change, and how that then informed their subsequent behavior. We conclude by proposing a model of how career identity informs employee responses to organizational change.

2.4.1. Change-Supportive Employee Behavior and Change-Inactive Employee Behavior

The findings reflected both change-supportive and change-inactive types of employee behavior. Whereas some interviewees were change “champions” in the sense that they were highly supportive of the change process, others were “doubters”, in the sense that they were more circumspect and likely to either resist the respective change or take a passive approach toward it (i.e., neither supportive nor resistant). Below, using themes from employees representing each category (i.e., change-supportive or change-inactive), we describe their responses in light of their emotional (i.e., feelings and beliefs about the change project), cognitive (i.e., understanding and knowledge of the project) and behavioral (i.e., experiences of current and intended change involvement) responses. Additional evidence for their change responses is provided in Table 2.3.

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3 We note that while champions and supporters have a lot in common in terms of their change responses and career identities, we decided to separate these employees based on their official involvement in the organizational change. This was done to see whether their change involvement could have been influenced by their change team membership.
Table 2.3. Representative quotes underlying second-order themes (change-supportive & change-inactive employee behavior)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional change responses</th>
<th>Cognitive change responses</th>
<th>Behavioral change responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Champions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1: “I am very optimistic about the change project. I try to look around the organization to see if everybody is coming with us .... If you want to change something in the work process, it is better to do it from bottom-up.”</td>
<td>C1: “I think it is very important for this organization to change .... It is important that there is the situation in the organization where everyone can say what he wants to say and he is not punished for his opinion.”</td>
<td>C2: “I am giving a good example here. In my heart and in my thoughts, I work a lot on the change .... I like sharing information with my colleagues about what happens in the change teams .... I have solutions .... I can change something.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4: “I really like it because it is not like the management says something and people have to do that. I do not believe in this concept. I really believe that you have to do it all together. You have to begin with the people.”</td>
<td>C5: “The change project is an internal change in the office aimed at having more confidence and trust. We need to trust each other more, think about each other, and work more together. I think we have to change that, because now, everyone is doing his own thing.”</td>
<td>C4: “It is our job as a team to motivate all the other colleagues who are not in the change team. What we do here in the organization is a lot of complaining, and I try not to do that anymore and tell people to be more positive .... I think I can make a difference, but I also think that everyone can make a difference. So let’s start from yourself .... I think my enthusiasm can inspire other colleagues .... I think I have a contribution to the change team and to the other colleagues.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporters</td>
<td>S5: “I think the change is good. I like the bottom-up approach, because when people are asked to participate in the early stage, they feel more connected to the problem, to the thing they are asked about.”</td>
<td>S3: “There are complaints about culture, transparency, people communicating with each other, and the hierarchy. The whole change project is to improve that, to improve the culture of the organization and work processes. …. I think it is important that there will be a change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal citizens</td>
<td>LC6: “I think the change is good, but I am always a little bit afraid that on paper you have excellent plans, but then somebody puts it in a drawer and nobody looks at it.”</td>
<td>LC3: “People feel dissatisfaction about the organization …. I do not recognize it yet …. I know very little about the change. If I understood it well, the change project is more about changing the culture than changing the organization itself.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LC1: “Now I see that there are good things coming from the change teams. People talk not only about negative things but also what they can do to change, how to make things better, etc. That is good.”</td>
<td>LC6: “I think a lot of people here are very motivated, they just want to do their jobs and to be nice with each other. Sometimes, I am not sure if the change project is necessary. They have an idea that people are not motivated. I do not think that is true. I think people are motivated and they just want to work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubters</td>
<td>D1: “I really do not believe that we have the influence. I think that the project is something to get people involved, but in the end, management does what they want. I do not believe that they are going to do that.”</td>
<td>D5: “People are talking about complaints, which surprise me .... The change team says that people are not satisfied, but I do not share or feel it .... The change project is also vague, and I think ‘Will it change anything?’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Champions.** These employees \((n = 5)\) were members of the change teams who, as might be expected, were investing maximum initiative, effort, and energy into implementing and promoting the change initiative. They were very positive about the change and believed strongly that a bottom-up approach was the best way to implement it (emotional change responses). They also felt that the change was necessary to augment organizational performance and that it ‘made sense’ from a strategic perspective (cognitive change responses). Champions demonstrated their involvement in and commitment to the change in their behavior (i.e., through ‘walking the talk’ thus signaling a behavioral change) (behavioral change responses). For example, one interviewee (C3) stated that: “If you want to improve the world, start from yourself …. Now, I try to make a little change, starting small, and by doing it by myself.” Champions, like C3, expressed a high level of self-confidence in their ability to make a difference in the organization, with statements like “I have ideas [for the change]” and “I can contribute to make things better.” In this respect, they can be characterized as psychologically empowered (Spreitzer, 1995), because they felt that they could make a positive contribution to the change initiative.

**Supporters.** These employees \((n = 9)\) were not officially involved in the change initiative because they were not members of the change teams, yet they proactively supported it. They were also positive both about the change itself and the decision to take a ‘bottom-up’ approach’ to implement the change (emotional change responses). Furthermore, supporters felt that the change was important for the organization, and were well informed about how it was being implemented and the prospective impact on future performance (cognitive change responses). Although they were not members of the change teams, they shared their ideas about the change with team members (behavioral change responses). S2, whom we have classified as a ‘supporter’, provides a good example of the kinds of attitudinal and behavioral responses among this group: “I am not in one of the
change project teams, but we are backing them up. In our department, we try to make sure that our colleagues, who are within these [change project] teams, feel that they are backed up by us in their views …. Because these are actually the two most junior colleagues that are in these groups and … sometimes, especially one of them does not feel secure about the best direction of change, so we talk about things which they are busy with, so she feels she is backed-up …. This is how I contribute to the organizational change.”

**Loyal citizens.** Although these employees ($n = 8$) (two were members of the change teams, six were not) were positive about the change project as an opportunity for employee participation in organizational life, they were less positive about its potential to impact on organizational performance (emotional change responses). Loyal citizens (except for those in the change teams) understood the rationale behind the initiative for the change but had little in-depth knowledge about the project and its objectives. Moreover, they were not aware of, nor did they understand, the problems involved in the change identified by the change teams (cognitive change responses). Loyal citizens did not show any initiative to support the change even though they were ready to participate in concrete change activities if asked, primarily because of their commitment to the organization (behavioral change responses). LC4 provides a good example of the kinds of views expressed by this group: “I see my commitment also in just working and not grumbling. When the change teams come up with a good plan, then as a whole organization, we go for it, because everybody wants to work in an organization where people find it nice to work. So I will give my energy, my enthusiasm, and will go for it.”

**Doubters.** These employees ($n = 7$) were not officially involved in the change project teams (except for one employee) and tried to distance themselves from it, showing no desire to either be involved in or support its implementation. Indeed, doubters were relatively negative about the project, seeing it as ineffective with no potential to augment
individual or organizational performance. The majority believed that because of their relatively low-level position in the organizational hierarchy, they had no influence over managers. They were also more likely to criticize management, especially those involved in the original change initiative (emotional change responses). Doubters complained about how the organization was being managed and denied problems and issues identified by members of the change teams. They had little knowledge about the change process and the change teams (except the one member of the change team), often referring to members of the teams in an emotionally distant and critical fashion (cognitive change responses). Doubters did not show any initiative to support the change process nor were they willing to support members of the change teams (behavioral change responses). D2 provides a good example of the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that characterized this group: “I am not in the change project. I do not feel that involved in it …. It has two teams, and they are trying to come up with new ideas. We will be informed and we will do it like they will say …. I am also, you know … a team player. When colleagues wanted to implement these ideas, I would join, but this would be with some distance.

2.4.2. Career Identity Informing Employees’ Change-Supportive Behavior

We identified two themes which enabled us to understand how employees’ career identities informed their support for the change initiative. First, their subjective view of their careers, which reflects the extent to which they are values-driven and self-directed (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Second, their work values – reflecting the extent to which they were either other-oriented or self-centered (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). Although exploring employees’ subjective views of their careers allows us to understand their career behavior, exploring individuals’ work values allows us to understand the underlying motivation for their work behavior. The findings of this study suggest that while understanding these two components provides insights into the
differences in employees’ career behaviors it also allows us to understand employee responses to organizational change. Specifically, they suggest that employees will try to make sense of the respective change by drawing on their career identities to construct, understand and respond to it. Continuing the approach used above, we will elaborate on this finding by drawing on the data from one interviewee from each classification. Additional empirical evidence for our findings is presented in Table 2.4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective career view (values-driven &amp; self-directed)</th>
<th>Work values (other-oriented vs. self-centered)</th>
<th>Career identity shaping employee behavior during the change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champions</td>
<td>C2: “Even now that I am 54, I want to grow …. I want more face-to-face contact with people. I want to have a process and that is why I have to organize an additional job or to become a freelancer …. To arrange this, I need to make my website, which I did a couple of weeks ago.”</td>
<td>C2: “That is my own motivation. I like changes. I believe in peoples’ passion. When I look around, I see there is no passion in this organization, because people are unhappy. I like to help … to uncover someone’s passion to see what they can do.”</td>
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<td>C1: “The red thread through my whole career is to try to help vulnerable people, people who have a low position in the community, to help them get a better position. This has been always my red thread, and it still is.”</td>
<td>C1: “I try to do my best to deliver my capacity to the change process …. For me it is not a problem to say what I want to say, but some of my colleagues cannot do that. I think it is my task to help them, to create the situation in which they can say what they want to say.”</td>
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<td>C2: “I like to work. I like people – to help them …. Work is important for me, but not because of money, but more … to help other people …. When I can help you, then I am happy about it. That is the reason why I work.”</td>
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<td>C1: “It is more about how I do my work than wanting to achieve something for myself. I do not care about my job title. It is more about aiming to attain something for people.”</td>
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Supporters

S1: “I found an announcement in a newspaper about starting a consulting line for caregivers .... I started in this organization first as a volunteer at the consulting line for caregivers and then switched more toward communication .... When I started here, I knew nothing about care. Working at consulting line, I realized that we are important for these people because we can help them.”

S3: “I was writing my master’s thesis about informal care. This is how I got in contact with this organization. Later on, they asked me if I want to work here in a communication position. But I did not, because I preferred a job in journalism, so I asked whether I could have a position as a policy officer.”

S1: “I like that I can help people .... When I have a good job, I do not need a career for the money and not for me .... When I started here, I knew nothing about care. Working at consulting line, I realized that we are important for these people because we can help them.”

S3: “I want to give people a little bit of hope .... The work has to contribute, to improve something.... It is not for the money, neither it is only for the satisfaction or for personal gain .... The work has to touch me, to connect with my personal being.”

S1: “I like when there can be some changes so the things are better .... I think that I can help. I like when I can give input because I think that I can help. It motivates me to help the change teams. When I read that everybody must have their ideas, then I am going to think and I will share them with the change teams.”

S3: “I think it is a waste of time and energy ... there are so many things that we can worry about .... and there is such a lack of energy. So, I want to fill this lack .... You have a lot of people and this energy they cannot use to share with colleagues or with friends or with family ...., so this motivates me to be involved in the change.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loyal citizens</th>
<th>LC6: “I did a lot of different things …. I like my work, but I am thinking that maybe I would like to do something more in another area; but I do not know, and I am still happy here. So it is not that I want to leave within a year or something.”</th>
<th>LC6: “I like my work. I do useful things here. I could not work for a company which produces something unimportant. I think this job is important to society …. It is important for me that we mean something for someone else, that we make a difference in someone's life.”</th>
<th>LC6: “I just want to do my work and not to spend too much energy and time on thinking about what can be improved and how I see the ideal situation in the organization …. I just want to do my job and put my energy and time in what I am supposed to do.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>LC3: “I was fired from the place I worked. Sixty people worked there, but 30 of them had to be let go because of the financial crisis. That is why I had to leave the organization. So it was not my choice, but I got the chance to see what my possibilities at several places are. So now I like the situation that I have flexibility.”</td>
<td>LC3: “What is important for me is to work with people …. also to make things better for others, not for my personal gain …. To me, success is not about the financial aspect of work, but more about the content of the job itself, so that I enjoy it, and can develop myself.”</td>
<td>LC3: “I am here on a temporary basis, so my involvement may be less. However, I am a person who commits himself to the people, the organization, when he works …. so I want to be involved …. I think that I can bring something in–that is important or something the change teams can use, something I think is important for them…. I will do that.”</td>
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<td>Doubters</td>
<td>D1: “I have worked here for seven years and I think it is okay to do something else …. I really do not know what I am going to do, what kind of job …, so I am just looking …. I really do not know …. I want to do what I am good at, and at the moment I do not do what I am good at.”</td>
<td>D1: “It is very important to do something that you like …. Work is important not only to get money but also to do things I am good at What motivates me is my colleagues, the work atmosphere and interesting projects”</td>
<td>D1: “I am a secretary, so I have to do what other people ask of me …. I do not know what else I can do, because I am dependent on other people. I do my best, and I do the things that the change teams ask me of me and I cannot do more …. I do not have an influence.”</td>
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<td>D6: “For myself ..., I want to start my own company, but that is in the future .... The most important thing for me now is to work here for a few years.... I want to stay here, and let's see what the time will bring.”</td>
<td>D6: “I think it is very important because of the financial reasons; of course ..., you have to pay your bills and everything, but you also have to do something that you like … and the social context that you have with people is important.”</td>
<td>D6: “I think it is very important that you know what is happening in the organization so that you have the information and you know what it is all about …. I think that it is very important that you know what is happening. .... It is good for yourself .... Maybe you can use this information for yourself or ... at work.”</td>
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Champions’ change responses and career identity. Champions had a strong affiliation both with the organization and the not-for-profit sector more generally. This affiliation guided their past career trajectories and future aspirations. They were very proactive toward the change and believed it was their responsibility to take charge of their own careers rather than ceding responsibility to their employer. This finding reflects some of the key themes in protean career theory (subjective career view), where they demonstrated acute awareness of what they wanted from their careers. C3 provides a particularly good example of this kind of orientation:

I always do what comes in my way and what I think is right, what is good for me, what I like and what I am good at …. I like to do something for and with people. I am not a business woman …. I noticed that health care in Holland was changing in the way I did not like. It was always about money and time, not informal care, really caring for people. That’s why I made the move [new job in informal care] …. I have noticed that I did not like it anymore so I had to do something else.

Champions’ proactive engagement in socially oriented work was clearly reflected in the work values underlying their work motivation. They tended to ground the meaning they attributed to their work (work values) in other-oriented work (i.e., helping others). For instance, C3 saw her work as an opportunity to “see and use her skills and capabilities, to develop, to mean something to the world …. Not something big [laughing] … do something little.”

A protean career orientation and focus on other-oriented work values permeated champions’ narratives about their involvement in the change initiative, as suggested by C3 below:
I think it [participation in the change] is important for my motivation for staying here. For instance, I can act as a victim, but I like my job, I like the informal sector. I think I can do good job and to achieve things. This motivates me to be part of the change project and it motivates me to stay here and to contribute …. I know that some colleagues are afraid of losing their job [their reason not to participate in the change] but it does not matter for me because I think … of course, I like to have a job and to earn my money, but when I cannot say what I want, be happy in the organization … then I do not want to work there anymore.

C3’s quote suggests that her protean career orientation encourages proactive involvement in the change initiative. She sees her involvement in the change as a way to enjoy her work and to draw meaning from it. Similarly, her preference for other-oriented work activities also encourages proactive engagement in the initiative. We might also conclude that being actively involved in the initiative and receiving feedback from other champions reaffirms her protean orientation.

Supporters’ change responses and career identity. Although some supporters had begun their careers in other types of organizational settings, they still preferred to work in a socially oriented setting. Their accounts of their career trajectories included many self-initiated career changes, pointing to the agentic nature of their career development and their awareness of the reasons behind those changes. Thus, supporters had a protean career orientation (subjective career view). As an illustration, S2 explained why she decided to become a freelancer:

This is a choice I made, because I like to go at different places and do different things and ... I think I am good at it, come in and be productive right away. I like it .... I want to be independent like that. I am not willing to go to an organization
anymore …. I do not like to be in organizations where you get pushed sideways and … you end up doing things you do not want to do just because the management thinks it should be done. I do not like it anymore …. I like to have this independence to speak up about what I see happening …. This is the reason.

The variety of work experiences among supporters reflected the different motivations that they brought to their work (e.g., a desire for development, challenge, change or autonomy). However, in order for them to see their work as meaningful, they had to be able to satisfy their other-oriented work values (work values). For instance, S2 explained: “I am not somebody, who is aiming for a top position in a company because …. I am more interested in doing it myself and in being good at it, so that you can make a difference like in this working field I am always looking for a working field, which is important for the society. It can be either things in environmental issues ... you know, all kinds of things which are a bit on the side of idealism.”

Having a protean career orientation and wanting their work to satisfy their other-oriented work values seemed to encourage supporters to be actively involved in the organizational change initiative as suggested by S2:

As a freelancer, I can always say ‘I am off after a couple of months, so why should I care?’ But I always care …. If I see something wrong in an organization and I have an idea how to make things better, I just speak up because I think it is a waste if I do not. I am not at all afraid of the consequences. If I have to stop my assignment here earlier than planned, this means I am going to another assignment earlier.

We can see here that S2’s protean career orientation satisfies her need for freedom and yet it also encourages her to engage in the change initiative. Specifically, we observe
how her other-oriented work values combined with her protean career orientation allow her to support her colleagues in the organization rather than on focusing solely on personal gain. She sees her involvement in the change process as an opportunity to make a contribution to the organization.

**Loyal citizens' change responses and career identity.** Loyal citizens reported relatively diverse career stories and had no identifiable affinity with any particular type of work setting. They were also more likely to have experienced involuntary job loss (e.g., downsizing) (Zikic & Klehe, 2006) than any of the other groups. Two members of the change teams were loyal citizens. They had both experienced a career “identity crisis” (Marcia, 1980) when they had been unable to make a decision about the next step in their careers. Nevertheless, the majority of loyal citizens had a clear picture of what motivated them in their work. They had all also had diverse work experiences. However, unlike champions and supporters, loyal citizens were less self-directed in their career orientation. They were happy to continue working in an organization that allowed their work to reflect their values but that provided no future career opportunities. Thus, we can regard loyal citizens as employees with a rigid career orientation (subjective career view). LC4 provides an example of this orientation:

Before MCare I had other jobs. All of them had to do something with websites …. I do not have a goal in the way that in five years I would like to have achieved a particular kind of job. I just want to have a nice job that is challenging and interesting. There must be always something different, so it does not become boring. Maybe I want to be a web manager …. [What do you do to become a web manager?] I try to do it in the way I work, in my job, the studies I can do here ... I do not think at MCare there is a lot ... I can grow. There are not many opportunities for me here to grow further in MCare.
It was important for loyal citizens to have a good job that motivated them and which they could enjoy. It was also important that they could help people and do something meaningful for others. This finding highlights their other-oriented work values (work values). LC4 also explained that in addition to wanting “a nice job and the challenge, so that you can develop yourself”, she also wanted to do “something for society …. What other people can profit from … do websites not for selling peanut butter but for helping people to help other people.”

A rigid career orientation and the tendency to have other-oriented work values among this group explains why they took a more passive approach to the change initiative compared to champions and supporters, as suggested by LC4 below:

I like to work, just do my work. This is why I did not get involved in the change project …. If I participate in this project, I have less time to do my work, which is important. You can talk about the organization, but eventually, it is about the work you do every day.

This finding suggests that LC4’s rigid career orientation, impacts on her willingness to engage in the change initiative. Her other-oriented work values are reflected in her belief that by not getting involved in the change she can focus on doing a good job and hence making a bigger contribution to the organization.

Doubters’ change responses and career identity. Doubters had work experiences in diverse organizational settings. They either did not have high expectations of their work or were uncertain about what they wanted from their careers (except for one employee—a member of the change team) and ceded responsibility for their career development to their employer. Some doubters were also experiencing a career “identity crisis” (Marcia, 1980). Uncertain of their guiding values and less capable of managing their careers, they had a
dependent career orientation (except for the two employees with a reactive career orientation) (subjective career view)\(^4\). D2 exemplifies this theme when she describes her career-related problems:

I would like to make changes in my career, but I am not quite sure what. So I am still ... sort of "oh ... what do I want?" I think I can do more things that I do now at MCare. There are other skills I have, but I cannot show them here, but I am not sure which settings ... would be best .... I think it is not the organization, which is restricting me, but it is just that I need another working environment to explore myself. I do think that my supervisor gives me some new things at my work. So in this sense I did get the opportunity to develop new skills, but it is still ... MCare ... it does not feel like the right working environment for me.

Doubters regularly emphasized the importance of getting material benefits (e.g., money) as well as other types of rewards (e.g., recognition). Moreover, they did not believe that their jobs could satisfy their needs, which had a negative impact on their sense of commitment to their organization. In this respect they tended to exhibit self-centered work values (work values). D2, for example, described her work as follows: “Work does mean an income ... it does mean ... distraction or ... you know at home I am a mum, kids are running around and asking, and here I just can work and I can accomplish things. I like this very much, because full-time mum would be not very satisfactory, so I do enjoy work a lot .... It is important that I can see the result from the work I do... also that you have a supervisor, who gives you ... some space and freedom in what you do.”

\(^4\) We mention in the study that among the doubters were two employees with a reactive career orientation. We do not elaborate on this finding because, owing to the limited number of employees with a reactive career orientation, we could not draw any relevant conclusions for this category.
The combination of a dependent career orientation and self-centered work values could explain doubters’ passive response to the change initiative, as suggested by D2, below:

I do not feel that involved [in the change]. It is perhaps because I am not that attached to MCare, because I am bit cynical after eight years [laughing] …. It does not feel like the right working environment for me …. Over the last two years, I have noticed that I feel distant from the organization …. I am doing my work, my supervisor is happy, but I do not feel as attached to the organization like, ‘that is a great organization, they are doing such good work’.

A dependent, rather than a protean career orientation and an apparent lack of proactivity impacted on D2’s willingness to engage in the change initiative. This lack of involvement also seemed to exacerbate her lack of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization as a whole. While focusing on her career problems, she does not acknowledge the importance of the organizational change for other employees and how her lack of support could negatively influence the success of the organizational change.

2.4.3. Toward a Career Identity Model of Employees’ Change-Supportive Behavior

As shown in our findings, employees’ career identity informed both how they made sense of the respective organizational change initiative and their willingness to engage with/support it. Building on these findings, the model shown in Figure 2.1, below, explains how career identity impacts on employees’ willingness to engage in change-supportive behavior. The matrix shown in Figure 2.2 elaborates on the model by illuminating how each component of career identity (subjective career view and work values) informs each category of change-related behavior.
Figure 2.1. A career identity model of employees’ change-supportive behavior.
### Figure 2.2. Components of career identity informing employees’ change-related behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change-supportive employee behavior</th>
<th>Change-inactive employee behavior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Champions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Loyal citizens</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protean career orientation</td>
<td>Rigid career orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-oriented work values</td>
<td>Other-oriented work values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporters</strong></td>
<td><strong>Doubters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protean career orientation</td>
<td>Dependent career orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-oriented work values</td>
<td>Self-centered work values</td>
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When faced with organizational change, individuals are likely to experience increased levels of ambiguity and uncertainty. They begin to make sense of the situation in accordance with their identity needs (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Given the increasing salience of work-related identity in the work context (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) and the increasingly individualistic nature of contemporary careers (Inkson, 2006), the findings of this study suggest that employees’ career identity informs how they make sense of their experiences of organizational change initiatives. Career identity also informs employees’ willingness to engage in/support the respective change, as shown in Figure 2.1.

We further suggest that in line with the work of Hall (1996) and Briscoe and Hall (2006) we can view employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change as being informed by their subjective career views which are high or low on both values-driven and self-directed career dimensions. In turn, the literature on other-oriented work values (Korsgaard et al., 1997; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004) allowed us to distinguish between employees with other-oriented and self-centered work values. Therefore, although individuals’ subjective view of their careers informs their career behavior, their work values inform the motivation behind this behavior.

In the model shown in Figure 2.1, we suggest that career identity, consisting of employees’ subjective views of their careers and their work values, provides a frame of reference that employees can use to make sense of organizational change initiatives (Weick, 1995). How they make sense of the respective initiatives will, in turn, impact on their changes responses (Piderit, 2000) in some cases encouraging active participation (change-supportive behavior) and in others passive (change-inactive behavior).
Figure 2.1 shows that only the combination of the two components of career identity (i.e., subjective career view and work values) provides insights into whether employees engage in change-supportive behavior or change-inactive behavior. As an illustration, employees who were more proactive in their careers (i.e. champions and supporters) were also more proactive toward and supportive of the organizational change. However, this was only true for employees who were motivated by other-oriented work values. Being independent in their career management and other-oriented in their work motivation, these employees engaged in change-supportive behavior. Employees who were other-oriented in their work motivation but more passive in their career development also adopted a more passive approach to the change initiative, serving as loyal citizens. Doubters, who took a passive approach to their careers and were driven by self-centered work values, also adopted a passive approach to the change initiative.

From a protean career perspective a career unfolds in a series of short learning cycles rather than a lifelong career cycle (Hall, 1996). Within the context of this study, this means that an organizational change initiative provides an opportunity for employees to engage in a ‘learning loop’ which informs their future career identity, as suggested by Figure 2.1.

It is notable that Figure 2.1 reflects the experiences and behaviors of all the employees we interviewed, regardless of whether they were members of the change project change teams or not. Change team members who were passive in their career management or self-centered in their work motivation, were also likely to adopt a passive approach to the organizational change initiative. This finding suggests that group membership and/or official status had little impact on whether or not employees are likely to engage in change-

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5 Referring to the Table 2.2, we characterized interviewees as change champions (No. 1–No. 5), supporters (No. 6–No. 14), loyal citizens (No. 15–No. 22), and doubters (No. 23–No. 29).
supportive behavior, which allows us to rule out potential alternative explanations for our findings. For instance, we can eliminate the potential influence of employees’ self-efficacy (e.g., Hornung & Rousseau, 2007) and felt responsibility for change (FRCC) (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006), which would increase as a result of being officially involved in the change project. Moreover, the literature indicates that both of these factors are reflected in employees’ subjective view of their careers. First, self-efficacy is required for adaptable and self-directed career management (Fugate et al., 2004). Second, a protean career orientation is associated with a proactive personality (Briscoe, et al., 2006), which is an important factor in explaining individuals’ FRCC (Fuller et al., 2006).

2.5. Discussion

This paper has explored how career identity informs employees’ willingness to engage in change-supportive behavior during an organizational change initiative. We started with a general question about whether the contemporary careers literature could be used as a lens through which to understand employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change. Drawing on data from interviews conducted with 29 employees working in an organization experiencing a bottom-up change initiative, we identified and then distinguished between change-supportive behaviors and behaviors that were more passive toward the respective change initiative. We also explored the respective responses according to whether they were emotional, cognitive or behavioral and connected them to existent theory on career identity utilizing the concept of sensemaking. Specifically, we have suggested that employees seek to make sense of an organizational change initiative by drawing on their career identity. Moreover, as we have shown, their understanding of the respective initiative informs their subsequent behavior towards it. That is to say; whether they actively support it or otherwise. This furnished a typology of four categories
of change-related behavior as exhibited by: champions, supporters, loyal citizens, and doubters, shown in Figure 2.2.

Our analysis revealed two components of career identity: (a) employees’ subjective view of their careers and (b) their work values, which together inform their subsequent response to organizational change. In particular, we found that proactive career behavior and a focus on other-oriented work values promoted change-supportive behavior, while passive career behavior and other-oriented or self-centered work values promoted a more passive response to organizational change. In this regard, our findings extend current theory on organizational change (e.g., Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011) and bridge the different streams of literature that have attempted to explain employees’ motivations to participate in and support organizational change (e.g., Elias, 2009; Kim et al., 2011).

Our study builds and extends research on employees’ involvement in organizational change in several ways. First, it elaborates on the recently established concept of change-supportive employee behavior (Kim et al., 2011). The proposed model, suggesting how career identity informs change-supportive behavior, offers a unique opportunity to understand the underlying behavioral motivations of employees during organizational change. It especially points to the impact of individuals’ subjective views of their careers and their work values in informing how they make sense of organizational change and subsequent behaviors toward it. These results are consistent with research emphasizing the influence of intra-individual attributes on recipients’ change reactions (e.g., Elias, 2009).

The paper also illuminates the impact of individuals’ subjective view of their careers (e.g., Khapova, Arthur, & Wilderom, 2007; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) on their response to organizational change. Specifically, it shows how employees with values-driven and self-directed careers (protean career orientation) (Briscoe & Hall, 2006) are more likely to be
proactive toward and support organizational change. These findings are consistent with the literature suggesting that a proactive personality, which was found to be associated with a protean career attitude (Briscoe et al., 2006), is positively associated with participation in organizational change (Parker, 1998). Moreover, openness to job change was found to have a positive influence on employees’ perceptions of organizational change (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). In contrast, employees with less self-directed careers took less initiative in and showed less support for organizational change, because of their rigid and dependent career orientations (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Perhaps because of their passive approach toward their careers, these employees were more inclined toward value security, which was found to predict less proactive behavior under the ambiguous circumstances (Grant & Rothbard, 2013), such as organizational change.

By examining individuals’ subjective view of their careers, our study adds to the limited research that acknowledges the importance of using the career as a lens through which to investigate individual responses to organizational change (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). However, more research is needed to understand the composite and dynamic interplay between individuals’ career agency and change-supportive behavior among different employees (middle- and low-level) as well as in different organizational settings.

Finally, our study contributes to the literature emphasizing the role of work values in defining individuals’ involvement in organizational change. We have demonstrated how other-oriented versus self-centered work values inform individual motivations to support organizational change. In particular, we have suggested that employees with other-oriented work values saw their involvement in organizational change as a way to contribute to such change, their colleagues, and the organization as a whole. In contrast, whether employees with self-centered work values became involved in organizational change depended on the potential benefits that such involvement could bring them. These results are consistent with
the literature on other-oriented values, which indicates that employees with strong prosocial values are more willing to confront challenges posed by unpleasant circumstances to make meaningful contributions to other people and an organization (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004) and that such employees are more proactive under ambiguous circumstances (Grant & Rothbard, 2013).

2.5.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Our study has some limitations that should be addressed by future research. First, while generalizability is not a specific aim of in-depth qualitative research such as this; we encourage other researchers to conduct further research in the for-profit sector to identify potential synergies between the two sectors.

Second, our study has a clear focus on the individual characteristics of change recipients and does not consider content or contextual factors (e.g., management support) as has been the case in other studies (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Moreover, we have focused on positive organizational change in this study, which may be different from negative organizational change, as employees feel more positive about any organizational change that does not involve staff reductions (Jones et al., 2008). It might be that employees with a protean career are also proactive in resisting change if they consider such change to be detrimental to the organization (Lau & Woodman, 1995) and to their own career opportunities. Thus, further research should consider the individual characteristics of the organizational change recipients as well as the content and contextual factors.

Finally, we can expect factors other than career identity to inform employees’ change-supportive behavior. For example, previous change experiences may also inform employee involvement in organizational change because they provide opportunities for employees to develop their change capabilities (e.g., Stensaker & Meyer, 2011). We
therefore suggest that future research address other career related explanations to employees’ change supportive behavior.

2.5.2. Practical Implications

Consultants and managers regularly see employee involvement as a key element in the successful implementation of organizational change. Thus, it is crucial for them to identify employees who would be among the first to accept and support an organizational change initiative and later to promote it among their peers. Using the terminology of our paper, they might be identified as “change champions”. Our findings show that it is important to become aware of the influence of career identities on employees’ behavior in the context of organizational change and to use this knowledge to identify employees as change agents. This would enable a better understanding of employees’ individual characteristics, which types of reactions we can expect from them and which motivational practices should be used to increase employee involvement in organizations.