



Encouraging employees' active feedback & participation when rolling out major changes

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abstract

When managers and other leaders of organizational change (*change agents*) introduce and implement major changes, responses from other members of the organization can fall along both passive–active and positive–negative dimensions. Change agents usually treat positive (*approving*) responses as good and negative (*disapproving*) responses as bad. They often ignore the passive–active dimension—that is, the degree of energy with which organizational members affected by change (*change recipients*) respond to the initiative. We suggest that change agents instead focus more on this passive–active dimension and work to elicit active responses to change even when these responses are negative, because active responses can lead to valuable improvements in the initiative. We provide three recommendations for assisting organizational leaders in encouraging and learning from the active feedback of change recipients.

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Organizational change is inevitable: To improve a business's functioning, people at all levels must adapt to altered environments, embrace novel tools and techniques, and experiment with new processes. Such transitions and transformations are considered successful when they are implemented well (such that they are understood by organization members and endure after their initial rollout) and achieve their stated objectives. Today, the pace of organizational change is accelerating around the world for reasons as far ranging as technological and scientific developments, globalization, climate change, and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.^{1,2} Yet research suggests that 50% to 80% of change initiatives fail.^{3–5}

One of the most important factors influencing the success or failure of these initiatives is how the people we call *change recipients* (typically the employees whose work processes are altered) feel about and act on proposed and actual changes. Also important is how constructively the *change agents* (often the managers who direct these initiatives) address these responses. An illustration comes from Avinor, a private aviation company administered by the Norwegian government.⁶ In 2003, the company announced an urgent need to cut costs. Initially, employees accepted this news, both because civil aviation around the world was in poor economic straits and because management created processes to engage employees across levels in developing a plan to reduce expenses. But when the final plans—which included extensive layoffs and closing facilities—became public, support for the effort collapsed, because employees realized that the change initiative did not incorporate their feedback. Unions, which had initially supported Avinor's changes, pushed back, challenging the plans openly and requesting an investigation of leadership's numbers. By 2006, although management had implemented some 80% of the company's proposed changes, the remaining 20% (which were meant to produce the most significant cost savings) had not been accomplished.

Managers and other change agents often blame failed initiatives on change recipients'

resistance.⁷ It is true that employees who are upset about a new initiative sometimes try to subvert it.⁸ It turns out, however, that even negative responses (as long as they are in good faith) can help a change succeed if the change agents make use of the respondents' concerns to improve the proposal.⁹ In fact, Avinor's experience features a common detail in stories of unsuccessful organizational change: When management fails to truly engage with the feedback and perspectives of all members of an organization, the lack of engagement can doom even plans with core goals that have strong support across a company.

Unfortunately, inattention to recipients' responses when major changes are initially proposed or rolled out can not only undermine the effectiveness of the initiatives but also, at times, put the organization or the people it serves at risk. Employees, after all, often know the details of how changes can affect work processes and can identify ways that the initiative can be improved as well as aspects that might seriously damage the organization. Elizabeth A. Hood, the first author of this article, observed this dynamic firsthand when she worked for a company in which a manager altered processes so that the company could claim more work was completed for a large client than was actually the case. This unethical behavior was initially hidden from Hood. When she recognized it, she felt that, given the company's culture, she could not say anything to her manager or others about ethical issues. She chose to ignore the directive and proceed in an ethical manner. Her response eventually led to her removal from that particular project and strengthened her desire to leave the company. In this case, management's ignorance of Hood's reaction ultimately harmed the company.

Another example comes from the recent Boeing 737 MAX crisis, which had devastating consequences. Boeing management had changed plans and decided to speed up the deployment of the 737 MAX series airplanes; later, when two of these planes crashed because of a system failure, investigations revealed that employees had already identified the problem but their perspectives had not been taken into account.¹⁰

Core Findings

What is the issue?

Driving successful organizational changes is never easy. *Change agents*—leaders and managers—usually focus on the *valence* of organizational members' responses to change, that is, whether they are negative or positive. However, for changes to be successful, change agents need to consider *activation*: how active or passive these change recipients' responses are as well.

How can you act?

Selected recommendations include:

- 1) Seeking to understand not only whether employees approve or disapprove of a change but also what drives their response
- 2) Focusing primarily on encouraging active responses—whether positive or negative—to change

Who should take the lead?

Organizational leaders and managers

Lives were lost because the company failed to give sufficient weight to employees' knowledge and experience.

Next, we explore some factors that influence how change recipients make sense of initiatives—that is, how they assess the value and consequences of the initiatives—and how they feel and act on the basis of their understanding. Then we outline how scholars categorize employee reactions in terms of both how activated they are (how much energy employees display) and how positive or negative those reactions are. We argue that highly activated responses are at least as valuable to the organization and sometimes even more important than highly positive responses. Finally, we provide recommendations to help managers foster active responses to change initiatives.

How Employees Make Sense of Change

The recipients of organizational change evaluate new initiatives by how the changes may affect them personally and the organization broadly.^{9,11} They often identify the possible gains and losses from the initiative to determine how they want to respond.^{9,11} Individuals also evaluate a new proposal on the basis of what they know about the people implementing this change. For instance, they consider the managers' apparent attitudes toward them as employees.¹² When a manager and an employee have a good relationship, the employee tends to be more supportive of a new initiative. Individuals also think about change initiatives in light of how well aligned managers' stated changes are with what actually occurs when management introduces new processes.¹³

In addition, research shows that people who help shape, carry out, and provide insights into a change initiative typically form more positive perceptions of that change.¹⁴ Thus, managers' involving recipients in the change process can greatly influence the success of the change initiative.

Further, studies suggest that as a change progresses, individuals' responses typically

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shift.¹⁵ Some individuals shift from negative to positive evaluations, while others shift from positive to negative.¹⁵

Types of Recipient Responses to Change

Organizational researcher Shaul Oreg and his colleagues⁹ have categorized change recipient responses on the basis of *activation* and *valence*. That is, individuals can respond to a change with passive or active behaviors and with positive or negative feelings. (See Table 1.)

Low-activation or *passive* responses refer to reactions that involve relatively little energy, regardless of whether the person's feelings are positive or negative. For instance, individuals may simply not express their ideas about a given change.⁹ Absenteeism and low engagement are also examples of passive responses.^{9,16,17} By contrast, *active* responses are those that can be described as comparatively high energy, regardless of their valence. These responses, whether in words or in deeds, provide considerable feedback to managers and other change agents. This can lead to long-term positive consequences, even when the feedback causes some initial delays stemming from the change initiative's being adapted or altered.⁹ With respect to valence, meanwhile, change recipients might embrace (feel positively toward) or reject (feel negatively about) a new initiative for any number of reasons.

Next, we outline what combinations of passive–active and positive–negative responses to change look like.⁹ To help translate past research so that managers and others can put its conclusions into practice, we describe the categories of change responses and how these responses apply in specific instances of change. We also describe some field studies that suggest contexts in which the types of responses might

occur. These illustrations are important because change recipients' responses do not occur in a vacuum, and case studies help illuminate the factors that can contribute to them. Finally, we include advice for ways that managers can respond constructively to the varied responses an initiative may receive.

Of course, organizational leaders do not always have time to consider employee responses before making changes—as when the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly forced employers to have their staff work from home. In this article, we focus on circumstances in which change recipients' responses may have an important impact on the change.

Change Acceptance

In some cases, change recipients may approve of a proposed new initiative and do little to interrogate or engage with the change agents putting forward the proposal. In these cases, the change recipient may feel calm, relaxed, and contented.⁹ For example, when a manager recommends a new approach that seems to be a good idea to all involved, the employees may say they support it without raising any questions.

This scenario might seem, on the surface, to be ideal. Indeed, when the change is simple and straightforward—not requiring initiative on the part of the change recipients—this turn of events creates no problems. However, when

organizational members passively accept a change, they often do not take steps to explore what the initiative will mean in practice. As a result, they do not raise questions, give feedback, or engage in troubleshooting that would help the new process be implemented effectively.^{9,18} In these cases, the initial rollout may appear to go smoothly and quickly, but unexpected problems may arise during the change's full implementation.^{9,19,20}

Illustrative Field Study. In 2007, researchers John McAvoy and Tom Butler described an attempt at organizational change within a team of programmers.²¹ The change was intended as a new approach to software development, in which team members would collect stories of software user experiences as a way of receiving feedback. Team members were initially quite enthusiastic about this idea.

However, the collection and use of user stories was more complicated than it first appeared. After reviewing some of the collected user stories, team members realized that sharing the views and opinions found in the user stories might create conflict within their team, forcing the group to discuss topics about which team members had significantly differing opinions.²¹ The team members became reluctant to discuss user stories. Some individuals even placed obstacles in the way of applying insights from user stories—for instance, by arguing that the

Table 1. Matrix of responses to change initiatives

	Passive behavior	Active behavior
Positive feelings	Recipients agree with the change without interrogating or discussing it; they feel calm, relaxed, and content. Although seemingly beneficial, this response can signal that change recipients have not had an opportunity to think through the practical consequences (and potential pitfalls) of a change.	Recipients proactively engage with the change, offering feedback and asking questions; they feel excited, elated, and enthusiastic. Feedback in these cases is often extremely valuable, as the recipients of the change are eager to see it succeed and want to actively facilitate the process.
Negative feelings	Recipients disengage from the change process; they feel despair, sadness, and helplessness. This response may signal employees' skepticism that managers will seriously attend to or engage with their perspectives and concerns. This reaction can predict problems not only for a change initiative but also within the organizational culture or for a given employee's relationship with the organization as a whole.	Recipients resist the change; they feel stressed, angry, and upset. Provided the recipients of change have the best interests of the organization at heart, this response—although confrontational—signals an opportunity for management to learn more about how to modify approaches to the change in ways that can significantly benefit the organization.

Note. Based on Figure 2 in "An Affect-Based Model of Recipients' Responses to Organizational Change Events," by S. Oreg, J. M. Bartunek, G. Lee, and B. Do, 2018, *Academy of Management Review*, 43(1), p. 70 (<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0335>). Copyright 2018 by Academy of Management.

stories needed more documentation than the project manager had initially thought necessary. Once team members started to encounter and acknowledge such difficulties, their commitment to the approach “effectively disappeared,” McAvoy and Butler noted.²¹ The team stated that this process “was not worth the effort,” even though, in theory, they continued to support the collection of user stories.²¹ Team members eventually reverted to their prior approach to software development, and the change initiative failed.

Change Proactivity

A positive, energetic approach to change is also possible.⁹ In these cases, employees and other change recipients support the change and foster its implementation. These individuals are generally eager to be engaged and provide feedback, which may lead to *breakthrough ideas*, or insights that emerge from asking important questions and applying the answers to carry out the change initiative.^{9,22} Such proactive responses promote successful change within the organization while also fostering interaction and collaboration between the people rolling out the change and those receiving it. People who react proactively in this manner are likely to express support for organizational change, defend it against attacks, and help develop it. Emotions related to change proactivity include excitement, elation, and enthusiasm.⁹

Illustrative Field Study. Two organizational researchers, Lotte Lüscher and Marianne Lewis, conducted a field study of a change initiative in the Lego Group.²³ The company was undergoing a comprehensive restructuring that would create self-managing teams at every level; this change would essentially eliminate the distinction between lower- and middle-level managers. The middle managers involved would need to find a way to understand and accept major changes in their managerial roles for the change to meet its objectives and thereby enable the new management structure to effectively replace the older one.

The Lego Company engaged Lüscher as a consultant. She conducted “sparring” sessions with the middle managers to help them work

“Disengaged employees may feel despair, sadness, and helplessness”

through and troubleshoot scenarios with this new management structure both before and after its introduction.²³ In these sessions, the managers identified challenges they experienced and examined dilemmas they could not easily solve. For instance, managers were concerned about being responsible for the results of teams that they needed to allow to function more independently than they had in the past.²³ Lüscher also helped them learn to allow leaders of the self-managing teams to work more autonomously while still requiring those teams to provide timely reports that enabled planning.²³ These exercises allowed the managers to develop strategies to address problems inherent in the organizational change rather than being paralyzed by these challenges.²³ Lüscher was helpful (and probably crucial) in encouraging the managers to be actively engaged in the process. As a result, the organization implemented the initiative smoothly.

Change Disengagement

In contrast to a passive, positive responder, who simply goes along with a change, a passive, negative responder quietly disengages from the change process. Disengaged individuals do not exhibit strong negative attitudes and may even appear to accept a change without actually doing so. Rather than complain or push back against the new proposal, they may take such actions as absenting themselves from discussions about a change, making errors, and dragging their feet at the implementation stage.^{9,24,25} Disengaged employees may feel despair, sadness, and helplessness.⁹ Compared with other employees, they tend to be more cynical²⁶ and feel more negatively about their job.^{26,27} Hood’s example of her own experience represents a type of change disengagement. Hood did not challenge the manager: Given her prior experiences with the company, she believed that an active response would not

succeed. She simply did not go along with the unethical change.

As is true with people who accept change passively, the limited feedback provided by people who are disengaged may lead managers to mistakenly assume that implementation of a change will go well. However, implementation may be difficult if it depends on the participation of these disengaged individuals.⁹ Change agents are often unable to determine the reasons for disengagement and so lose opportunities to improve the change they are trying to lead.

Illustrative Field Study. Timo Vuori and Quy Huy documented Nokia's attempts several years ago to develop touch screen phones to compete with Apple's iPhone.²⁸ Their study illustrates how managerial actions might lead to employee disengagement.

Their report revealed that prior to Apple's introduction of the iPhone, Nokia's top managers had information that the new product would feature a touch screen, which Nokia phones did not have.²⁸ Upper management told middle managers that touch screens needed to be included in Nokia phones. However, upper management did not share the strategic rationale for doing so, nor did they adequately explain to middle managers the importance of touch screens to the future success of Nokia phones. The top managers did not have strong technical competence themselves and were more concerned about external competitors and shareholders than they were about their middle managers or their subordinates, whom they assumed could be pressured into accomplishing what was wanted.

Thus, middle managers were focused on accomplishing the technical tasks without understanding their overall purpose.²⁸ These middle managers were afraid of upper management, because top managers at the company had a history of putting pressure on and responding very aggressively toward the middle managers. Vuori and Huy described the atmosphere as being one of fear.²⁸ One middle manager, they noted, "was typically open and clear, but in certain meetings [with higher-level

leaders], he became very quiet and when he spoke his voice was shaking."²⁸ Because of the culture of fear, the middle managers also were afraid of their colleagues in other units, so they never criticized others' ideas, wary of what would happen to them in response. Even when Nokia's middle managers knew that incorporating touch screens was proving difficult, they did not share this negative information with their top managers. Rather, they made over-optimistic promises that were ultimately unrealistic.²⁸ "Fearing top managers' immediate negative reactions, they remained silent or filtered information," Vuori and Hoy noted.²⁸ These responses gave top managers a distorted view of how Nokia was doing in response to the iPhone. The result of this dysfunction was that the company did not take the necessary steps to successfully deploy a touch screen phone.²⁸ Nokia's phones declined in quality and usability, product introductions ran late, the CEO was eventually dismissed, and these failings ultimately contributed to the decline and downfall of the company.

Change Resistance

Change recipients who have an active, negative response purposely set in motion forces that interfere with the successful implementation of change.^{9,29} The emotions associated with change resistance include stress, anger, and upset.^{9,30,31}

Change resistance can initially seem undesirable, and in the short term, it often is. Active resistance is likely to slow down the change process and perhaps disrupt it entirely.^{9,32} It can also lead to reduced commitment to the organization and to lowered perceptions of organizational effectiveness.³³ However, when resistance is not actively destructive, it can result in employees providing helpful feedback about the reasons a change may be problematic for its recipients. Some members resist organizational change because they desire to see the organization succeed and have legitimate concerns about a change. Therefore, in the long term, resistance may—if recognized and addressed—be helpful to the initiative.⁹ In this way, some forms of resistance can potentially result in proposals that foster the success of the

organizational change process.⁹ When change agents fail to recognize that change resistance is sometimes helpful, they squander an opportunity to use feedback from employees to adapt change processes in a constructive way.³⁴

Resistance to organizational change benefits an initiative most during the planning stage,⁹ allowing change agents to learn about potential problems and modify their approach to avoid them. Change resistance is much more problematic once implementation begins. Thus, finding ways to obtain feedback, including negative feedback, from change recipients early on is a powerful policy.

Illustrative Example and Field Study. Many timely examples of change resistance have come about because of policies linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the highly contagious novel coronavirus spread in early 2020, companies had to adapt to the pandemic in part by switching to primarily remote work arrangements. As vaccines became available and virus cases declined, leadership at some organizations began to announce transitions back to prepandemic modes of working, for example, by requiring employees to come back into the office five days a week. However, in certain cases, employees have pushed back against such initiatives, citing concerns about the continued spread of the virus or the benefits of more flexible work arrangements.³⁵ The responses of these individuals often illustrate thoughtful resistance to change initiatives.

An interesting field study of active resistance focused on members of an organization that is not a workplace but rather a religious organization, the Catholic Church. Betzaluz Gutierrez and her colleagues studied a case of resistance that was a response to a lack of organizational change that church members believed was crucial.³⁶ In 2002, the *Boston Globe* began to publish revelations that some Catholic priests had abused children and that some bishops had subsequently covered up these incidents. Many Catholics felt pain, anger, betrayal, and shock at this news, and church attendance dropped precipitously. Some people who considered themselves “concerned Catholics” formed a

group called Voice of the Faithful (VOTF). This group became a vehicle that gave lay Catholics a means of responding to the scandal, so as to take part in the church’s governance and alter “the passivity (among lay Catholics) that members came to see as a root cause of the abuse and cover-up.”³⁶ This group grew to about 20,000 members within a few months. Partly in response to VOTF’s prodding, Catholic bishops in the United States did eventually establish a charter for the protection of children. The members of VOTF felt that taking action “enabled them to become part of the solution in an embattled institution,” Gutierrez and her colleagues noted.³⁶

Recommendations for Managers

On the basis of our earlier discussion, we suggest three key ways that change agents, building on their understanding of responses to change, can best ensure a change initiative’s success:

Recommendation 1: Seek to Understand Not Only Whether Employees Approve or Disapprove of a Change but Also What Drives Their Response

The examples and case studies together reveal that for managers to fully benefit from responses to a change initiative, they need to understand how employees feel about the change, why employees feel that way, and what kind of response these feelings evoke. As our examples have indicated, employee feelings drive each of the different types of recipient responses to change.

Determining these drivers of responses to change may require thinking about an individual’s past behavior and context. Perhaps a quirk of personality is the reason behind an individual’s tendency to behave passively in many situations. Or an individual may have personal reasons for being withdrawn at work that have nothing to do with the organization or the change the organization is trying to make. Speaking directly with change recipients is essential if change agents are to get a better sense of where the recipients’ feelings are coming from; it is especially important when recipients’ responses are

change agents

Leaders and directors of organizational change

change recipients

Employees whose work processes are altered

50% to 80%

Change initiatives that ultimately fail

In Brief: How Managers Can Foster the Success of Change Initiatives

Recommendation 1: *Seek to understand not only whether employees approve or disapprove of a change but also what drives their response.*

- Determine the reasons for employees' responses to change so you may respond appropriately. Ask employees what they think and why.
- Think about each employee's response in light of larger circumstances—for instance, is this response typical of that employee's behavior, or is it symptomatic of larger cultural norms at the organization that need to be addressed?
- To practice perspective taking, consider yourself a recipient of a recipient's responses to change and explore the reasons for your own response. Think about what you might do differently on the basis of this experience to elicit active constructive feedback from employees.

Recommendation 2: *Strive to incorporate recipient feedback rather than spending energy trying to convert recipients' evaluations from negative to positive.*

- When seeking out the opinions of employees about a change, do not automatically reject or push against negative feedback.
- Seriously consider the merits of the employees' feedback (for example, with recommendation 1 in mind, think about whether the feedback comes from a desire to support the organization and its goals overall).
- Use employee feedback to make appropriate judgments about the change: Are there things that can and should be altered in the new initiative? Has the initiative's purpose been clearly communicated? How can the organization prepare for some of the problems that employees foresee?

Recommendation 3: *Focus on encouraging active responses—whether positive or negative—to change.*

- Make it clear in communication that you are seeking out and value diverse opinions on a new initiative.
- Develop structures and processes for employees to provide feedback about change. This step is particularly valuable after announcing a change and before it has begun in earnest, as employee responses can have a greater impact at this stage.
- Engage employees in implementing the change: People who feel they are shaping an initiative will be more likely to support its execution.

negative. When employees respond negatively to a change initiative because of their legitimate concerns about its viability and perhaps its ethics, managers need to weigh and act on their feedback.

Managers can use the feedback they receive as an opportunity to practice perspective taking. When they receive feedback, they essentially become recipients of a proposal for change and can reflect on this experience further. They can pay attention to how it feels to be on the receiving end of new ideas for how to do things. For example, does an employee's critical feedback make them feel upset? That response may provoke their own change resistance. What would it take to direct the energy of their response productively and engage with the employee's ideas? By asking such questions, managers can practice identifying their own emotional responses and consider how they might communicate current plans and future proposals to engage others in a productive, active way.

Recommendation 2: Strive to Incorporate Recipient Feedback Rather Than Spending Energy Trying to Convert Recipients' Evaluations From Negative to Positive

Several case studies we outlined have demonstrated the damaging consequences of failing to encourage and take into account feedback from change recipients. In these cases, leadership would have been wise to amplify and attend to negative voices rather than dismissing or disagreeing with them. This is because negative feedback can provide leaders with information and direction to improve a change initiative, and this information may be coming from people in the organization better positioned than the leaders to know about the problems a change initiative might be heading for. When managers seek opinions on a change, they gain the opportunity to identify and address valid concerns about an initiative and avoid potential pitfalls. Thus, rather than attempting to convert individuals to a positive viewpoint, managers should seek ways to gather a variety of different opinions and incorporate all types of recipient feedback into the change initiative.

In addition, change agents who attend to such feedback may discover that a negative response reflects a failure in their own communication. For instance, the change recipients may not understand an initiative's purpose or importance to the organization. To counter disengagement, then, managers in these cases could share their reasons for a given change. Although efforts such as increasing communication and modifying plans on the basis of employee feedback often take time, they can, when done well, lead to greater employee commitment to implementing the change and, ultimately, to greater success in reaching the goals of the. Eventually, a change initiative is likely to need buy-in from the people who will actually implement the changes. This end will be most easily accomplished when managers acknowledge their employees' initial concerns and encourage them to participate in shaping how an initiative is carried out.

Recommendation 3: Focus Primarily on Encouraging Active Responses—Whether Positive or Negative—to Change

Given that active responses to change, whether positive or negative, provide more feedback than passive ones, change agents should consider approaches that assist in shifting employee responses from passivity toward activity. For example, managers can hold meetings in which both those who evaluate a change positively and those who view it negatively are invited to air their perspectives—a move that signals interest in the expression of multiple viewpoints rather than a preference for positive feedback. This kind of managerial response would likely have fostered more successful change at Nokia.

Managers can sometimes inadvertently contribute to passivity. For instance, they may convey that they want employees to simply accept a proposal without taking time to scrutinize it. In some cases, managers may have a larger hurdle to overcome, as when employees are afraid to give voice to their concerns about a change initiative.²⁸ Managers should consider ways to reduce this fear. A key factor is allowing individuals to share their honest evaluations without fear of management retaliation.^{10,37} Managers could address this issue

“Managers can sometimes inadvertently contribute to passivity”

by communicating about the change in ways that give employees permission to disagree, providing opportunities to ask questions, creating a forum for offering feedback, or all of the above. Managers should also evaluate whether they can do more to express interest in employee concerns and viewpoints. When managers both provide vehicles for response and demonstrate that they take this feedback seriously, employees feel more motivated to share their ideas and feelings.

Managers can also tailor strategies for eliciting active engagement based on the feelings they perceive as driving responses, as suggested in recommendation 1. Further, when individuals need additional guidance to more fully understand a change, managers might engage in strategies similar to those described in the Lego case study.²³ A consultant who truly understands organizational processes can be particularly helpful in these cases. Giving employees a chance to talk through, spar with, and test-drive scenarios related to new processes and workflows will provide them with the opportunity to offer feedback and ask questions in a safe space.

As general guidance, we recommend that managers develop a structure and process for employees to provide feedback. For instance, regular meetings in which managers seek honest feedback from recipients could serve as a forum in which active responses to change are encouraged and shared. Once these structures and processes are in place, employees will be more likely to become actively engaged in the change initiative. Over time, as employees begin to feel that they have an influence on the change initiative, buy-in should increase and promote the successful implementation of the change. Therefore, managers should seek greater activation and engagement of recipients during a change initiative.

Summary & Conclusion

We have argued that the passive–active dimension of responses to change is likely more important than the positive–negative dimension. When change recipients respond with energy, it is easier for change agents to get feedback that supports both the likely success of the change at hand and the health of the organization as a whole. The field studies we have presented have shown that each type of employee response to change comes within a context—such as a culture of fear or an atmosphere in which only positive responses are

encouraged—that managers help to create. If managers are to foster change effectively, they need to understand how change recipients are responding to the managers’ actions and then react constructively to those responses. We hope that the examples and suggestions we have provided in this article will help steer the course of change in many organizations.

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