J Bus Ethics
DOI 10.1007/s10551-016-3311-7

Ethical Considerations and Change Recipients' Reactions: 'It's Not All About Me'

Gabriele Jacobs[1] · **Anne Keegan**[2]

Received: 22 December 2015 / Accepted: 21 August 2016

Abstract An implicit assumption in most works on change recipient reactions is that employees are self-centred and driven by a utilitarian perspective. According to large parts of the organizational change literature, employees' reactions to organizational change are mainly driven by observations around the question 'what will happen to me?' We analysed change recipients' reactions to 26 large-scale planned change projects in a policing context on the basis of 23 in-depth interviews. Our data show that change recipients drew on observations with three foci (me, colleagues and organization) to assess change, making sense of change as multidimensional and mostly ambivalent in nature. In their assessment of organizational change, recipients care not only about their own personal outcomes, but go beyond self-interested concerns to show a genuine interest in the impact of change on their colleagues and organization. Meaningful engagement of employees in organizational change processes requires recognizing that reactions are not simply 'all about me'. We add to the organizational change literature by introducing a behavioural ethics perspective on change recipients' reactions highlighting an ethical orientation where moral motives that trigger change reactions get more attention than is common in the change management literature. Beyond the specifics of our study, we argue that the genuine concern of change recipients for the wellbeing of others, and the impact of the organizations' activities on internal and external stakeholders, needs to be considered more systematically in research on organizational change.

Keywords Behavioural ethics · Change management · Change recipients · Change resistance · Deontic justice · Organizational change · Policing

> "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) After Virtue, p. 201".

Introduction

A vast number of theorizing and research works focuss on the management of organizational change. Changes of all kinds (e.g. mergers, acquisitions, reorganizations, continuous improvement initiatives, etc.) have provided a visible backdrop for day-to-day individual and collective experiences of work and organizational life in the past three decades. Everybody needs to be change-ready and change-resilient if they want to be part of the contemporary workforce (Abrahamson 2000; Huy and Mintzberg 2003). The change literature deals with context, content, process and outcomes at both the organizational (Rafferty et al. 2013) and individual levels (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999;

Gabriele Jacobs and Anne Keegan contributed equally and are listed alphabetically.

✉ Gabriele Jacobs
gjacobs@rsm.nl

Anne Keegan
a.e.keegan@uva.nl

[1] Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, Mandeville Building, T04-03, Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, 3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands

[2] Amsterdam Business School, University of Amsterdam, Plantage Muidergracht 12, 1018 TV Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Published online: 08 September 2016

Herold et al. 2008; Oreg et al. 2011), and recent years have seen a growing interest in the role of change recipients' reactions in organizational change processes.

The assumption that change agents try to determine 'how will I this get accomplished?' and change recipients try to figure out 'what will happen to me?' (Ford et al. 2008) is a widely shared one in research on managing planned organizational change (Kotter and Schlesinger 1979). It has inspired important studies in the rich field of research on change recipients (see Oreg et al. 2011; Rafferty et al. 2013) as well as produced some blind spots as leading commentators suggest. The prevalent tendency to describe change processes and their effects in overly linear, simplistic ways needs to be supplemented by a nuanced perspective on organizational change and to better account for the ambivalent nature of many change reactions (Bartunek et al. 2006; Maitlis and Sonenshein 2010; Piderit 2000). Scholars argue that a systematic understanding of the sources of ambivalent reactions of change recipients can improve change implementation (Ford et al. 2008). Given the managerial and theoretical relevance of better understanding of change reactions, it is surprising that empirical studies addressing this issue are still rare.

Most current conceptualizations of recipient's reactions ignore an essential source of ambivalence which is rooted in justice and moral arguments regarding the impact of change on others. The widespread assumption prevails that change reactions are mainly driven by self-interested motives. Job-level impacts of change (Herold et al. 2008), personal advantages (Holt et al. 2007) or the threat to power, prestige, and job security (Oreg 2006) are all typical factors in research on change reactions. This results in a focus on self-interested individuals requiring cajoling about the impact of change on 'me' and overlooking the possibility that they may have genuine and broader concerns about change processes. Even though scholars have advocated the relevance of a multilevel perspective on reactions to organizational change (Rafferty et al. 2013), researches into how losses and gains of colleagues and of organizational outcomes influence change reactions are still limited.

Research inspired by deontic justice (Folger 2001) stresses that individuals prefer to live in ethical social systems, that they value justice (also) for its own sake and that—at least—"from time to time, we do find ourselves caring about the lives of others" (O'Reilly et al. 2016, p. 171). While the organizational justice literature is largely unconcerned with ethical questions (for an exception, see Schminke et al. 2015), deontic justice explores the ethical value of a concern for justice and is interrelated with the behavioural ethics literature (Crawshaw et al. 2013; Folger et al. 2005; O'Reilly et al. 2016). There is broad empirical support for the importance of moral motives for organizational behaviour (e.g. Cropanzano et al. 2003; O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Schminke et al. 2015), yet the genuine concern for the wellbeing of others or the societal impact of the organizations activities (Dunford et al. 2015; Hansen et al. 2011) is not well recognized in research on organizational change.

Situations of organizational change are situations of high uncertainty and therefore trigger justice concerns (Brockner et al. 1994; Van den Bos and Lind 2002). Oreg and Sverdlik (2011) show that a source of resistance to change is when employees realize that they need to carry a higher burden for the change than their colleagues. Yet, evidence that change recipients do not only care about how they are treated, but also how their colleagues are treated, comes from the literature on downsizing operations. The decision to downsize and the company's treatment of downsized employees are not morally neutral incidents, but need to be judged in ethical terms (Van Buren 2000). Employees observe organizational reactions not only towards themselves, but also towards their colleagues (Van Dierendonck and Jacobs 2012). In times of major restructuring, 'survivors' lower their organizational commitment (Datta et al. 2010) as a reaction to the perceived injustice towards the 'victims' of downsizing (Skarlicki et al. 1998). Victims and survivors also consider the overall picture of the organization in order to assess downsizing operations. In cases where layoffs are perceived as purely driven by profit concerns, survivors are more inclined to react to unfair layoff-procedures with lowered organizational commitment than when the layoffs are perceived as occurring due to economic necessity (Van Dierendonck and Jacobs 2012).

These so-called third party reactions (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Skarlicki et al. 1998) present an interesting twist to the current discussion on change recipients' reactions. The third-party perspective allows us to go beyond the dyadic perspective (organization–employee, or change agent–change recipient) and to explicitly include the observation of the experiences of colleagues (De Cremer and Van Hiel 2006; Skarlicki and Kulik 2005). It also allows us to consider the role of recipients' perceptions of overall organizational gains and losses in forming reactions to organizational change (Lavelle et al. 2007). In an organizational change context, compared to a stable context, it is more likely that leaders cannot live up to their former commitments and are prone to violate psychological contracts (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Van Buren 2000). Employees are likely to observe violations of psychological contracts towards themselves, and also towards others. As a consequence of this, change recipients are also more likely to consider the broader organizational picture, to reflect on the organizational vision (Jacobs et al. 2006, 2008) and to search for deviations from the organizational goals and values during times of change.

Our main argument therefore is that the change recipient literature fails to acknowledge that employees might not only be self-interested in times of change, but may also be genuinely focussed on other- or organization-related outcomes, losses as well as gains. Based on findings from an in-depth qualitative study of change recipients in the German police, we argue in line with the ambivalence literature (Piderit 2000) that researchers need to focus more on the social setting of the change recipient as a source of multifocussed (me, colleagues, organization) observations of change. Based on our study, we propose that change recipients might resist (or embrace) change, not because it threatens (or enriches) them individually, but because change recipients worry about (or applaud) change effects as these relate to their colleagues or organizational outcomes.

Drawing inspiration from sensemaking (Weick 1995) and deontic justice (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011) perspectives, we add to the organizational change literature by proposing that moral explanations should be explicitly incorporated into change theories. According to these views, the social setting of organizational change acts as a rich basis for multifocussed observations (Lavelle et al. 2007) that emerge from interactions between change actors as change unfolds. The meaning that emerges from these interactions is based on foci of the change that all participants, not just change agents, bring forth for attention (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015; Thomas and Hardy 2011; Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009; Weick et al. 2005). Framing the social setting in this way might explain that change reactions are not 'all about me' but are perhaps a tapestry woven from observations about and genuine interest in what change means to me, to colleagues, and to the organization.

The Role of Others in Organizational Change Reactions: Is it All About Me?

Rafferty et al. (2013) show the relevance of group level and organizational level influence factors on individual reactions to change. At the organizational level, cognitive and emotional processes such as attraction–selection–attrition (Schneider 1987) suggest change can induce that people leave the organization, who perceive a misfit between their own personal characteristics and the new attributes of the changed organization. Studies have shown how organizational level charismatic leadership can facilitate a shared positive emotional reaction that elicits individuals to embrace change (Herold et al. 2008). The influence of social factors on the group and work-unit level has also been posed as an antecedent of reactions to change (Wanberg and Banas 2000). Drawing on social information processing theory, it is held that individual perceptions are shaped by thoughts and feelings expressed by others (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978). Social influences on change reactions have been studied including whether other colleagues and managers view the change as positive or negative overall. When an employee's social environment (i.e. colleagues, supervisors) tends to resist a change, the employee is also more likely to resist (Oreg 2006). Rumours in the workgroup (Isabella 1990) and emotional contagion (Sanchez-Burks and Huy 2009) influence individual responses to change and perceived experiences of colleagues are considered a cognitive and emotional influence factor on change recipients.

Still, a common assumption in these approaches is that change recipients assess change-related information from the self-directed utilitarian perspective of what it means for them personally, what it means to 'me'. This prevalence of the fundamental assumption that the ultimate goals of individuals are self-directed is not limited to organizational change research, but rooted in the history of ethics scholarship (Cropanzano et al. 2016). Instrumental and relational justice models assume that when change leads to the loss of colleagues during downsizing operations, recipient resistance is explained by the unwillingness of individuals to invest in new relationships (Liu and Perrewé 2005) or the potential threat to one's own position (Cropanzano et al. 2016). Fedor et al. (2006) argue that conceptualizations of change as broad initiatives, such as layoffs or reorganizations, actually mask the real effect change has on individuals, since it is mainly work unit and individual job level changes that represent change for individuals. Thus, "the change situation faced by employees is probably best represented by the new demands placed on employees' work units in conjunction with those demands affecting their own jobs" (p.7).

Findings from deontic justice research suggest that this may not be an accurate construction of how people judge situations. The way we observe others being treated in our immediate work setting or more distal setting of other organizational units, can enable and constrain positive cognitive and affective assessments of the organization (Dunford et al. 2015; O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Rodell and Colquitt 2009; Skarlicki and Kulik 2005). These studies extend the organizational justice debate, which had long explained the justice process exclusively from a utilitarian or social exchange perspective. Instrumental or interpersonal justice perspectives entail that people care about justice for instrumental reasons, because justice 'serves' the self beyond justice as such (Tyler and Lind 1992). The deontic justice approach suggests, however, that justice is valued in and of itself (Folger et al. 2005; O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Turillo et al. 2002). Proponents argue that people, in addition to self-directed interests,

sometimes have other-directed fairness as an ultimate goal. Evidence from neuroscience shows that employees can indeed be concerned with the plight and needs of others. Deontic justice judgements are heavily influenced by cognitive (understanding others' minds) and affective (experiencing others' pain) empathy of individuals. Moreover, individual differences in the scope and intensity of moral assessments of situations are reflected in neural differences among people (Cropanzano et al. 2016). Such findings indicate, that deontic justice is to a certain degree hard wired. The core argument, that there is a basis for human motivation, beyond that of self-interest, fits well with studies on morality and virtue as legitimate variables for organizational analysis (e.g. Cropanzano et al. 2001; De Cremer et al. 2010; Wright and Goodstein 2007). A deontic justice perspective suggests that observations rooted in the experience of 'others' provides information that can influence reactions to change even if the observations have no direct consequences, positive or negative, for the change recipient. Employees react favourably to fairness, even when they are disadvantaged by just decisions (e.g. Greenberg and Colquitt 2013; Turillo et al. 2002).

Broadening the Scope of Observations of Change Recipients: Inspiration from Sensemaking

Following Maitlis (2005) sensemaking is seen as a process of social construction, denoting efforts by members of an organization to interpret and create an order for occurrences (Weick 1995). A sensemaking view implies that members collectively construct and interpret the meaning of change to create a workable reality (Lüscher and Lewis 2008) that both enables and constrains further cycles of interaction about change and how it should be dealt with. Change recipients do not so much encounter social information in change processes as much as enact it (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Maitlis and Christianson (2014) argue that sensemaking should not be reduced to merely interpretation but also covers processes where actors' create and bring forth aspects of the environment for 'noticing' as well as for interpretation. This indicates that change recipients do not passively receive clear information on how others feel about change and react on this but *co-construct* the meaning of change (Thomas et al. 2011; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). The involvement of change actors in co-constructing meaning (Weick et al. 2005) exposes actors to narratives of change from multiple perspectives (Cunliffe and Coupland 2012) not all of which refract only individual level 'me' oriented views of change.

Change processes are multiauthored (Buchanan and Dawson 2007) where interaction in the social setting provides different 'lines of sight' to the change process (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015; Thomas and Hardy 2011) and different ways of observing and deriving meaning from change-related events. Based on this sensemaking inspired view, recipients are likely confronted with different, sometimes contradictory and complex interpretations of change from colleagues, the work group, and the broader organizational setting. The multifocussed nature of observations that recipients have of change processes supports those who challenge a view of recipients as mainly throwing up unreasonable obstacles in order to screw up well-orchestrated change endeavours (Ford et al. 2008; Thomas and Hardy 2011). Theorizing on recipients' reactions to change has broadened recently to consider the complexity of reactions and resistance (Sonenshein 2010) but while this perspective acknowledges tensions, it is still largely rooted in a 'what does it mean for me' perspective on change reactions.

We add to this discussion by showing that the mainly self-interested 'me' focus in the description of change recipients' reactions to change obscures complex reactions of change recipients rooted in multifocussed social observations and paradoxes that result. Employees make sense of their organization, by including observations on how external parties (such as customers, community members or the general public) (Dunford et al. 2015) and internal parties (e.g. colleagues and superiors) are treated (O'Reilly et al. 2016). The moral identity of employees (Aquino et al. 2009) can lead people to experience a relatively large circle of moral regard. This implies that employees consider under certain circumstances the moral implications of events for their direct colleagues, but also for the wider organization including its external stakeholder (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011). Due to the high likelihood of psychological and social contract breaches in times of organizational change (Van Buren 2000), moral sensemaking processes might be triggered, which encompass the implications of the change for a larger circle than just 'me'.

Police Stories: Making Sense of Change as a Recipient

We carried out this exploratory qualitative study in the German Police. We aim to contribute a novel and nuanced perspective on change recipients' reactions and in this way, improve theorizing on this important issue. While data generalizability is not typically the aim of exploratory qualitative research (Guest et al. 2006; Miles and Huberman 1994), the German police may be an exemplary setting (Eisenhardt 1989) for studying reactions to change given the different types of change projects occurring in the police context all over Europe since the rise of New Public Management in the 1980s. As such, the insights we

generate in this paper are potentially of relevance for other settings where change projects are common and effect large numbers of organizational members. It is also important that we consider change not only in large, private sector firms which tend to be over-represented in studies of important organizational phenomena at the expense of alternative contexts like public and voluntary sector organizations (Keegan and Boselie 2006). The number, scale and scope of projects reflect responses by leaders to new forms of crime (cross-border criminality, international terrorism and advanced forms of organized criminality) and pressures on the police force to operate with higher levels of efficiency, cost effectiveness and customer-orientation. It is important to point out that there was not one but rather many different types of (often overlapping) changes occurring when we studied these change projects.

Descriptions of Change Projects

We analysed recipients' reactions to large-scale change projects that ranged from the relatively focussed (e.g. restructuring of a department of about 400 employees) to the relatively broader and more ambitious (the reassignment of tasks or roles of police units on a countrywide basis). We asked respondents to describe the change projects and what they understood to be the goals of these change projects. The changes cover the typical forms of intervention in public sector organizations (Bejerot and Hasselbladh 2013) including political intervention, intervention by laws, regulations, audit and inspection, intervention by management and by rationalizing professional practice. Among the goals described by interviewees were the more effective handling of personnel resources, the introduction of more efficient work procedures, and the readjustment of organizational structures to suit a changing political and social environment. General themes included the desire for more 'cops on the beat'. In a context of shrinking resources and smaller budgets for public expenditure, this led to initiatives including the merger of police districts, the introduction of more flexible shift-work models, the decentralization of managerial tasks and creation of larger spans of control. A second commonly cited trigger for changes was the need for better knowledge sharing in the field of investigative policing which led to the introduction of shared service centres and greater specialization in police work. Other changes were initiated as a result of new laws created by the Ministries of the Interior leading to an increase in the proportion of positions within the police requiring higher-level educational qualifications impacting the career prospects of many incumbent police officers. This is the general setting for the study of recipients' reactions to change.

Data Collection

We considered only respondents who were clearly change recipients and not change agents. While recognizing the fluidity of social identities in organizational settings (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015), here we follow Ford et al. (2008) in defining change recipients as those responsible for implementing, adopting or adapting to changes which others, typically known as change agents, identify as necessary, and who define and specify the desired outcomes. The interviewees did not take part in defining the aims or goals of these projects or in policy discussions on the initiation of changes.

We recruited participants from a training centre for police officers deemed as high potentials for theoretical and practical reasons. Out of roughly 270,000 police officers about 150 are sent to the Police Leadership Academy by sixteen German states (Länder) and two federal police forces each year. The academy recruits officers from all over Germany and from every department and sector of the organization providing us access to people from across the organization who have participated in different change initiatives. This gave us access to respondents in one location to carry out face-to-face interviews that would be difficult to achieve in any other way. Police officers are drawn evenly from the various police organizations and represent an interesting cohort to study as they are themselves likely, 1 day, to lead change in the organization. Interviews were conducted in German, transcribed and analysed (by one of the authors, a native German speaker) in German. We asked every interviewee to select specific change projects to consider while answering our questions, projects in which they recently participated and we explored two broad themes in all of the interviews. Firstly, all interviewees were asked for their assessment of their focal change project(s) and if they thought it was successful or unsuccessful. The definition of (lack of) success was explicitly left up to the interviewees to avoid imposing any framing of success criteria on the interviewee. If their assessment overall was negative (or positive), we asked them to tell us what they saw, observed, or experienced that made them come to that assessment. We did not provide prompts as to what types of observations they should focus on, this was entirely up to them. In this respect, we align with others who suggest that theorists should explore how change recipients' understanding changes (Sonenshein 2010).

Data Analysis

Three of our respondents report two change projects, meaning that we analysed a total of 26 accounts of planned structural change projects from the perspective of 23

interview participants. We transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim and uploaded interview transcripts to Nvivo version 10 for analysis. An overall summary was made of each interview in German and professionally translated into English and used as a way of familiarizing ourselves with key aspects of the different change projects (Creswell and Miller 2000). Having analysed the summaries of the interviews and identified main themes through processes of inter- and intra-interview analysis, we then coded the original German transcripts line by line (Miles and Huberman 1994). We coded for every observation or experience that respondents offered as a basis for their assessment of the change as having been successful or not and these were translated from German into English. Wherever we felt the German expression did not have a direct equivalent in English we also retained the original German expression. This phase was highly inductive and iterative, involving multiple coding cycles, and resulted in an initial 98 separate codes covering observations made by interview participants in coming to their change assessments.

Results

We first categorized the data in terms of whether the interviewee assessed the change, from an overall perspective, as successful or unsuccessful. We then looked for reasons given. These covered issues pertaining to the individual change recipient, to others in their work environment (peers, managers) and to the impact on the organization including the impact on service quality and public perceptions. We coded both 'gains' and 'losses' that police officers observed from each of the three foci of me, colleagues and organization when describing why change projects were successful or successful. Then, using a process usually described as axial coding whereby data are put back together in new ways by making connections between categories (Corbin and Strauss 1990), we compared and contrasted all the coded utterances relating to the how change recipients made sense of change.

This process resulted in three broad themes and their related subthemes based the different observations made by the interview participants in terms of the impact of change on 'me', on 'colleagues and on 'work, organization and policing' and their overall assessment of the (lack of) success of the change project. We present these themes and subthemes in Table 1.

The main themes cover observations of the impact of change on 'me', 'colleagues, and 'work, organization and policing'. We added subthemes to capture the fact that when observing the impact of change on different levels, interviewees observed both losses and gains. Some general comments on the patterns in the coding are required before we discuss the themes in more detail. When distinguishing between the three foci 'me', 'colleagues' and 'organization' we are aware of the fact that these foci are typically nested. The 'me' is nested within the group of colleagues, and the 'colleagues' are nested within the organization. In our coding pattern, we referred to the main focus of the respective utterance. Thus, when the 'me' is explicitly considered, we coded this utterance as a 'me' observation; when the utterance is explicitly discussing consequences for 'colleagues', we coded this as a 'colleague' focus. In total, we coded seven pure utterances relating to 'impact of change on me' in terms of losses (five) and gains (two). We coded a total of 136 utterances relating to 'impact of change on colleagues' in terms of losses (99) and gains (37). Finally, we coded a total of 223 utterances relating to 'impact of change on work, organization and policing' in terms of losses (148) and gains (75).

Theme 1: Observing Impact of Change on 'Me': Losses

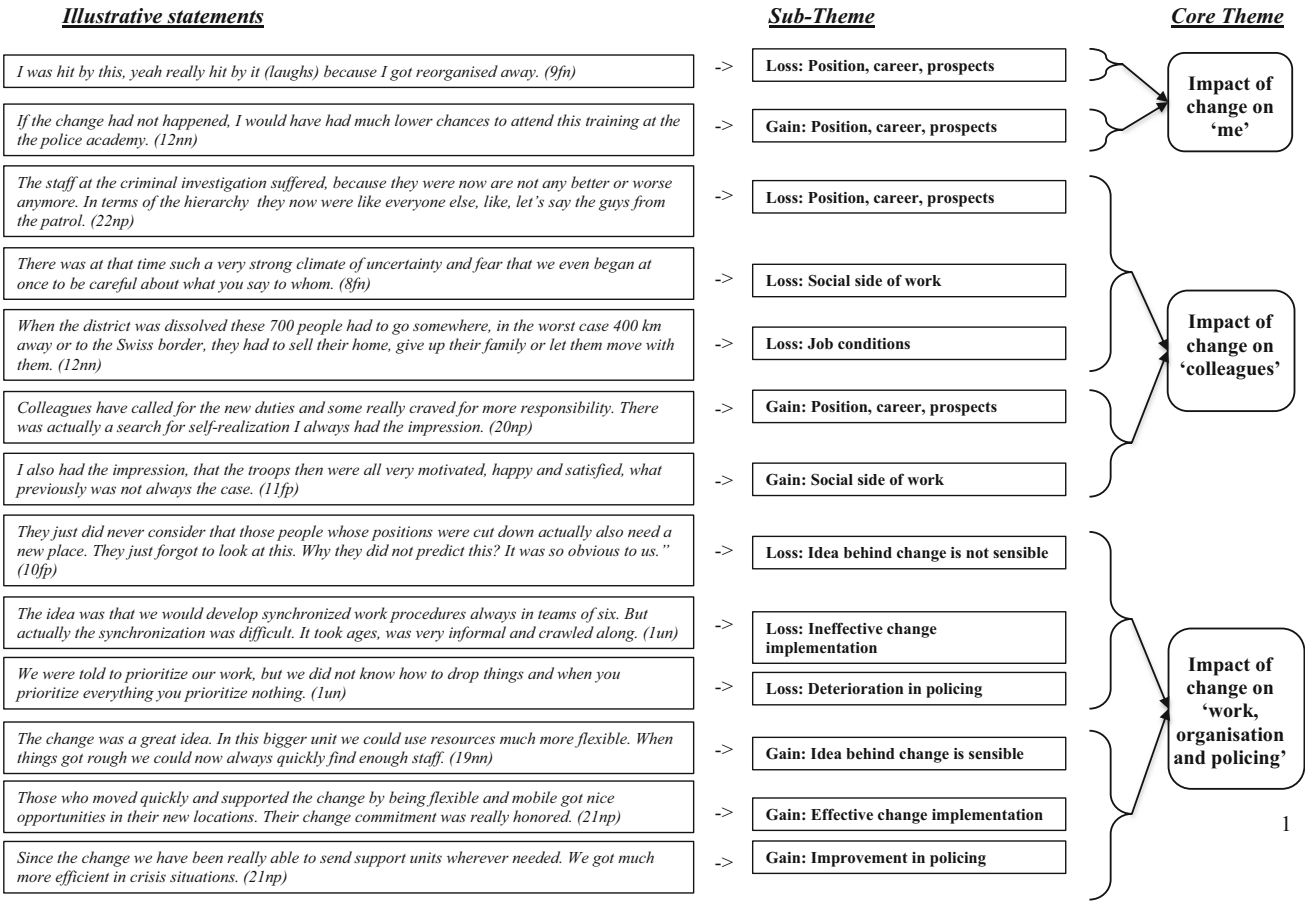
Coding data for what change means to the individual—to the 'me'—we observed that respondents described losses incurred as a result of change in terms of the impact of change on them personally. However, there are few cases among the total number of coded utterances where individuals described losses at the "me" level. We now describe the patterns in the "me" reactions.

The first subtheme refers to how change meant loss in the case of 'me' in terms of 'position, career, prospects' of the change recipient. For example, 'I had a position which did not exist anymore after the change' (13nn) is coded at the "me" level. A sub-subtheme of the 'Loss-me' subtheme builds the observations of the mixed impact of change on the individual, referring to both 'me' and 'colleagues' such as in these quotes where the 'me' focus is explicitly linked with 'colleagues': 'People who had been on the beat for 10 years, and were hoping to get criminal investigation tasks, had to give up on this dream and continue walking the beat. Actually this also happened to me. … and this destroyed a lot….The careers of people involved in the project have reached a dead-end because in the new position structure, old skills that they have are not needed anymore. This happened to people throughout the whole organization, but it also happened to me' (21np).

Observing impact of Change on 'Me': Gains

Our respondents also observe gains from the 'me' or a mixed 'me' and 'colleagues' focus. 'The career chances of those like me on the higher tracks increased since the

Table 1 Illustrative Quotes from Each Pattern



proportion of higher qualified people should be enhanced' (12nn).

Theme 2: Observing Impact of Change on 'Colleagues'

Observing Impact of Change on 'Others': Losses

By far the majority of the observations of loss for individuals as a result of the changes refer to what happened to 'colleagues', peers and managers and to their families. These observations pervade the data, and vivid examples are given in nearly all interviews. Coding for observations of loss to colleagues includes loss of positions, careers, prospects, status, feelings of belongingness, or predictability and convenience of work routines and practical issues such as commuting distance. We coded these to a number of subthemes. The first subtheme covers losses in terms of 'position, career, prospects': 'Leadership positions were taken away. People lost their status and positions and former tasks. This led to serious frustration, which sometimes manifested in open complaints. These people were put on lower hierarchical positions. Suddenly they found themselves in positions they had had years before. This was a clear demotion, not in salary but in tasks and status. People were sent into personal crisis' (10fp). Coding for observations of 'losses of colleagues' also showed the impact of change on people's feelings of belongingness and social aspects of working. We aggregated data coded on these dimensions into subtheme two on the 'social side of work': 'Many people were dissatisfied'. (Interviewer: 'How did you see this?'). 'Just those things that were previously typical for what you do in your work unit, such as togetherness, sometimes sitting together in the evening, just these social things. Now people just worked-to-rule. And even admitted it'(13nn).

We also identified observations relating to the impact of change on others with implications for more practical aspects such as commuting distance to work, work-life balance, predictability of rosters. We coded observations of this nature and aggregated these codes into the subtheme 'job conditions'. For example: 'Now the shift rota is very

driven by work needs….so if there is an incident I call my people to come in. We have 4 week planning ranges but this can be changed within an hour. Well, my colleagues who are fathers and mothers, this is seriously impacting their lives' (20np).

Observing Impact of Change on 'Colleagues': Gains

Observations supporting the general assessments as to whether change achieved its goals also relate to the gains for others. The first subtheme-related gains for colleagues 'position, career, prospects': 'Many colleagues now had the opportunity to take over other areas. Now they could cover different and new areas. Most of my colleagues took this as something very positive' (3un). Gains for colleagues were also observed in terms of the quality of the social environment at work. These observations relate to gains in terms of the 'social side of work': 'The spirit was positive and motivated. People liked it and felt better, since they also had more colleagues to help them with all the operational tasks' (11fp).

Theme 3: Observing the Impact of Change on 'Work, Organization and Policing'

Observations supporting the general assessments of change also relate to the impact of change on 'Work, Organization and Policing'. We coded more data relating to observations with this focus than at the first two levels. These observations relate to observations of what change means for policing, for standards of service to citizens, for the quality of work and for implementation aspects of change. As with the first two broad themes, the observations here also relate to the impacts of both losses and gains observed by change recipients to result from change processes.

Observing the Impact of Change on 'Work, Organization and Policing': Losses

We coded data at four subthemes. Subtheme 1 aggregates data coded for observations of losses in terms of Work, Organization and Policing: 'Idea behind change is not sensible': 'Really, I never got this. When you do a reorganization, why do you not first get a clear picture of the current situation and then of the situation you want to move to? Only then you can say this is a success or not. It drove us crazy that there were never clear numbers about the current situation' (14nn). Subtheme 2 relates to observations of losses as a result of 'ineffective change implementation': 'The internal goals clashed with each other. One goal was to handle the change in a socially adequate way, the other one to do the change as effectively as possible. But many of those people who needed to get positions for social reasons just did not have the expert knowledge, e.g. for airport or railway police. Sometimes up to 50 % of the new personnel was just not able to work since they were missing expert knowledge' (24np).

The data shows that losses were perceived to flow from the change, whether it was assessed overall as successful or unsuccessful, because the change led to alterations in work, organization and policing which were inferior to the local practices that employees already had. These changes being pushed through led to poor implementation. At subtheme 3, we aggregated data coded for losses in terms of work, organizing and policing that arise from 'deterioration in policing': 'We were asked to prioritize work and there I am not always sure if we took the right decisions. Just to give an example, we could say that we do not have a big problem with right-wing terrorism, and therefore we do not focus so much on this. Instead we focus on other topics and do them on a high quality level. Still, this means that we would neglect right wing terrorism just to name something' (4up).

Observing Impact of Change on 'Work, Organization and Policing': Gains

Respondents also observed the gains associated with changes in terms of their impact on work, organization and policing. We gather data coded on these observations at three subthemes. The first related subtheme for 'gains work, organization and policing' is 'idea behind change is sensible' and gathers the data coded for observations by change recipients that the change makes sense and is well conceived: 'I feel the police education reform was really needed. We worked much better in this more modern and better system which is quite close to any school or university system and we had to get rid of this old, very closed system which had come long ago from paramilitary structures' (14nn). A second subtheme relates more closely to observations made that the change was implemented well by change agents and that the correct decisions were taken during the change implementation processes which improved police work and organization. This is subtheme 2: 'Effective change implementation': 'The right signals were sent. It was clearly not to your disadvantage to be flexible and mobile. Those who had to be pushed on their chair out of the office were not the winners. And I think this is right. When you are as flexible as a steel rod you do not belong in this job anyway' (7fn). A final subtheme used to aggregate data coded for observations of gains for work, organization and policing is subtheme 3: 'improvements in policing'. This subtheme emerged as very important in the data and we coded many observations here (53 of our 75 positive utterances in this theme): 'The improvements are straight forward and for everybody to see. The

investigative police can now focus on major crime. But the uniform police can now also handle more interesting cases, not always only the easy and not promising ones. And for the public it is also easier. When I report a burglary, I can now be sure that the whole case will be handled at the same station. Our work quality really improved on many levels' (15nn).

Making Sense of Change: Mixed Reactions, Ambivalence and a Focus on the Other

In Table 2, we summarize the intra-interview patterns of how respondents observed the consequences of organizational change in terms of losses/gains by focus. We show the multidimensional pathways through which our respondents narrated their experiences of the change as achieving its goals or not, and as rooted in observations in terms of the 'me', the 'others', and 'work, organization and policing'. As Table 2 shows, when assessing change outcomes, change recipients consider information from several foci, reactions are not always clearly positive or negative and it is never simply 'all about me'.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that recipients' assessments of change are rooted partly in ethical considerations of change whereby gaining from the change personally, while colleagues suffer and the organization deteriorates, or vice versa, leads to ambivalence. Ambivalent employee reactions have been acknowledged in the literature as important sources of constructive criticism in times of change (Eisenhardt 2000; Ford et al. 2008; Ford and Ford 2010; Sonenshein 2010). A thorough understanding of the sources of ambivalence, and the importance of ethical considerations as one of these sources, is important for two reasons. First, organizations can only appropriately address ambivalence when they understand the sources and motivations behind it and second, ambivalence can provide valuable insights on how change recipients both understand and implement change (Oreg and Sverdlik 2011).

Our interviewees draw on observations of losses and gains, at times simultaneously from different foci, to assess change outcomes. They observe colleagues and the organization and themselves suffering, sacrificing and losing out alongside observations of colleagues, the organization and themselves gaining, winning and experiencing improvements as part of these change projects. However, the focus is rarely if ever on losses and gains exclusively in terms of the impact on 'me'. The way change recipients assess change rather represents ambivalence as defined by Eisenhardt as 'both positive and negative (as well as intended and unintended) outcomes for employees and organizations' (2000: 703) and described by Piderit (2000) as cognitive and emotional responses to change. Change is observed as *simultaneously* delivering losses and gains whether or not it is perceived overall as successful or unsuccessful, and this is a tension that pervades these accounts by police officers.

Our respondents were generally in agreement that the beneficial effects of organizational change always come with costs and negative outcomes, while change that they assess as unsuccessful is seen as delivering benefits at different levels for different parties: 'What would be different when the project would have been perfect?' (Interviewer) 'I don't know, I have never seen an ideal change project in my life. What do we do with your question now? (laughs)' (22np).

Though theorizing on recipients' reactions to change and sensemaking about change has developed substantially in recent years (Sonenshein 2010), the complexity we observed in the data seems to go beyond prior findings. Theorists take into consideration ambivalence based on differences between reactions that are rooted in cognitive as opposed to emotional responses of individuals (Piderit 2000), the conflict between dispositional and attitudinal orientations (Oreg and Sverdlik 2011) and consider reactions that are based on multilevel analysis by recipients (Rafferty et al. 2013) or sensemaking that is based on different, opposing narratives of change (Sonenshein 2010). Our findings suggest that most of the change recipients in our study also make sense of change based on ethical considerations, namely their observations and experiences of the impact of change—in positive as well as negative ways—on themselves, but to an even greater extent on 'colleagues' and on general issues of work, organization and policing.

On the few occasions that interviewees discussed their assessment of change as successful or not by drawing on observations and experiences of personal losses and gains, they did not clearly separate themselves from the surrounding social context. When the 'me' did come into play, it was often only in relation to colleagues. The questions about "what did you observe" did elicit highly detailed and vivid responses about the impact of change on others and for work and the organization. A possible explanation for the emphasis on 'colleagues' and 'the organization', in line with the deonance argument (Turillo et al. 2002), is that police officers were genuinely impacted by the losses and gains of their colleagues, managers or subordinates, even when these observations did not provide information that impacted directly on the change recipient themselves. Observations that people lost their positions, had their careers suddenly truncated, had family difficulties, or became depressed, may have challenged the officers' sense

Table 2 Overall assessments and observations rooted in core themes

Interviewee	Overall assessment of change	Impact of change on me		Impact of change on others		Impact of change on work, organization and policing	
		Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains
1un	Negative			Position, career, prospects		Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Improvement in policing
2un	Negative			Social side of work		Idea behind change is not sensible; Ineffective change implementation	Improvement in policing
3un	Negative			Position, career, prospects; Social side of work	Position, career, prospects	Idea behind change is not sensible; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible
6fn	Negative			Job conditions		Ineffective change implementation	Improvement in policing
7fn	Negative			Job conditions; Social side of work		Ineffective change implementation	Effective change implementation; Improvement in policing
8fn	Negative			Social side of work		Ineffective change implementation	Effective change implementation
9fn	Negative	Position, career, prospects (me)		Position, career, prospects		Ineffective change implementation	Idea behind change is sensible; Effective change implementation
12nn	Negative	Position, career, prospects (mixed me and other)	Position, career, prospects	Position, career, prospects; Job conditions	Position, career, prospects	Idea behind change is not sensible; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
13nn	Negative	Position, career, prospects (me).Position, career, prospects (mixed me and other)		Job conditions; Social side of work		Idea behind change is not sensible; Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Improvement in policing
14nn	Negative			Position, career, prospects		Idea behind change is not sensible; Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
15nn	Negative			Position, career, prospects	Social side of work	Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
16nn	Negative		Position, career, prospects	Job conditions; Social side of work	Position, career, prospects	Idea behind change is not sensible; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible
17nn	Negative			Social side of work		Deterioration in policing	Improvement in policing

Table 2 continued

Interviewee	Overall assessment of change	Impact of change on me		Impact of change on others		Impact of change on work, organization and policing	
		Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains
18nn	Negative			Position, career, prospects; Social side of work	Position, career, prospects; Social side of work	Ineffective change implementation	Idea behind change is sensible; Effective change implementation
19nn	Negative				Position, career, prospects	Idea behind change is not sensible	
4up	Positive			Social side of work		Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Improvement in policing; Idea behind change is sensible
5up	Positive			Social side of work	Social side of work	Idea behind change is not sensible	Idea behind change is sensible
10fp	Positive			Position, career, prospects		Idea behind change is not sensible	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
11fp	Positive			Social side of work	Social side of work	Ineffective change implementation	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
20np	Positive			Job conditions	Position, career, prospects	Deterioration in policing; Idea behind change is not sensible	Improvement in policing
21np	Positive	Position, career, prospects (mixed me and other)		Position, career, prospects; Social side of work	Social side of work	Ineffective change implementation; Idea behind change is not sensible	Effective change implementation; Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing
22np	Positive			Position, career, prospects		Idea behind change is not sensible; Deterioration in policing	Improvement in policing
23np	Positive					Ineffective change implementation	Effective change implementation
24np	Positive			Job conditions; Social side of work	Social side of work; Position, career, prospects	Ineffective change implementation	Effective change implementation
25np	Positive			Social side of work; Job conditions		Idea behind change is not sensible; Ineffective change implementation; Deterioration in policing	Idea behind change is sensible

Table 2 continued

Interviewee	Overall assessment of change	Impact of change on me		Impact of change on others		Impact of change on work, organization and policing	
		Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains	Losses	Gains
26np	Positive					Idea behind change is not sensible; Ineffective change implementation	Idea behind change is sensible; Improvement in policing

of justice even if there were no obvious short or long term implications anticipated for the change recipient themselves.

More generally, the patterns in our data may reflect the idea that the observation of suffering might trigger justice cognitions, such as severity of harm and deservingness (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011). Positive accounts on the organizational punishment of people who did not support sensible change initiative's supports this interpretation. Our respondents were not automatically grieving with colleagues who encountered personal losses, but accounted for the severity of the harm (e.g. moving location, or less desirable working conditions which were weighted against change reasons and goals), the attribution of blame (e.g. are the change goals justifiable?) and for the deservingness. For example, employees applauded that a lack of flexibility and willingness to accept personal costs for organizational improvements was sanctioned by the organization.

Our findings are in line with fairness theory (Folger and Cropanzano 2001), which states that the sensemaking of losses (own or other) inflicted by an authority is informed by three considerations, namely (1) comparing the current state of well-being to potential other states, (2) elaborating if the authority had other feasible options and (3) if the event violated moral or ethical standards. The multidimensional and multifocus sensemaking of losses and gains of our interviewees can be interpreted as an attempt to find answers to these three questions. Interviewees interpreted negative work behaviour of colleagues (like working-to-rule) as ethically adequate when they felt that the change pressure on them was not appropriate, if the change procedure was not considered as fair or if the overall goals did not make sense to them. In other cases, change recipients came to the conclusion that sensible change ideas can morally legitimate social losses and short-term deteriorations in organizational performance.

Considering this ethical dimension is therefore especially important given the large amount of change-induced losses reported in our interviews, since ethical considerations are mainly triggered by the observation of potential mistreatments or organizational decisions with negative consequences (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; van den Bos and Lind, 2002). Our data provides some clues that the social costs of change are potentially very high if we consider that each and every colleague negatively affected by a change process has in turn many colleagues observing her or his pain. From this perspective, the effects of social losses are easily multiplied and extend far beyond any one change recipient to others who may actually not directly lose out because of the change, or may even personally benefit from the change (Skarlicki and Kulik, 2005; O'Reilly et al. 2016). These are the types of losses that may be obscured by a focus on change recipients that looks too one-sidedly at personal losses and gains from change processes.

Observed gains and losses of colleagues and the observation that change implementation might violate fairness standards or lead to a deterioration in policing fuelled concerns about the change process and also reports on resistance. This finding indicates that change resistance also needs to be considered as a form of third-party punishment (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011). The change recipients in our study did not have high position power, since they were not in charge of the change process themselves. However, they had high resource power, given that change processes are largely dependent on the commitment and enactment of employees (Ford et al. 2008; Rafferty et al. 2013). In the face of the suffering of colleagues and the concern that external stakeholders (e.g. the public) might get poor outcomes, change recipients might be inclined to resist the change out of solidarity with the change victims. Such complexity suggests that we need to develop greater awareness and understanding of 'net reactions to change' if we want to predict how people will react to and behave in response to change or how they will be impacted on by change. Furthermore, as reactions to change cover different foci, it is likely that there is moral dynamism in these reactions and they change throughout the process in response to sensemaking in terms of losses and gains, and focus on me, colleagues or the organization generally.

We interpret the data as suggesting a strong focus among our interviewees on the broader work environment and the impact of change on organizational performance.

One explanation for this is that perceptions of deterioration in organizational performance or the quality of work can undermine the change recipients' identification with the policing profession or organization (Lavelle et al. 2007). Negative change-related outcomes of this nature are hard to detect but may be quite salient when it comes to understanding why people support change in their organizations or not. We also saw from the data on personal losses that while job loss was not common due to employment protection legislation in the German police, loss of status, position and hopes for better career prospects did occur leading perhaps to a more silent type of suffering with negative effects for the social environment of unhappy demotivated colleagues and leaders. Such negative outcomes from change may also be harder to detect in standard studies of recipients' reactions to change because these are not direct impacts on change recipients but rather indirect effects on those in the social setting.

We observe that change recipients may be clear in their perception of what the change means to them personally (loss/gain), but still observe that the change process is beneficial or damaging for colleagues and/or the organization or policing more generally. These colleague- and organizationally-rooted observations may explain, wholly or partially, change reactions, even when personal loss/gain is only one outcome of a change process. As far as we know, this particular type of ethical complexity has not been discussed in the change recipient's reactions to change literature and represents a potential contribution. We need to consider the interactions of ambivalence at the personal level and ambivalence rooted in observations of what change means for me, colleagues and the organization, suggesting a far more complex scenario underpinning change reactions than is usually assumed in studies of reactions to change whether addressing change resistance, readiness or commitment.

The policing context we studied may be a special case, because police officers rely heavily on 'colleagues' not only for work successes, but also for their own safety (Manning 1997). We saw many instances in the data where the social setting was negatively affected by change, and where colleagues were seen to be damaged by change projects. It may be that change recipients felt their own personal safety was lessened to a much greater extent than when they themselves personally lost something in the change process. The reliability of colleagues' reactions is important in the uncertain and unsafe situations police officers find themselves in as part of their daily work routines. Yet, the importance of colleagues is not only relevant in the policing sector. Similar dynamics can be observed among fire fighters, miners or workers in the energy and transport sector. All of these work settings have high-level safety implications. Having said that, while acknowledging the police is an extreme case of work interdependence where issues of safety and security are paramount, we suggest that the change consequences for others are likely more relevant and more influential for all change recipients than currently recognized by the change literature. Perhaps, all posturing aside, it really is not all about me.

Simplistic accounts of positive or negative reactions to change are not supported by our case study. When change reactions are ambivalent at an intra-psychological level (Piderit 2000), and also in terms of different foci (impact on me, colleagues, the organization), what reactions determine how people ultimately act or behave? What reactions have lasting effects, and what more generally are the temporal aspects of how these reactions emerge and unfold over time, both during and after the change project? We believe such complexity requires further theorization so that the different factors influencing how organizational members charged with implementing change can be understood in terms of the richness of these factors firstly, and as a basis for further studies of how these different factors co-mingle, are weighted by change recipients, and how these unfold dynamically and processually over time. Interconnecting the study of organizational change with the field of behavioural ethics is a much warranted, but so far neglected avenue to further our understanding of the successes and failures of organizational change.

Finally, our data suggest that change recipients commented on various very specific issues concerning the content of the change and the implementation of the change. Respondents' stories of this aspect of change suggest that the rather paternalistic tone of work on change recipients, tending to treat recipients rather as children who should listen to elders who know best (Ford and Ford 2010; Ford et al. 2008), might frame change recipients in a way that represents a missed opportunity for those responsible for planning and designing change processes. Change recipients consider a broad moral scope, including their colleagues, the organization and external stakeholders. The change recipients in our study were deeply involved in the work of their organizations, and they appear to have observed their surroundings intensely during change projects. These change observations need to be taken seriously as change processes are being 'rolled out' because they can potentially provide valuable information about opportunities and obstacles for implementing change. Rather than sanctioning only formal information flows (Bordia et al. 2004) change leaders should facilitate the emergence of socially embedded understandings of change that emerge as organizational members interact and begin to see the consequences of change as it is being implemented.

We are not advocating that every aspect of resistance should be celebrated nor that resistance needs to be

demonized (Thomas and Hardy 2011), rather we are arguing that these broader other focussed and organization-related observations are rooted in a proximity to practical and social factors that seriously impact on the chances of a change process succeeding. Such local knowledge is needed, since change agents have only limited insights into daily work routines. Change reactions generally, and resistance specifically, may arise from the superior 'line of sight' change recipients have to implementation aspects of change. The change recipients we interviewed experienced change processes at close quarters and expressed the finely grained and often ambivalent nature of these change processes that simultaneously created and destroyed thus unleashing effects that were complex and multifaceted especially to their leaders, the change agents who operated at a distance from the change setting. A sensemaking perspective suggests that change is becoming (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). As such, reactions to change also unfold as new and potentially ambivalent facets are revealed through personal interactions in the workplace and sharing of experiences as well as the testing of personal theories about what is going on, and what it means for me, for us, and for the organization. Sensitivity to these insights from knowledgeable, well-informed and morally reflective change recipients should perhaps be a core part of research studies as this could further enhance our understanding of the complex nature of change processes.

Limitations and Future Research

Our exploratory, qualitative study, like all studies, has limitations which are important to acknowledge. Firstly, we only focussed on one specific context, the police context which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, going beyond the usual focus on large, private sector firms in studies of important organizational phenomena is important. Bamberger and Pratt (2010, p. 666) argue that it is "often only by venturing outside of the monastery that management researchers can observe or gain exposure to phenomena or relationships playing under-recognized or unrecognized roles in shaping taken-for-granted intra- or interorganizational dynamics". We started our study with a classic organizational change perspective and were struck by the different picture we encountered in the policing context. We realized however that we could embed, support and explain the findings we got with management theory that was developed mainly in private sector settings while potentially enriching it with emerging insights in this policing context. There are also good ethical arguments for conducting research outside the "happy few" organizations (Keegan and Boselie 2006) to make sure that we blend insights from multiple contexts (Feldman 2005; Kelman 2005). All this suggests the need for cross fertilization between what we know from mainstream change theories. We can blend insights from other less well-studied contexts to build overall more robust theories that serve more than private sector contexts. Public organizations have great visibility and symbolic importance for organizations' ethical standards and the trust we have in the societies in which we live.

The police sector also has much in common with other sectors where safety and security lead to high levels of interdependence. In these contexts, the impact of colleagues' experiences is also likely to play a role in overall assessments of change. The police context is one in which the meaning of work plays a crucial role. Assessments of the impact of change on the organization in general played an important role for our participants. This may also be the case for other organizations where the mission of the organization is a crucial aspect of the meaningfulness of work for its members.

A second limitation is that we looked at only one type of change, namely large-scale, planned organizational change where employees typically have no voice, limited opportunity to participate, and are also, only to a very limited extent, able to either resist or support the change. It is very possible that other types of changes, such as cultural, more incremental or very local, highly participative change projects, produce different types of recipient sensemaking. However, as our aim is to contribute a more nuanced perspective on change-related ambivalence and ethical aspects of change assessments, we think these issues may be as relevant for other types of change.

A third limitation is that we selected a specific cohort for our interviews, namely change recipients, recruited into a high potential group at the police leadership academy. These change recipients might have a biased (positive) attitude towards their work and stronger capacities for understanding a managerial perspective, when compared to the average change recipient. Given this, we were struck by the prevalence of negative descriptions, and also the intense personal descriptions these recipients gave of suffering and gains, mainly of their colleagues.

A fourth limitation is that we report interview data drawn from interviewees' accounts of previous involvement in change projects which creates difficulties with recollection (Alvesson 2003). Longitudinal studies involving real-time participant observation and data collection will be valuable in surfacing emergent reactions to change and locating these in organizational aspects that shape sensemaking processes so that richer insights can be generated than we are capable of with this type of data (Oreg et al. 2011). Having said that, our access to participants in many different types of large-scale planned change projects taking place in a police organization

undergoing massive transformation can provide valuable insights, which we hope we have demonstrated.

Whether the 'other' and 'organization' oriented sensemaking is genuine, or simply what interviewees described retrospectively as part of their image management (Alvesson 2004) or based on social desirability motives, is something we cannot answer with this data. Self-interested motives can emerge in several ways, next to self-congratulation, the concern that 1 day he or she will be a victim of a change process (Cropanzano et al. 2016) can trigger self-centred motives to resist change. Given the finding that there are far more utterances that cover losses than gains, one explanation for the strong focus on 'colleagues' and 'the organization' may be that people find it easier to talk about what colleagues or the organization lost as a result of change processes rather than to refer to what they lost themselves. Within this context of police work, ego defence mechanisms may provide an explanation, whereby it is easier to divulge feelings of loss indirectly than directly may provide an explanation (Lazarus 2000). In the masculine policing context, we studied for example (Fletcher 1996) where personal suffering is not really considered newsworthy but just part of the job (Van Maanen 1978) as with many 'hard job' work cultures (Collinson 1992), respondents may simply not have been willing to discuss the impact of change on 'me' as there is little discursive space for talk about what 'I' lost.

The limited number of cases we analysed limits the generalizability of the study, and while generalizability is not our main aim (Miles and Huberman 1994; Guest et al. 2006), future studies of larger numbers of cases might be valuable for confirming the emergent patterns we have surfaced in this in-depth exploratory study. However, the number of interviews we undertook conforms to the best practice in qualitative research where saturation of theoretical codes is important (Guest et al. 2006), and the transparent steps we took in coding and interpreting the data may provide a basis for future researchers to build on and confirm the patterns we have described regarding ambivalence and ethical aspects of change recipients' reactions.

Finally, our data clearly suggest that when reacting to change, change recipients consider information at several different levels. What clearly needs further research is the question how recipients of change arrive at an overall assessment or weighting of change based on this multidimensional pattern of sensemaking and observations pertaining to different levels. When and why do observations of losses at the organizational level weigh more heavily than observations of gains at the individual level? We are not able to answer this question on the basis of this study, but think it is an issue that does warrant attention in future research.

Conclusion

As organizational scientists, we do not do enough justice to the messy, highly complex, often painful and demotivating, often joyful and inspiring ambivalent realities of change processes. We do not systematically consider multiple contexts when studying change, and often fail to blend insights from different types of organizations to build more robust, context sensitive theories. On the one hand, the importance of abstraction and complexity reduction to create meaningful theories is evident. On the other hand, to do justice to the complexities we encountered in our field context, we have to take seriously the importance of telling a more complete and contextualized story about recipients and organizational change. How change recipients make sense of and evaluate change is a critical aspect of understanding how planned organizational change unfolds. In their assessment of change, an important but unexplored question is whether change recipients are also driven by ethical considerations, and do they genuinely consider the pain and joy of their colleagues and the overall losses or gains in terms of organizational outcomes? As knowledgeable organizational participants, change recipients may disagree with change projects that lead to deteriorations in their career prospects and still care about change and want it to succeed because they believe it will lead to better policing. They may dissent and at the same time be deeply committed, and may personally lose or gain from change and still find it simply morally not justifiable because of the effects of change on their colleagues and on the organization.

Reactions to change may be far more ambivalent and multidimensional, than considered in the current literature. Change recipients' reactions to change are based on observations about change effects on the person themselves, their colleagues and others, and the work and organizational outcomes change recipients observe throughout the process. We conclude therefore by proposing that ambivalence extends beyond self-interested psychological reactions to change, but encompasses reactions that are rooted in conflicting meanings assigned to change based on what it means to me, to others, and to the organization. Acknowledging the complexity and ethical import of change recipients' reactions to change is essential to telling a more complete story and relies on recognizing that it is certainly not 'all about me'.

We started with a quote suggesting that we live our lives also as part of the lives of others. In line with this thought, we suggest that the change literature must add to the question 'what will happen to me?' the questions 'what will happen to my colleagues, and what will happen to my organization?'

Acknowledgments First of all, we like to thank the German Police University (DHPol) and our respondents from within the police for their openness towards this research and their generous support and time investment. We are indebted to Robert Chia, Gail Whiteman, Wim Van der Voort and Dieter Wehe for their valuable and important comments on earlier versions of this article. Also, we are grateful to our action editor Harry J. van Buren and two anonymous reviewers whose constructive suggestions helped us to improve this work.

References

Abrahamson, E. (2000). Change without pain. *Harv Bus Rev, 78*, 75–81.

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: a reflexive approach to interviews in organisational research. *The Academy of Management Review, 28*, 13–33.

Alvesson, M. (2004). *Knowledge work and knowledge-intensive firms*. Oxford: OUP.

Aquino, K., Freeman, D., Reed, A., II, Lim, V. K., & Felps, W. (2009). Testing a social-cognitive model of moral behavior: the interactive influence of situations and moral identity centrality. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 97*(1), 123.

Armenakis, A. A., & Bedeian, A. G. (1999). Organizational change: a review of theory and research in the 1990s. *Journal of Management, 25*, 293–315.

Bamberger, P. A., & Pratt, M. G. (2010). Moving forward by looking back: reclaiming unconventional research contexts and samples in organizational scholarship. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*(4), 665–671.

Bartunek, J. M., Rousseau, D. M., Rudolph, J. W., & DePalma, J. A. (2006). On the receiving end: sensemaking, emotion, and assessments of an organizational change initiated by others. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 42*, 182–206.

Bejerot, E., & Hasselbladh, H. (2013). Forms of intervention in public sector organizations: generic traits in public sector reforms. *Organization Studies, 34*(9), 1357–1380.

Bordia, P., Hobman, E., Jones, E., Gallois, C., & Callan, V. J. (2004). Uncertainty during organizational change: types, consequences, and management strategies. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 18*, 507–532.

Brockner, J., Konovsky, M., Cooper-Schneider, R., Folger, R., Martin, C., & Bies, R. J. (1994). Interactive effects of procedural justice and outcome negativity on victims and survivors of job loss. *Academy of Management Journal, 37*(2), 397–409.

Buchanan, D., & Dawson, P. (2007). Discourse and audience: organizational change as Multi-Story process. *Journal of Management Studies, 44*, 669–686.

Collinson, D. L. (1992). *Managing the shopfloor: Subjectivity, masculinity and workplace culture*. Amsterdam: De Gruyter.

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*, 3–21.

Crawshaw, J. R., Cropanzano, R., Bell, C. M., Nadisic, T. (2013). Organizational justice: new insights from behavioural ethics. *Human Relations*, 0018726713485609.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into practice, 39*(3), 124–130.

Cropanzano, R., Goldman, B., & Folger, R. (2003). Deontic justice: the role of moral principles in workplace fairness. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 24*(8), 1019–1024.

Cropanzano, R. S., Massaro, S., & Becker, W. J. (2016). Deontic justice and organizational neuroscience. *Journal of Business Ethics,*. doi:10.1007/s10551-016-3056-3.

Cropanzano, R., Rupp, D. E., Mohler, C. J., & Schminke, M. (2001). Three roads to organizational justice. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 20*, 1–113.

Cunliffe, A., & Coupland, C. (2012). From hero to villain to hero: making experience sensible through embodied narrative sense-making. *Human Relations, 65*, 63–88.

Datta, D. K., Guthrie, J. P., Basuil, D., & Pandey, A. (2010). Causes and effects of employee downsizing: a review and synthesis. *Journal of Management, 36*(1), 281–348.

De Cremer, D., Mayer, D., & Schminke, M. (2010). Guest editors' introduction on understanding ethical behavior and decision making: a behavioral ethics approach. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 20*, 1–6.

De Cremer, D., & Van Hiel, A. (2006). Effects of another person's fair treatment on one's own emotions and behaviors: the moderating role of how much the other cares for you. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 100*(2), 231–249.

Dunford, B. B., Jackson, C. L., Boss, A. D., Tay, L., & Boss, R. W. (2015). Be fair, your employees are watching: a relational response model of external third-party justice. *Personnel Psychology, 68*(2), 319–352.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 532–550.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (2000). Paradox, spirals, ambivalence: the new language of change and pluralism. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 703–705.

Fedor, D. B., Caldwell, S., & Herold, D. M. (2006). The effects of organizational changes on employee commitment: a multilevel investigation. *Personnel Psychology, 59*(1), 1–29.

Feldman, M. S. (2005). Management and public management. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*(6), 958–960.

Fletcher, C. (1996). The 250 lb man in an alley: police storytelling. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 9*, 36–42.

Folger, R. (2001). Fairness as deonance. In S. W. Gilliland, D. D. Steiner, & D. P. Skarlicki (Eds.), *Theoretical an cultural perspectives on organizational justice* (pp. 3–33). Greenwick: IAP.

Folger, R., & Cropanzano, R. (2001). Fairness theory: justice as accountability. *Advances in organizational justice, 1*, 1–55.

Folger, R., Cropanzano, R., & Goldman, B. (2005). What is the relationship between justice and morality? In J. Greenberg & J. A. Colquitt (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational justice*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (2010). Stop blaming resistance to change and start using it. *Organizational Dynamics, 39*(1), 24–36.

Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & D'Amelio, A. (2008). Resistance to change: the rest of the story. *Academy of Management Review, 33*, 362–377.

Greenberg, J., & Colquitt, J.A. (Eds.). (2013). Handbook of organizational justice. Psychology Press.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods, 18*(1), 59–82.

Hansen, S. D., Dunford, B. B., Boss, A. D., Boss, R. W., & Angermeier, I. (2011). Corporate social responsibility and the benefits of employee trust: a cross-disciplinary perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics, 102*(1), 29–45.

Herold, D. M., Fedor, D. B., Caldwell, S., & Liu, Y. (2008). The effects of transformational and change leadership on employees'

commitment to a change: a multilevel study. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(2), 346.

Holt, D. T., Armenakis, A. A., Feild, H. S., & Harris, S. G. (2007). Readiness for organizational change the systematic development of a scale. *The Journal of applied behavioral science, 43*(2), 232–255.

Huy, Q. N., & Mintzberg, H. (2003). The rhythm of change. *MIT Sloan Management Review, 44*, 79–84.

Isabella, L. (1990). Evolving interpretations as a change unfolds: how managers construe key organizational events. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*, 7–41.

Jacobs, G., Christe-Zeyse, J., Keegan, A., & Polos, L. (2008). Reactions to organizational identity threats in times of change: illustrations from the German police. *Corporate Reputation Review, 11*(3), 245–261.

Jacobs, G., Keegan, A., Christe-Zeyse, J., Seeberg, I., & Runde, B. (2006). The fatal smirk: insider accounts of organizational change processes in a police organization. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 19*(2), 173–191.

Keegan, A., & Boselie, P. (2006). The lack of impact of dissensus inspired analysis on developments in the field of human resource management. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(7), 1491–1511.

Kelman, S. (2005). Public management needs help! *Academy of Management Journal, 48*(6), 967–969.

Kotter, J. P., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1979). Choosing strategies for change. *Harvard Business Review, 57*, 106–114.

Lavelle, J. J., Rupp, D. E., & Brockner, J. (2007). Taking a multifoci approach to the study of justice, social exchange, and citizenship behavior: the target similarity model. *Journal of Management, 33*(6), 841–866.

Lazarus, R. S. (2000). Toward better research on stress and coping. *American Psychologist, 55*, 665–673.

Liu, Y., & Perrewé, P. L. (2005). Another look at the role of emotion in the organizational change: a process model. *Human Resource Management Review, 15*, 263–280.

Lüscher, L. S., & Lewis, M. W. (2008). Organizational change and managerial sensemaking: working through paradox. *Academy of Management Journal, 51*, 221–240.

MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. London: Duckworth.

Maitlis, S. (2005). The social processes of organizational sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*, 21–49.

Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in organizations: taking stock and moving forward. *The Academy of Management Annals, 8*(1), 57–125.

Maitlis, S., & Sonenshein, S. (2010). Sensemaking in crisis and change: inspiration and insights from Weick (1988). *Journal of Management Studies, 47*, 551–580.

Manning, P. K. (1997). *Police work: the social organization of policing* (2nd ed.). Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Morrison, E. W., & Robinson, S. L. (1997). When employees feel betrayed: a model of how psychological contract violation develops. *Academy of Management Review, 22*(1), 226–256.

O'Reilly, J., Aquino, K., & Skarlicki, D. (2016). The lives of others: third parties' responses to others' injustice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 101*(2), 171.

Oreg, S. (2006). Personality, context, and resistance to organizational change. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 15*, 73–101.

Oreg, S., & Sverdlik, N. (2011). Ambivalence toward imposed change: the conflict between dispositional resistance to change and the orientation toward the change agent. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*(2), 337.

Oreg, S., Vakola, M., & Armenakis, A. (2011). Change recipients' reactions to organizational change A 60-year review of quantitative studies. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 47*, 461–524.

O'Reilly, J., & Aquino, K. (2011). A model of third parties' morally motivated responses to mistreatment in organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(3), 526–543.

Piderit, S. K. (2000). Rethinking resistance and recognizing ambivalence: a multidimensional view of attitudes toward an organizational change. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 783–794.

Rafferty, A. E., Jimmieson, N. L., & Armenakis, A. A. (2013). Change readiness: a multilevel review. *Journal of Management, 39*, 110–135.

Rodell, J. B., & Colquitt, J. A. (2009). Looking ahead in times of uncertainty: the role of anticipatory justice in an organizational change context. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94*, 989.

Salancik, G. R., & Pfeffer, J. (1978). A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 23*, 224–253.

Sanchez-Burks, J., & Huy, Q. N. (2009). Emotional aperture and strategic change: the accurate recognition of collective emotions. *Organizational Science, 20*, 22–34.

Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. (2015). Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 36*(S1), S6–S32.

Schminke, M., Arnaud, A., Taylor, R. (2015) Ethics, values, and organizational justice: individuals, organizations, and beyond. *Journal of Business Ethics, 130*(3), 727–736.

Schneider, B. (1987). The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology, 40*, 437–453.

Skarlicki, D. P., Ellard, J. H., & Kelln, B. R. (1998). Third-party perceptions of a layoff: procedural, derogation, and retributive aspects of justice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*(1), 119.

Skarlicki, D., & Kulik, C. (2005). Third-party reactions to employee (mis) treatment: a justice perspective. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 26*, 183–229.

Sonenshein, S. (2010). We're changing—or are we? Untangling the role of progressive, regressive, and stability narratives during strategic change implementation. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*, 477–512.

Thomas, R., & Hardy, C. (2011). Reframing resistance to organizational change. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 27*, 322–331.

Thomas, R., Sargent, L. D., & Hardy, C. (2011). Managing organizational change: negotiating meaning and power-resistance relations'. *Organization Science, 22*, 22–41.

Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science, 13*, 567–582.

Turillo, C. J., Folger, R., Lavelle, J. J., Umphress, E. E., & Gee, J. O. (2002). Is virtue its own reward? Self-sacrificial decisions for the sake of fairness. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 89*, 839–865.

Tyler, T. R., & Lind, E. A. (1992). A relational model of authority in groups. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 25*, 115–191.

Uhl-Bien, M., & Marion, R. (2009). Complexity leadership in bureaucratic forms of organizing: A meso model. *The Leadership Quarterly, 20*(4), 631–650.

Van Buren, H. J., III. (2000). The bindingness of social and psychological contracts: toward a theory of social responsibility in downsizing. *Journal of Business Ethics, 25*(3), 205–219.

Van den Bos, K., & Lind, E. A. (2002). Uncertainty management by means of fairness judgments. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 34*, 1–60.

Van Dierendonck, D., & Jacobs, G. (2012). Survivors and victims: a meta-analytical review of fairness and organizational

commitment after downsizing. *British Journal of Management, 23*, 96–109.

Van Maanen, J. (1978). The asshole. In P. K. Manning & J. van Maanen (Eds.), *A view from the street* (pp. 221–238). Santa Monica: Goodyear.

Wanberg, C. R., & Banas, J. T. (2000). Predictors and outcomes of openness to changes in a reorganizing workplace. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*, 132–142.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*, 409–421.

Wright, T. A., & Goodstein, J. (2007). Character is not "Dead" in management research: a review of individual character and organizational-level virtue. *Journal of Management, 33*, 928–958.