

Work Engagement and Job Crafting as Conditions of Ambivalent Employees' Adaptation to Organizational Change

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Abstract

This work focuses on how mixed feelings serve adaptive functions in organizational change. Failing to recognize that attitudes to change may involve both positive and negative evaluations of the change at the same time may affect change implementation. This article explored the relationship between ambivalence to change and adaptive performance in the context of an acquisition using a diary study. We also examined work engagement and job crafting as specific conditions under which ambivalence can lead to adaptive or nonadaptive courses of action. Our results showed that the relationship between ambivalence to change and adaptive performance is positive but not robust. We uncovered two conditions that increase ambivalent employees' chances to adapt to organizational change: (1) either employees display high work engagement or (2) they display high reducing demands and low seeking resources. Analyses of change recipients' reactions beyond dichotomous ones and their mechanisms will better inform practitioners and researchers.

Keywords

adaptive performance, ambivalence, diary study, job crafting, organizational change, work engagement

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Introduction

Despite the long history of ambivalence (it can be traced in Plato and Aristotle) and the fact that it is inherent in organizational life (Rothman et al., 2017), the concept has only recently started to receive attention within the context of organizational change. Ambivalence is defined here as an attitude comprising both positive and negative reactions to an object (Kaplan, 1972; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011; van Harreveld et al., 2009). As organizational life is becoming more and more complex, many authors observe that it is full of oppositional demands and interests (Piderit, 2000; Rothman et al., 2017). Very often leaders and employees need to balance contradictory demands of competition and cooperation, excellence and cost cutting, organizational and personal agendas, stability and change, structure and flexibility, tradition, and innovation (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Rothman et al., 2017).

This may evoke attitudes that are just as complex, contradictory, and ambivalent (Ashforth et al., 2010; Methot et al., 2017; Rothman et al., 2017). Several studies during the past two decades have recognized that change recipients' attitudes to change have a great impact on the way that employees adapt to the change (Oreg et al., 2011; Van Dam et al., 2008). Employees often fail to adapt to organizational change, and many organizational change initiatives fail because those involved or affected by the change do not support it (Oreg et al., 2011; Vakola et al., 2013).

However, these studies failed to recognize that attitudes to change are not "black and white" (Vakola, 2016) but may be ambivalent which means involving both positive and negative cognitive beliefs, emotional reactions, and evaluations of the change at the same time (Oreg et al., 2018; Piderit, 2000). Failing to consider the possibility that change recipients' reactions to change may hold conflicting views about the change at hand may reduce the accuracy and validity of the results and mislead practitioners in the change implementation process (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011).

If researchers and practitioners are to gain a more realistic understanding of how employees adapt to change, then the mechanisms that transform ambivalence into a beneficial force need to be systematically studied. Our rationale is to examine two different conditions that may facilitate ambivalent employees, namely, one referring to their state of mind (i.e., work engagement) and one referring to the specific actions they may undertake (i.e., job crafting). More specifically, we examine work engagement, a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), as a motivational condition that broadens the action-thought repertoire of change agents enabling them to adapt their performance to change conditions. A second mechanism that may transform ambivalence into a positive force for change adaptation is job crafting, a behavioral strategy of dealing with new situations effectively through regulating one's work environment (Petrucci et al., 2018).

This research contributes to the literature in three ways: First, failing to accurately understand and describe both ambivalence and potential mechanisms that can associate it with positive change outcomes, may mislead both researchers and practitioners. The primary concern of our research is to explore this construct and its relationships

with adaptive performance. Second, we respond to a call for more evidence on adaptive performance (Shoss et al., 2012). Examining antecedents and mechanisms that facilitate change supportive adaptive behaviors such as adaptive performance is important for managing change successfully and for allowing organizational learning to take place (Shoss et al., 2012). This understanding would also benefit the promotion of positive employee change behaviors which are not as stable as they were described in the past, but they evolve along with the change project (Vakola, 2016).

Finally, research in change contexts has employed cross-sectional or longitudinal designs to test differences assuming that there is stability over time in terms of change attitudes and behaviors (Vakola, 2016). However, the dynamic nature of change makes it imperative to focus our attention on individual variation (within-person effects) and on how adaptive behaviors take place during change implementation. To that end, we have decided to conduct a diary study to achieve our study aims. Diary research is an ideal tool to examine how fluctuations in the predictors and moderators may go hand in hand with fluctuations in the outcomes (Ohly et al., 2010). This is essential in organizational change research because it enables us to recognize attitudes toward change as something that may manifest differently on different days and, thus, as a dynamic rather than a crystallized phenomenon. As such, our design helps to uncover the boundary conditions in the relationship between ambivalence and adaptive performance. In other words, *when* (i.e., on which days) is ambivalence toward change more likely to lead to positive rather than negative outcomes for employees?

Ambivalence and Adaptive Performance

According to Piderit (2000), the attitude formation process often starts with ambivalence, which is also the case for beta and gamma changes where ambivalent reactions seem to prevail. In beta change that involves the development of a new understanding of what constitutes a shift on the reference dimension, making sense of the change process is more complicated and, as a result, employees' inferences about the attitude toward the change will not be immediate (Piderit, 2000). Based on the same rationale, gamma change that involves "a complete conceptual redefinition" (Beer & Walton, 1987, p. 342) is even more complex (Piderit, 2000, p. 789). As a result, employees who try to deal with beta or gamma change "seem more likely to engage in the formation of a new attitude rather than simply shift their old attitude along stable dimension" (Piderit, 2000, p. 789).

Ambivalence is largely characterized as undesirable and unpleasant and, therefore, individuals are described as motivated or advised to avoid or reduce ambivalence and the discomfort it elicits (van Harreveld et al., 2009) and it is distinct from other concepts such as ambiguity, dissonance, or insecurity (for a comprehensive review, please see Baek, 2010). But ambivalent individuals adopt a more complex thinking and systematic information processing that prevent them from making quick decisions and therefore can neutralize extreme evaluations (Baek, 2010) and provide more accurate descriptions (Maio et al., 1996; Meffert et al., 2004). Also, Jonas et al. (1997) suggest that high ambivalence produces a reduction in confidence in one's attitude, which in

turn leads to more systematic processing of information. Nordgren et al. (2006) showed that higher levels of ambivalence produced both more negative emotions and more one-sided thoughts designed to resolve the ambivalence. Ambivalent individuals are expected to be more susceptible to the influence of a persuasive communication (Armitage & Conner 2000; Conner & Armitage, 2008; Oreg & Sverdluk, 2011). Rothman and Wiesenfeld (2007, p. 294) suggest that members expect consistency from their group leaders, and leaders' ambivalent expressions create a "sense of uncertainty and doubt," but it can also lead to positive outcomes such as creativity (Fong, 2006) and trust (Pratt & Dirks 2006).

Evidence linking ambivalence to change behaviors (Rothman et al., 2017) and, more specifically, to adaptive performance is surprisingly rare although ambivalence is a common reaction to change and personal transition (Larsen et al., 2001). Being able to exhibit adaptive performance which describes the extent to which employees adjust their behaviors to meet the demands of a new setting (Pulakos et al., 2000; Van den Heuvel et al., 2013) is positively associated with important outcomes such as managing change, organizational learning, and keeping up with changing customer expectations (Dorsey et al., 2010; Shoss et al., 2012).

We follow Pulakos et al.'s (2000) and Griffin et al.'s (2007) suggestion that "dealing with the uncertain work situation" is a core element of the adaptive performance which is expressed/manifested through employees' behaviors. In addition, we adopted Van den Heuvel et al.'s (2013) suggestion of measuring employees' *specific* behaviors to a change at hand. There are two distinctive conceptual differences with other constructs aimed at describing employees' adaptation (or nonadaptation) to change (such as resistance or willingness or readiness to change): (1) adaptive performance is considered a separate dimension of task and contextual performance (Pulakos et al., 2000) and, as a result, it describes expected behaviors related to change required by the organization and (2) adaptive performance is based on *actual* behaviors which are distinct from attitudes that involve cognitions, emotions, and intentions to behave. Adaptive performance is critical to change success (Jundt et al., 2015; Van den Heuvel et al., 2009) which explains the recent interest of literature (Gordon et al., 2018; Petrou et al., 2018).

Conflicting and oppositional demands of organizational change lead individuals to experience mixed feelings about their organizational context (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; A. Lee et al., 2015; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Zou & Ingram, 2013). To illustrate, an employee may understand the cost cutting of their organization to ensure its survival, but they are not able to deal with everyday increasing work demands and they feel ambivalent toward the change or they may feel enthusiastic about the prospect of change and frustrated about the delays associated with its implementation.

Vince and Broussine (1996) described that, when managers from a public organization felt both excited and afraid of the change, they tended to offer limited support to the change. Lüscher and Lewis (2008) described that managers experienced ambivalence due to a situation where they had to empower their employees through delegation while fearing of losing control and efficiency, felt behaviorally paralyzed. In a study, which took place in an aerospace company, managers may subtly support

employee resistance through communicated ambivalence directed to organizational change the company introduced (Larson & Tompkins, 2005). Following a different line of reasoning, Rothman and Melwani (2017) explain that ambivalent employees are less likely to rush to action (which may be viewed as behavioral paralysis) and more likely to take time to consider more balanced alternative courses of action. In addition, ambivalent individuals are better at recognizing unusual relationships between concepts and associations (Fong, 2006) and more willing to adopt a balanced consideration of information at hand (Rothman & Melwani, 2017). Similarly, ambivalent employees are sometimes perceived as effective change agents because they perform a more balanced assessment of the change at hand (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Having considered the evidence, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between day-level ambivalence to change and day-level change recipients' adaptive performance.

The Role of Work Engagement

Work engagement is an important motivational resource for employees' performance (Christian et al., 2011) and for adaptation to change (Petrou et al., 2018). Highly work-engaged employees tend to remain motivated even in the face of decreasing resources, they go beyond their roles to achieve their organization's goals and they are able to cover from temporary losses of resources drawing from larger resource reservoirs (Bakker et al., 2016; Christian et al., 2011).

We suggest that the experience of ambivalence may facilitate adaptation to a changing environment when people experience work engagement, which is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). More specifically, vigor refers to high levels of energy, the willingness to make extra effort, and the personal determination in the face of possible difficulties (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Dedication refers to strong work involvement and the experience of interest, importance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and challenge (Green et al., 2017). Further, absorption refers to a state of high focus and concentration in one's work, so that time seems to pass rapidly, and one has difficulty detaching from his or her work (May et al., 2004). Change recipients' work engagement is regarded as an extremely significant factor of any organizational change (Frese, 2008; Matthysen & Harris, 2018; Van den Heuvel et al., 2010). It may provide the required personal energy, concentration, and persistence (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010) and the extra personal effort needed (Vance, 2006).

Our proposition that work engagement may strengthen the relationship between ambivalence and adaptive performance draws on the dual tuning theory which suggests that positive and negative emotions can interact to promote desirable work behaviors (George, 2011; George & Zhou, 2007). According to George (2011), both positive and negative affect are adaptive for different reasons and it is through their combined effects that effective functioning results in and outside of organizations. In a creativity context, George and Zhou (2007) concluded that when employees

experience both positive and negative moods, a supportive context will allow the dual tuning effects of these moods to manifest, thereby fostering creativity; while in the absence of a supportive context, creativity suffers (George & Zhou, 2007). In that sense, if change recipients' ambivalence is coupled with positive and facilitating conditions, it has more chances to express its beneficial potential rather than to lead to dysfunctional or negative reactions.

Regarding ambivalence to change, negative change evaluations can create a sense of dissatisfaction, which can promote opportunity identification and push people to exert greater effort. At the same time, positive change evaluations promote positive change actions and support. When this interactive effect is combined with a positive motivational state such as work engagement, change recipients' action-thought repertoires will be broadened and are more likely to lead to adaptive behaviors. This is based on the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), which suggests that positive emotions (e.g., joy, interest, contentment, happiness, satisfaction, pride, and love) have the capacity to broaden people's momentary thought—action repertoires and build people's personal resources (ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological) through widening the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind. Both positive and negative affect provide organizational members with powerful signals of both salient opportunities and threats. As a result, experiencing both positive and negative emotions at the same time should be considered as functional in organizational life. When ambivalent employees experience a positive fulfilling work-related state of mind, that will equip their individual repertoire with more personal energy concentration and persistence, they will be more willing to listen more and work more on the positive side rather than on the negative side of ambivalence which may have a positive effect of adaptation to change. Reversely, when employees are not work engaged, we do not expect that they will find the energy to redirect their ambivalence toward constructive ends. Therefore, we suggest that

Hypothesis 2: Day-level work engagement moderates the link between day-level ambivalence and day-level adaptive performance, such that the link is stronger for higher (rather than lower) work engagement.

Job Crafting

Job crafting has been recognized as a strategy that facilitates adaptation to organizational change because job crafters deal with new and threatening situations effectively by regulating their work environment (Petrou et al., 2018). Specifically, job crafters may deal with change by seeking job resources (e.g., seeking advice or help from others), by seeking challenges (i.e., proactively taking up new projects or challenges), or by reducing demands (e.g., by eliminating emotional stressors of their jobs; Petrou et al., 2012). All in all, in the face of organizational change, job crafters may attempt to maximize their tools and eliminate their stressors. However, the consequences of such behaviors are not exclusively positive or always well understood.

Although not exclusively targeted at organizational change, recent literature reviews and meta-analyses helped us to understand and systematize what we already know about job crafting (J. Y. Lee & Lee, 2018; Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017; Zhang & Parker, 2019). The contribution of these integrative studies is twofold. First, they reveal that job crafting is not a single concept, but it can take two different forms, each with different nature and motivation. On one hand, when people seek resources or seek challenges, they engage in what has been called expansion or promotion-focused job crafting (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; cf. approach crafting, Zhang & Parker, 2019). Such crafting behaviors enable employees to maximize their job scope and, therefore, make their jobs more resourceful and more interesting. On the other hand, when employees reduce their demands, they engage in what has been called contraction or prevention-focused crafting (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; cf. avoidance crafting, Zhang & Parker, 2019). Such crafting helps people to eliminate (rather than maximize) their job scope and to protect (rather than to develop) themselves. The second contribution of these integrative studies is revealing that these two types of crafting have very different implications and consequences for employees. Specifically, expansion or promotion-focused crafting (hereafter simply referred to as “expansion crafting”) has positive implications not only for job performance (J. Y. Lee & Lee, 2018) but also for employee well-being, motivation, and health (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017). Reversely, contraction or prevention-focused crafting (hereafter simply referred to as “contraction crafting”), has very often opposite effects, namely, either nonsignificant or negative implications for employee motivation, performance, health, and well-being (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017).

Within the context of organizational change, the consequences of reducing demands on adaptation to change remain unclear. For instance, these effects have been found to be nonsignificant (Petrou et al., 2018) and even positive or negative depending on one’s attitudes about the change (Demerouti et al., 2017). This raises a legitimate question, especially, when one considers ambivalent employees: Could it be that expansion and contraction are not always so clear-cut behaviors and they do not necessarily exclude each other? For example, if ambivalent employees give in their positive as well as their negative feelings at the same time, could they simultaneously engage in expansion and contraction job crafting and, if so, what happens then?

Can Ambivalent Crafters Simultaneously Craft in Different Ways?

If expansion and contraction crafting represent two ways in which ambivalent employees may try to deal with change, this, in fact, provides them with three different possibilities. First, employees could give in their optimistic attitude toward the changes, thus, engaging in heightened expansion crafting and low contraction crafting. Second, employees could give in their self-protective tendencies regarding the change, thus, engaging in low expansion crafting and heightened contraction crafting. Third, employees could embrace both existing tendencies, thus, engaging in heightened expansion and heightened contraction crafting. Existing literature is scarce to

formulate explicit hypotheses about this link but there are adequate reasons to believe that all three possibilities are legitimate.

First, innovation literature suggests that to produce novel output, employees need to embrace opposing forces. Although creativity and adaptation are not the same, creativity is about solving novel problems, which resembles adaptation. In other words, to solve problems, people need not only to display a growth mind-set but also one that focuses on eliminating errors or obstacles which are an integral part of problems (Miron-Spektor & Beenen, 2015; Zacher & Wilden, 2014). This idea is also known in literature addressing the joint effects of opposing motivational forces as a strategic advantage for employees who want to achieve maximum performance (Amabile, 1993). For example, by approaching opportunities and avoiding risks, people can express their full potential in terms of performance (Nikitin & Freund, 2010). Similarly, ambivalent employees may decide to embrace opposing forces that they are confronted with. By seeking resources and challenges, they can capitalize on the aspects of the change that they find attractive (Petrou et al., 2018). By reducing demands, they are able to eliminate the aspects of the change that they find less attractive (Demerouti et al., 2017).

Second, one could argue that ambivalent employees are already too overwhelmed cognitively (Rothman et al., 2017) to embrace opposing forces and, in that case, they must make a choice. If one reads too much into the existing meta-analyses and literature reviews on job crafting (J. Y. Lee & Lee, 2018; Lichtenhaler & Fischbach, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2017), it would be legitimate to expect that ambivalent employees should choose expansion crafting over contraction crafting. Although these integrative studies do not consider the organizational change context, this conclusion could be equally applicable to change. By seeking resources and challenges, employees capitalize on the tools they have to deal with change (Petrou et al., 2018). Reversely, reducing demands could be viewed as an indication of low motivation as it could eliminate the challenging aspects of one's job that are necessary to keep employees sharp and interested (Petrou et al., 2012). In that sense, contraction could act in antagonistic ways and weaken the positive effects of expansion, and, thus, it should be kept at low levels, while expansion should stay at high levels.

Finally, a third possibility could be legitimate if the demands of organizational change are major or overwhelming. In such cases, when the doubts of employees are not answered with organizational support, they can lead to paralysis and chaos (Huy, 2002). Perhaps with increasing challenges, people need to take wise decisions and let go of "battles" that they know already that they will lose. They may, thus, choose to engage only in contraction as a mean to protect themselves, while, at the same time, they avoid expansion. This could become a particularly relevant alternative for ambivalent employees. As we have argued previously, one of the main reasons why ambivalence may eventually lead to negative consequences is that it paralyzes employees and makes their reaction times very slow. In that case, it could be that the only way to break the vicious cycle of ambivalence is to respond in drastic and decisive ways. Trying to find resources when they do not exist (cf. seeking resources) or working on multiple projects (cf. seeking challenges) need long time to unfold and to clearly lead

to success or failure (Emmons & King, 1988; Nixon et al. 2011). Therefore, if the primary focus of ambivalent employees is short-term survival rather than long-term flourishing, it could be that they only need to focus on reducing demands. Furthermore, reducing demands could have negative consequences for others (Bakker et al., 2016), for example, if delegating tasks creates workload for one's coworkers. In that sense, seeking contact with others (cf. seeking resources) is incompatible with reducing demands. These distinct three possibilities lead us to formulate a research question as to how expansion and contraction crafting interact with each other in predicting adaptation of ambivalent employees:

Research Question 1: What are the joint effects of expansion and contraction job crafting on the link between employee ambivalence and adaptive performance?

Method

Procedure and Participants

Participants were office employees of a large cosmetics and natural beauty products international company recently acquired by an international corporation. The company engages in the design, development, production, marketing, and sales of cosmetic products; the production of plant extracts used as raw materials in its products; and the trade of dietary supplements and bee products. At the time of the study which was 40 days after the announcement of the acquisition, the employees were experiencing changes because of the new situation. More specifically, management introduced a series of new work practices and processes to be followed regarding production line, customer service, and people management. Before the acquisition, as a family business of 250 employees, the organizational culture was developed around the owner's personal values of modesty, close family relationships, ecology, togetherness, and hard work.

All office employees were asked to participate voluntarily. They were informed about the study purpose in a meeting and received instructions in written. Each day, they received in their internal mailboxes an envelope with completion instructions, and the daily questionnaire of the respective day along with a return envelope that they would leave in specified collection point. Employees were instructed to fill in the diary over five workdays, at the end of their shift. It is a fundamental benefit of a diary research design to allow examination of reported events in their natural context minimizing the amount of time between the experience and the account of this experience (Bolger et al., 2003). By reducing the danger of retrospection, diary research design can capture the within-person processes with higher fidelity than the traditional longitudinal research methods (Bolger et al., 2003). The duration of a diary assessment depends on three main reasons, namely, the feasibility, the reliability, and the nature of the constructs (Bolger et al., 2003). A 5-day data collection allows to capture daily behaviors as this amount of time is related to the occurrence of these constructs under examination without putting burden on participants. A total of 57 usable questionnaires and diaries were returned (response rate 71%). Respondents had a mean age of

36.6 years (standard deviation [SD] = 7.8), 27% were male and had a mean tenure of 11.9 years (SD = 7.9). Respondents worked at company offices as employees and managers responsible for sales, ICT (information and communication technology), marketing, finances, HR (human resources), purchasing, and operations.

Measures

Daily Job Crafting was measured with the 10-item Daily Job Crafting Scale of Petrou et al. (2012) that assesses the three subdimensions of job crafting. Four items were used to assess *seeking resources* (e.g., “Today, during my shift I have asked others for feedback on my job performance”), three items were used to measure *seeking challenges* (e.g., “Today, I have asked for more tasks if I have finished my work”), and three items were used to measure reducing demands (e.g., “Today, I have tried to ensure that my work is emotionally less demanding”). Respondents indicated how often they engaged in the different behaviors on an answering scale ranging from 1 = *totally disagree* to 7 = *totally agree*.

Daily Adaptive Performance. Following Van den Heuvel’s (2013) conceptualization of adaptive performance measure, we conducted three interviews with key players (two employees and one manager at the HR department) to capture the behaviors that could be used as indicators of employee adaptation to the acquisition. The indicators of employee adaptation comprised seven items (i.e., “Today, I incorporated all the suggested changes in my tasks,” “Today, I adopted all the changes related to my job according to the new information received after the acquisition,” “Today, I aligned all my daily practices according to the guidelines given after the acquisition.” Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *at a great extent*.

Ambivalence to organizational change was measured daily with four items developed by Oreg and Sverdlik (2011). Sample items are “Today, when I thought about the acquisition, I had both good and bad thoughts,” “Today, when I thought about the acquisition, I experienced both good and bad feelings.” Responses ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *at a great extent*.

Work engagement was measured with the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale reflects three underlying dimensions, which are measured with three items each: Vigor (e.g., “Today, at my work, I felt bursting with energy”), Dedication (e.g., “Today, my job inspired me”), and Absorption (e.g., “Today, I got carried away when I was working”). High scores on all three dimensions indicate high work engagement. Items were scored on a scale ranging from 0 = *never* to 7 = *always*.

Statistical Analyses

All daily measurements were nested within individuals, resulting in a multilevel data structure, and we conducted multilevel analyses using MlwiN. All study variables

were at the within-level of analyses. Before proceeding to our main analyses, we found support that a two-level Null model for the dependent variable (i.e., day-level adaptive performance) had a better fit to the data compared with a single-level Null model, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 167.77, p < .01$, justifying a multilevel approach. Furthermore, the intra-class correlation (i.e., variance at the between level of analyses) for our study variables was 75% for adaptive performance, 72% for ambivalence, 78% for work engagement, 66% for seeking resources, 62% for seeking challenges, and 67% for reducing demands. To test the hypotheses, we conducted two sets of multilevel regression analyses. The first set compared a Null model with three nested models comprising successively the independent variables, namely, day-level ambivalence (Model 1); work engagement, seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands (Model 2); and the interaction between ambivalence and work engagement (Model 3a). The second set of analyses replaced the two-way interaction of Model 3a with the following two-way interactions: ambivalence by seeking resources, ambivalence by seeking challenges, ambivalence by reducing demands, seeking resources by reducing demands, and seeking challenges by reducing demands (see Model 3b). Subsequently, the two hypothesized three-way interactions were added in two separate models, namely, ambivalence by seeking resources by reducing demands in Model 4a, and ambivalence by seeking challenges by reducing demands in Model 4b.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the study variables. Notably, ambivalence had a negative but nonsignificant correlation with adaptive performance at the between level of analysis ($r = -.22, p = .10$) and a positive and significant correlation with adaptive performance at the within level of analysis ($r = .16, p < .05$).

Table 2 presents all nested models from our two sets of regression analyses. As shown in Model 1, ambivalence was positively related to adaptive performance ($\beta = .07, p < .05$). However, the link became nonsignificant when work engagement, seeking resources, seeking challenges, and reducing demands were also added as independent variables (see Model 2). Taken together, these findings fail to give a conclusive answer to Hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, the interaction effect of ambivalence and work engagement on adaptive performance was significant (see Model 3a; $\beta = .09, p < .05$). Simple slope tests revealed that the link between ambivalence and adaptive performance was positive when work engagement was 1 *SD* above the mean (estimate = $.27, z = 2.74, p < .01$) and nonsignificant when work engagement was 1 *SD* below the mean (estimate = $-.03, z = -.33, p = .74$; see Figure 1). The Johnson–Neyman (J-N) technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; in Preacher et al., 2006) was used to identify regions of significance, revealing that the link between ambivalence and adaptive performance became significant when work engagement was higher than $.02$ *SD*. These findings provide support to Hypothesis 2.

Table 1. Intercorrelations Between the Study Variables ($N = 56$ Employees and $N = 234$ Occasions).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Day-level ambivalence	3.18	1.50	(.91/.96)	.10	.07	-.04	.11	.16*
2. Day-level work engagement	4.59	1.24	-.10	(.87/.94)	.25**	.18**	.22**	.15*
3. Day-level seeking resources	3.21	1.18	.00	.56**	(.64/.83)	.20**	.13*	.18**
4. Day-level seeking challenges	2.61	1.23	.09	.41**	.51**	(.81/.90)	.06	.12
5. Day-level reducing demands	3.45	1.32	.07	.29*	.44**	.52**	(.62/.91)	.19**
6. Day-level adaptive performance	5.13	1.40	-.22	.58**	.43**	.26	.19	(.94/.98)

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are at the between level and above the diagonal at the within level; please note that the between-level variable can only be correlated at the between level; in the diagonal ranges are shown (low/high) for the alphas of all scales.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Finally, out of the two hypothesized three-way interactions, one was significant, namely the effect of ambivalence by seeking resources by reducing demands on adaptive performance (see Model 4a; $\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$; see Figure 2).

Simple slope tests revealed that the link between ambivalence and adaptive performance was positive and significant when reducing demands was 1 *SD* above the mean and seeking resources was 1 *SD* below the mean (estimate = .29, $z = 2.26$, $p < .05$; see Figure 2). The J-N technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; in Preacher et al., 2006) was used to identify regions of significance, revealing that the link between ambivalence and adaptive performance when reducing demands was 1 *SD* above the mean was significant when seeking resources was between the mean and 1.2 *SD* below the mean. We note that no other slope from the simple slope test was significant. This gives a partial answer to Research Question 1, namely, ambivalence may boost adaptive performance when change recipients engage in high reducing demands and in low seeking resources.

Discussion

Considering reactions to change from a dual nature perspective suggests that rather than equating positive evaluation with desirable outcomes and negative evaluation with undesirable outcomes researchers should focus on how mixed feelings serve adaptive functions in organizational change. Our results showed that the relationship between ambivalence to change and adaptive performance is positive but not robust. This finding shed light to the fragile nature of dual attitudes to organizational change. But more important, it shed light to the fact that there is a need to know more about the

Table 2. Multilevel Estimates for Nested Models With Day-Level Adaptive Performance as Dependent Variable (N = 56 Employees and N = 234 Occasions).

Model variables	M0		M1		M2		M3a	
	b	SEB	b	SEB	b	SEB	b	SEB
Intercept	5.13	.19	5.13	.19	5.13	.19	5.12	.18
Day-level ambivalence			.13*	.07	.11	.06	.12	.06
Day-level work engagement					.07	.09	.05	.09
Day-level seeking resources					.12	.08	.13	.08
Day-level seeking challenges					.07	.07	.07	.07
Day-level reducing demands					.12	.07	.11	.07
Ambivalence × Work engagement							.28*	.13
Ambivalence × Seeking resources								.09*
Ambivalence × Seeking challenges								
Ambivalence × Reducing demands								
Seeking resources × Reducing demands								
Seeking challenges × Reducing demands								
Ambivalence × Seeking resources × Reducing demands								
Reducing demands								
Ambivalence × Seeking challenges × Reducing demands								
Reducing demands								
-2 × log	672.85		667.10		655.63		650.99	
$\Delta(-2 \times \log)$			5.75*		11.47*		4.64*	
df			1		4		1	
Between-person variance	1.76 (.36)		1.77 (.36)		1.77 (.36)		1.75 (.36)	
Within-person variance	.59 (.06)		.58 (.06)		.54 (.06)		.53 (.06)	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Model variables	M3b			M4a			M4b		
	<i>b</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>b</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β
Intercept	5.12	.19		5.12	.19		5.12	.19	
Day-level ambivalence	.11	.07	.06	.12	.06	.06	.11	.07	.06
Day-level work engagement	.07	.10	.03	.08	.09	.03	.07	.10	.03
Day-level seeking resources	.15	.08	.07	.13	.08	.12	.15	.08	.07
Day-level seeking challenges	.04	.07	.02	.09	.07	.13	.05	.07	.03
Day-level reducing demands	.10	.07	.05	.16*	.08	.18*	.09	.08	.05
Ambivalence \times Work engagement									
Ambivalence \times Seeking resources	.08	.10	.03	.05	.10	.04	.07	.10	.03
Ambivalence \times Seeking challenges	-.03	.08	-.01	-.11	.09	-.16	-.02	.09	-.01
Ambivalence \times Reducing demands	.12	.09	.06	.09	.09	.10	.13	.10	.06
Seeking resources \times Reducing demands	-.08	.14	-.03	.02	.14	.02	-.07	.14	-.02
Seeking challenges \times Reducing demands	.12	.10	.06	.11	.09	.11	.11	.10	.05
Ambivalence \times Seeking resources \times Reducing demands				-.27*	.12	-.28*			
Ambivalence \times Seeking challenges \times Reducing demands							-.03	.08	-.02
$-2 \times \log$		652.32			647.56			652.19	
$\Delta(-2 \times \log)$		3.31			4.76*			.13	
<i>df</i>		5			1			1	
Between-person variance		1.77 (.36)			1.79 (.36)			1.77 (.36)	
Within-person variance		.53 (.06)			.52 (.06)			.53 (.06)	

Note. Some *p* values may appear to be different than indicated because all estimates have been rounded at two decimals.
p* < .05. *p* < .01.



Figure 1. The link between ambivalence and adaptive performance moderated by work engagement.

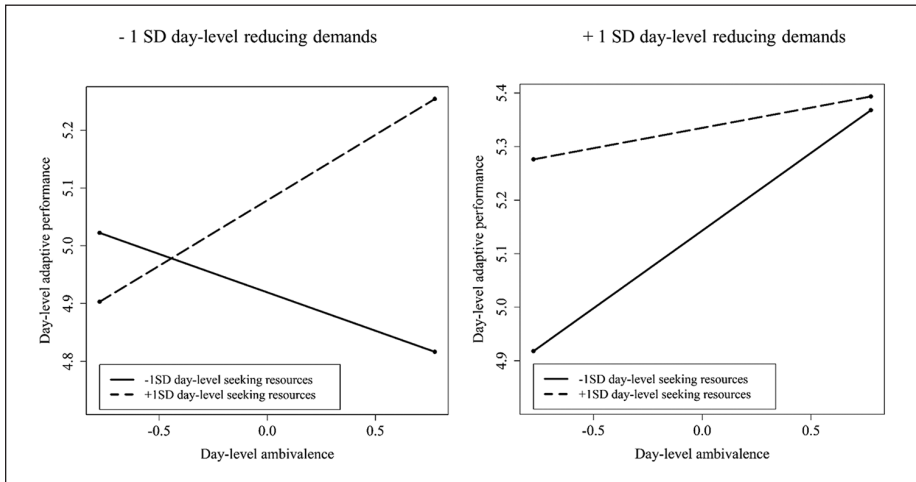


Figure 2. The link between ambivalence and adaptive performance moderated by reducing demands and seeking resources.

conditions under which ambivalence leads to beneficial outcomes rather than to dysfunctional ones. In this article, ambivalence can facilitate adaptive functions, but this depends on other factors which are work engagement and job crafting.

Interestingly, ambivalence can be transformed into an endured positive force when change recipients are work engaged. More specifically, experiencing ambivalence to organizational change is more likely to relate to positive outcomes, such as aligning behaviors to the new setting, when people have a positive fulfilling work-related state of mind (i.e., they experience high work engagement). Feeling vigor, dedication, and absorption at work enables people with “mixed feelings” to take a personal risk in the form of aligning their behaviors with the requirements of the change and support it. These findings contribute to and refine existing literature addressing work engagement as an important employee asset that can enhance adaptation to change (Kaltiainen, 2018; Kaltiainen et al., 2018).

Additionally, our findings reveal that what we viewed as a joint job crafting strategy (e.g., simultaneous contraction and expansion job crafting) is unable to facilitate ambivalent employees to make the most of their situation. Rather, our results suggest that ambivalent employees have to make a choice, and in the case of our sample and examined organization, they choose for contraction rather than for expansion. This is in line with evidence showing that reducing demands, normally a job crafting strategy with limited value, is well able to help employees when displayed within the context of major organizational change (Demerouti et al., 2017). However, because reducing demands is often viewed negatively by others or creates workload for others (Bakker et al., 2016), it may need to come together with a reduction of seeking resources (i.e., as our results imply). Alternatively, reducing demands may already cost energy for employees who display it, such that they are not willing to seek resources as well on the side; or perhaps resources are scarce in our studied organizations and, thus, employees prefer not to focus on them.

Another interesting point to be made about our results is that work engagement and reducing demands are two independent but equally successful conditions that increase ambivalent employees' chances to display adaptation. This may seem puzzling under the light of previous literature (e.g., Petrou et al., 2012) suggesting that work engagement and reducing demands correlate negatively with each other. In our sample, there was a positive within-level correlation between reducing demands and work engagement. Accordingly, engaged employees within our studied organization also tended to reduce their demands. In other words, happy employees also displayed contraction crafting. This could be perhaps explained by factors specific to the organizational context where the study was conducted. Being acquired by another company is often perceived by the employees as debilitating and threatening. Even in friendly deals, acquired employees and managers often describe themselves as being “taken advantage of” as they need to accommodate the new owner's demands (Marks & Mirvis, 2011). In this study, the acquired employees felt that the new owner will put emphasis on structure and rigid processes to systematize work and that will increase their workload and impersonalize their friendly work environment.

As a result, even if they were engaged, acquired employees were anticipating changes in organizational culture and increases in their job demands. This mind-set may have led them to choose contraction crafting as functional response and a means to survive and make the best of their situation, rather than to withdraw. According to

the threat-rigidity perspective, when individuals are confronted with threat, increased uncertainty or reduced control, they often restrict their cognitions and narrow their behavioral response repertoire (Staw et al., 1981; Zhou et al., 2008). In a change context, perceptions of threat can lead employees to narrow their cognitions and behaviors and focus on themselves and personal implications of change. In our acquisition context, employees have narrowed their cognitions and behaviors by reducing their demands while remaining engaged in their work to deal with this acquisition.

From a theoretical perspective, our findings show that there is a portion of employees that are ambivalent, and they may be overlooked in past research which focused on either positive or negative attitudes to change. Understanding employees' daily fluctuations of dual attitudes to change and the conditions under which those are linked to positive outcomes may be a step toward the unlocking of the positive potential of ambivalence. From an applied perspective, managers can benefit from awareness of change reactions that are not "black and white." Being able to understand that feeling ambivalent does not mean that one is against change, turns the attention on the real issue which is the conditions that can support or hinder change. Work conditions that enable work engagement along with effective and realistic communication on change impact will help ambivalent employees to adapt to acquisitions. In addition, managers could expect some signs of low motivation and reduced effort even from work-engaged employees when it comes to acquisitions. When employees are confronted with the often-overwhelming demands of an acquisition, which contains high levels of uncertainty, they need to make wise decisions. Trying to find resources or seeking new roles and projects in an environment that is new and uncertain and does not entail familiar roles and courses of action may be quite challenging in practice. On the contrary, while reducing demands may be seen by previous researchers as incompatible with work engagement, our results suggest that reducing demands is adopted by work-engaged employees in an acquisition and this may represent a more successful strategy of adapting to change.

Because research has yet to describe the full complexity of ambivalence, our current understanding of how dual attitudes operate in a change context remains incomplete. Researchers may further explore the way ambivalence to change can be transformed into a positive force. More specifically, future research needs to address individual differences (such as personality or different motivational styles) and equally important organizational factors (such as supervisory support, justice or communication) as additional moderating conditions which may unlock the positive potential of ambivalence to organizational change. In addition, moderators that capture less positive states at work than work engagement such as burnout will allow further investigation on the relationship between ambivalence to change and adaptive performance.

A potential limitation of our study comes from the fact that all our findings come from single source self-report data. This leaves open the possibility that common method and same source bias may have influenced our results. However, the repeated data collection process over 3 to 5 days has helped deal with respondents' recall biases (Ohly et al., 2010).

In conclusion, the study of reactions to organizational change cannot be complete without considering a more complex set of responses than the dichotomous one, that

is, support or resistance to change. More important is the focus on the mechanisms that can transform an ambivalent employee into a supportive change recipient. The discussion about change reactions is not black and white. Discovering whether there are other reactions such as ambivalence and how these are related with positive change outcomes may reveal important conditions that can explain how a change initiative can be managed and supported.

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