Rumor has it. Or does it?
Uncertainty and organizational trust and their relationship with perceived quality change-related information and rumors.

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For Inge, Alfie and Lily
Thanks for your patience

You never fail unless you stop trying
- Albert Einstein -
Abstract

In this thesis, the dynamics of communication during organizational change were studied. Our main research question was: do the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust during organizational change have a relationship with the report of rumors through the perception of quality change-related communication (QCC)? Furthermore, we were interested in exploring what types of rumors are most commonly reported during organizational change. The research was conducted using a survey (n=115) within a large financial services corporation undergoing major organizational change. We found significant relationships between uncertainty, organizational trust, QCC and the report of rumors. We also found that QCC partially mediated the relationship between uncertainty and the report of rumors and the relationship between organizational trust and the report of rumors. Over 90% of all reported rumors were negative and typically about changes in job security, work practices and organizational structure. Our findings suggest that change-related communication is not just about the design and content of the change-related information, but it is also about employee’s perception of the change-related information which is shaped by the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust.
## Contents

1. Introduction 6

2. Theoretical framework 9
   2.1 Organizational change and QCC 9
   2.2 Uncertainty during organizational change and relationship with QCC. 11
   2.3 Organizational trust during organizational change and relationship with QCC. 12
   2.4 Rumors 14
   2.5 Rumors during organizational change and relationship with QCC 15
   2.6 Theoretical model 17
   2.7 Research hypotheses 17

3. Research methodology 17
   3.1 Population 17
   3.2 Procedure 18
   3.3 Instruments 19
      3.3.1 QCC 20
      3.3.2 Uncertainty 20
      3.3.3 Organizational trust 22
      3.3.4 Rumors 22

4. Results 23
   4.1 Descriptive statistics 23
   4.2 Mediation Analysis (Hypothesis 4) 25
   4.3 Mediation Analysis (Hypothesis 5) 26
   4.4 Rumor categories 27

5. Discussion 28

6. Practical contributions 31

7. Limitations and future directions 32

8. Conclusion 34

References 36

Appendix A: Overview of items 44
List of figures

Chapter 2

Figure 1: Theoretical model 17

List of tables

Chapter 3

Table 1: Scale reliability and scale construction 20

Chapter 4

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and correlations 23

Table 3: Hierarchical multiple regression of uncertainty and QCC on report of rumors 26

Table 4: Hierarchical multiple regression of organizational trust and QCC on report of rumors 27

Table 5: Report of rumors in different rumor categories showing both N score and percentages. 28
1. Introduction

One of the major drawbacks of organizational change for employees is the uncertainty associated with the change process and outcomes of the change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b). This is because organizational change can affect an employee’s advancement opportunities within the organization, required (future) skills and the experience of job security (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004). Hence, organizational change poses a (potential) threat to an employee as valued resources from employment, such as income, status and social bonds, are at risk of being lost (Hobfoll, 1989). It is therefore no surprise that organizational change can act as a major stressor for employees leading to uncertainty (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007; Bordia et al., 2004; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991) and a decline in organizational trust (Robinson, 1996; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991; Smollan, 2013).

Change-related communication is aimed at reducing employees’ experience of uncertainty and keeping employees informed of anticipated events (Bordia et al., 2004). Scholars have demonstrated that quality change-related communication (QCC) is of vital importance for employees during organizational change in order to reduce the adverse psychological outcomes employees experience as a consequence of organizational change (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b; Miller & Monge, 1985; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991; Shaw, Fields, Thacker, & Fisher, 1993). However, Lewis (1999) argues that there is no agreement in the literature on what the exact criteria are for QCC that enables effective change. There is even no agreement on what the criteria of effective change are as Elving (2005) found that there is little or no empirical research available on effective organizational change. This is underpinned by a study by Covin and Kilmann (1990) in which over 900 issues were listed that were believed to have an impact on the ultimate success of large-scale organizational change. Thus, scholars have provided empirical evidence that QCC is important to employees
during organizational change but fail to establish exactly how and why. In other words, a workable definition of “quality” cannot be provided, making QCC an academically misty concept.

Allen et al. (2007) found that the majority of empirical studies on organizational change communication focus on the content of the change communication which is sent to employees by the organization (e.g. Armenakis & Harris, 2002; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b; Hansma & Elving, 2008; Richardson & Denton, 1996). However, much less is empirically known about the actual process an employee goes through when receiving and evaluating change-related information. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) have argued that the way information is processed is highly dependent on individual characteristics of the employee. This suggests that QCC is not objectively determined by organizational design of the content of change-related communication but is subjectively determined by the perception of the employees receiving change-related information. Hence, “quality” is all about employee perception. We are interested in studying the dynamics of the process in which QCC is evaluated by employees.

Allen et al. (2007) argue that there “remains a large gap in the change management literature regarding the role different sources of communication play in influencing employees’ attitudes and intentions towards change” (p. 207). Allen et al. specifically argue that future research should be aimed at how change-related communication influences the adverse change-outcomes employees experience. As the experience of uncertainty and declined organizational trust have been found to be common adverse outcomes for employees during organizational change, we argue that differences in the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust are important variables to study the dynamics of QCC during organizational change.
Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) argue that employees attain change related information from both formal channels (organizational messages and clues) and informal channels (rumors). It is argued that rumors are spawned when change-related information from formal channels is perceived as poor (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b). There is a growing body of research suggesting that rumors play an important role during organizational change. Therefore, to fully understand the dynamics of QCC we argue that it is necessary to incorporate both formal and informal information sources into our research model.

Our main research question is: *do the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust during organizational change have a relationship with the report of rumors through perceived quality change-related communication (QCC)?* We are confident that this research will adequately respond to the call by Allen et al. (2007), thus having theoretical relevance. Our study can also be relevant for managerial practitioners. By having a better understanding of the process an employee goes through when receiving and evaluating change-related information and acknowledging the notion that differences in the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust can influence the way change-related information is perceived, managerial practitioners are perhaps aided in creating a more differentiated change approach.

This thesis is structured as follows. Using an extensive literature review, we will first define the constructs of uncertainty, organizational trust, QCC and rumor and predict relationships between them. The research hypotheses will then be presented in a theoretical model and research methodology will then be explained. Then we will present and discuss our results. We will close this thesis with limitations and recommendations for future research.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Organizational change and QCC

Organizational change is defined as “some alteration in the existing organizational arrangements and/or processes” (Grant & Marshak, 2011, p. 205). During changes, organizations go through a transformation in their key attributes which “disrupt the order of the understood world” (Corley & Gioia, 2004, p. 173).

Change-related communication is aimed at reducing employee’s experience of uncertainty and keeping employees informed of anticipated events (Bordia et al., 2004). Quality refers the way the receiver of the change-related communication perceives the change-related communication.

Why is quality change-related communication (QCC) important during organizational change? During organizational change, employees go through a process of sense-making in which they need information to establish a sense of prediction and understanding (Jimmieson, Terry, & Callan, 2004). Uncertainty grows when people are not able to predict a situation (Milliken, 1987). Ashford (1988) therefore argues, in line with Kramer’s uncertainty reduction theory (1999), that uncertainty from organizational change can be reduced by providing employees with timely and accurate information about the organizational changes.

Many researchers have noted the role of (poor) QCC in relationship to (un)successful change efforts (e.g. Bordia et al., 2004; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). However, researchers fail to objectively determine criteria for QCC as well as the subsequent criteria for effective change. Determining criteria for QCC is difficult (if not impossible). This is due to the highly complex, nonlinear and context sensitive nature of organizational change (Jimmieson et al., 2004). Research suggests that QCC is highly subjective and based on individual characteristics. For instance, in a study undertaken by Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, and DiFonzo (2006), the processing of change-related
information was dependent on the level of stress an employee experienced. Smet, Vander Elst, Griep, and De Witte (2016) found that the experience of job insecurity influenced the way employees perceived change-related communication. Bordia et al. (2004) demonstrated that the mere provision of information from the organization may not be sufficient, rather it is the perceived QCC that influences employees’ appraisal of change. This implies that the way change-related communication is evaluated and viewed by employees can be shaped by their experience of adverse psychological outcomes caused by organizational change. The construct of QCC seems to be in a similar vein as the construct of ambiguity which is defined as “incomplete, complex or inaccurate information” (Houmanfar & Johnson, 2004, p. 120); it is the receiver of the information that determines whether information can be viewed as complete or incomplete or as high or low quality. Therefore, the term “perceived QCC” is more appropriate.

From what sources can employees gather change-related information? Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) state that change-related information is gathered from formal and informal organizational channels. Formal channels include intended organizational messages which are official announcements from the organization that are “designed to shape employees’ perceptions in a way that serves organizational interests” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 440). Another type of change-related information from a formal channel is the unintended organizational clue (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). An example of an unintended organizational clue is senior management announcing a merger with another company which employees can interpret as an event which will pose a threat to job security. Change-related information is also gathered from informal channels which is defined as rumors (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).
2.2 Uncertainty during organizational change and relationship with QCC.

Uncertainty is defined as a “psychological state of doubt that arises when unexplained events occur” (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994, p. 52) and curtails “an individuals perceived inability to predict something accurately” (Milliken, 1987, p. 136). According to DiFonzo and Bordia (1998b), uncertainty during organizational change rises when employees experience ambiguity. Milliken (1987) argues that “an individual experiences uncertainty because he/she perceives himself/herself to be lacking sufficient information to predict accurately or because he/she feels unable to discriminate between relevant data and irrelevant data” (p. 136).

Jimmieson et al. (2004) found that uncertainty is the most frequent psychological state resulting from organizational change. The researchers argue that this is due to the nonlinear nature of organizational change, making the process of organizational change highly unpredictable for employees. Because people have a core social motive to understand the world around them (Fiske, 2009), a lack of information or ambiguous information inhibits this motive resulting in uncertainty; “certainty renders existence meaningful and confers confidence in how to behave and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which one finds oneself” (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 124). Thus, when an organization changes the environment of its employee’s, uncertainty is a consequence of the employees trying to give meaning and understanding to this changed environment.

What do people do when they experience uncertainty? Kramer’s theory of motivation to reduce uncertainty (1999) provides meaningful insight to this question. Kramer states that, as uncertainty is an aversive psychological state, people will keep seeking information until the experience of uncertainty is properly reduced (Kramer, 1999). This is in line with the job insecurity model (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) which argues that employees seek information to assess the subjective threat to their personal situation caused by the
organizational change. Thus, uncertainty leads to information seeking strategies. Kramer, Dougherty, and Pierce (2004) found that, during the process of organizational change, receiving change-related information reduced employee uncertainty. Similar empirical results have also been confirmed by other scholars (e.g. Allen et al., 2007; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Thus, it has been empirically demonstrated that receiving change-related information can help reduce the experience of uncertainty.

Scholars agree on the notion that the experience of uncertainty is highly personal and can therefore differ between individuals. For instance, Kramer (1999) argues that an individual’s tolerance for uncertainty determines the way that uncertainty is experienced by an individual. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) argue that individual needs, such as the need for security and social support, play a role in ascertaining the level of threat from an organizational change event and thus influences uncertainty experience by the individual. Differing individual responses to uncertainty have also been empirically established using an experiment (Washburn, Baker, Raby, & Smith, 2001).

Based on this review of the literature, we expect that the more an employee experiences uncertainty the less change-related communication will be perceived as QCC (H1). This is mainly because the experience of uncertainty activates information seeking strategies (Kramer, 1999) and more emphasis is therefore placed on the quality and quantity of information.

2.3 Organizational trust during organizational change and relationship with QCC.

Trust is defined “as the willingness to be vulnerable to the discretionary actions of another party” (Pirson & Malhotra, 2011, p. 1087). Organizational trust describes the extent to which individuals trust an organization (Pirson & Malhotra, 2011).

A theory ground in the relationship between organizational change and organizational trust is the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989). A psychological contract is defined as an
individual's beliefs about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that person and another party (Rousseau, 1989). In other words, employees receive long-term job security and other job benefits in return for their loyalty and fulfillment of job obligations. When an organization initiates organizational change and an employee (potentially) loses valued resources, an organization is not fulfilling its psychological contract with an employee. This is referred to as a “psychological contract violation” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 227). Robinson (1996) found that violating a psychological contract can alter employee performance and lower an employee’s experience of organizational trust. Van der Smissen, Schalk, and Freese (2013) found that contract violation alters an individual’s perception on the fulfillment of obligations towards the organization. Tucker, Yeow, and Viki (2013) state that “major events such as organizational changes can bring about a complete reassessment of the trust relationship, either making or breaking the trust bond” (p. 190).

Communication on the consequences of an organizational change is one of the triggers that can cause trust in the organization to suddenly disappear (Smollan, 2015).

The experience of organizational trust can influence the way that change-related information is perceived. For instance, Giffin (1967) found that trust plays an important role in evaluating the credibility of the source providing the information. This implies that information received from the same source that (potentially) violated the trust of the receiver, is processed in a skeptical manner leading to the perception of poor quality information. Evidence for this implication was provided by Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999). The researchers examined how employees at a hospital undergoing organizational change evaluated change-related information presented by the organization regarding the rationale behind the change. The results demonstrated that the relationship between reasons used to justify the change and employee perceptions of the legitimacy of the reasons, was stronger under conditions of high trust than under conditions of low trust. Not trusting the organization
therefore implies that employees’ belief in received change-related communication declines which can shape the way QCC is perceived. Based on these empirical findings, we expect that the more an employee experiences organizational trust, the more QCC will be perceived (H2).

2.4 Rumors

Rumors are “unverified and instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in contexts of ambiguity, danger or potential threat, and that function to help people make sense and manage risk” (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007a, p. 13).

Rumors generally do not possess a solid foundation which makes it different from news (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002b). News is by definition verified by secure standards of authentication while rumors are not (Bordia et al., 2014; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002a). Rumors are however by definition not untrue statements; “they may turn out to be true or false, but their veracity is unknown for the moment” (Bordia et al., 2014, p. 365).

Instrumental relevance refers to the importance of a rumor; the significance of the issue to which the rumor pertains (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002a). Allport and Postman (1947) state that importance is a prerequisite for rumor transmission. They make this point by referring to the example of an American citizen who is not likely to spread rumors concerning the market price for camels in Afghanistan because the subject is not important to him (p. 34).

Ambiguity can result from the sender not fully disclosing all available information and/or result from the receiver’s personal analysis of the quality of the information. When formal communication is perceived as insufficient, people will rely on informal communication, such as rumor and gossip, to fill the information gaps (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2012; Houmanfar & Johnson, 2004; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997).

There have been many studies concerning the role rumors play in (potentially) dangerous, life-threatening and health-endangering situations such as earthquakes (Festinger, 1957; Miyabe, Namamoto, & Aramaki, 2014) and hurricanes (Thomas, 2007). In this case,
rumors are used to assess the level of threat for physical wellbeing. Festinger (1957) argues that rumors function to justify people's feelings of fear despite not directly experiencing the effects of a disaster by giving people a reason to be fearful and therefore reducing cognitive inconsistency. However, danger or threat does not have to be a psychological threat like natural disasters. A threat can also be psychological in nature, where the “sense of self, identity or indeed anything that one cherishes is challenged” (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b, p. 20).

We argue that organizational change is an ideal climate for rumor transmission as it meets all criteria. First, as organizational change can result in the loss of valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989), we argue that organizational change is a subject which is generally regarded as important by employees making organizational change instrumentally relevant. Second, as organizations do not fully disclose all change-related information (Jimmieson et al., 2004; Napier, Simmons, & Stratton, 1992; Richardson & Denton, 1996) and individual’s process information in different ways, organizational change can create ambiguous contexts. Third, employees can experience several adverse psychological outcomes from organizational change (Bordia et al., 2004; Bordia et al., 2006; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991) implying that organizational change can create danger and threat to individual wellbeing. Finally, driven by the need to understand the world around us (Fiske, 2009), to prepare for a worst case scenario (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b) and the need to be able to make predictions about our own situation (Milliken, 1987), rumors can be used during organizational change for sense-making and risk management.

2.5 Rumors during organizational change and relationship with QCC

The role of rumors during organizational change has received substantial empirical attention. After interviewing personnel of 43 organizations undergoing change, Smeltzer (1991) found that rumors accompanied perceived poor QCC. In a study of eight organizations Smeltzer and Zener (1992) found that rumors preceded formal announcements. In a survey
among 74 PR professionals, DiFonzo and Bordia (1998a) found that (harmful) rumors are commonplace within an organizational context and respondents indicated they received rumors on a weekly basis. The majority of rumors during organizational change are about personnel changes, job security and job satisfaction (Bordia et al., 2006). In a case study of a company with perceived poor QCC, DiFonzo and Bordia (1998b) found that rumors were much more commonplace compared to an organization where employees perceived QCC. Furthermore, DiFonzo and Bordia (2007a) argue that when employees are hearing rumors on a regular basis, they might perceive that the organization is providing insufficient change communication. Smet et al. (2016) empirically demonstrated that poor perceived QCC influenced the report of negative rumors.

Based on these empirical findings we expect that the more QCC is perceived, the less rumors will be reported (H3). Furthermore, as the literature has shown QCC to act as a precursor for the report of rumors we expect that QCC mediates the relationship between uncertainty and the report of rumors (H4) and organizational trust and the report of rumors (H5). Furthermore, and in line with the findings by Bordia et al. (2006), we expect that more negative than positive rumors will be reported during organizational change. This is based on the argument that during organizational change employees psychologically prepare for a worst case scenario and therefore seek negative information (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). This is done as a coping strategy to lower the emotional impact once the adverse outcomes of organizational change become real. Furthermore, when a psychological contract is at risk of being violated, employees scan their environment more profusely for negative information as they become more vigilant (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). In addition, negative information has a higher attention value than positive information as negative information is processed more thoroughly (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).
2.6 Theoretical model

Figure 1

Theoretical Model

![Theoretical Model Diagram]

2.7 Research hypotheses

H1: More experience of uncertainty will lead to the perception of less QCC.

H2: More experience of organizational trust will lead to the perception of more QCC.

H3: Perceiving QCC will lead to reporting rumors less frequently.

H4: QCC mediates the relationship between uncertainty and the report of rumors.

H5: QCC mediates the relationship between organizational trust and the report of rumors.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Population

The study was undertaken within a multinational company in the financial services industry based in the Netherlands. During the research period, the company was undergoing major organizational change due to changes in the regulatory system and technological advances. Because of these changes, the organization has officially confirmed that the total workforce will be downsized by at least 25%. This specific change environment is comparable to other organizational change settings which have been researched by other scholars.
A total of 160 surveys were distributed among the total number of employees (216). In total, 115 surveys were completed; 60 males (52%) and 55 females (48%). Total response was 72% on surveys distributed and 53% on the total workforce. Respondents’ ages ranged from 22 years to 62 years ($M=43.17$, $SD=10.20$). Years of employment ranged from 1 year to 40 years ($M=18.62$, $SD=11.41$). The education level distribution within the organization was 9.5% high school (middelbare school), 19.1% secondary vocational education (middelbaar beroepsonderwijs), polytechnic 56.5% (hoger beroepsonderwijs) and 14.8% university (wetenschappelijk onderwijs). The largest group of respondents were married or living together and had children (68.7%).

No discrimination was made in the employee’s function or position within the organization. This is due to the fact that the organizational changes apply to all employees, irrespective of their function. An exception was made for directors due to the fact that they are responsible for communicating organizational change. As the focus in this study lies on employees receiving change-related information, directors were not included as respondents.

Even though the organization is part of a multinational corporation, the organization is actually organized as an independent organization with its own senior management. Even though organizational changes are initiated from the headquarters, senior management are solely responsible for communicating change-related information within their organization. For this reason, we did not extend our research population by including other organizations within the corporation, as we are interested in having a research population which attain change-related information from the exact same source.

3.2 Procedure

To attain the highest response rate, due to the relatively low number of employees within the organization, we chose the use of a written survey instead of a digital survey.
Combined with commitment and introductions from departmental managers and a personal introduction from the researchers, this approach provided a satisfactory response.

Prior permission was asked from departmental managers to undertake the research within their department. Managers were also asked to create awareness and commitment among the employees to participate. For most departments, the researchers joined planned departmental meetings and were given time to introduce the research and ask for commitment. Emphasis was put on anonymity due the sensitive nature of the research subjects. Respondents who were not present at departmental meetings received a separate personal introduction from the researchers. An introduction and instruction to the research was also provided in the questionnaire. After the introduction and instruction, the questionnaires were distributed.

The first ten respondents were specifically asked to check for any formulation errors and other constraints (Babbie, 2013). After this check, the rest of the respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire containing 30 items (appendix A). A few minor typos were corrected but no major changes were made to the questionnaire. The questionnaire mainly contained items which respondents were asked to score based on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Data collection took place during a three-week period in November and December 2016. After the first and second week reminders were sent by email. Questionnaires could be returned by depositing the questionnaire in special mailboxes which were placed at several locations within the organization, by returning the questionnaires to departmental managers or by returning the questionnaires personally to the researchers.

3.3 Instruments

To maintain internal validity and reliability for this research, we used scales that were tested extensively by other researchers (appendix A provides an overview). As previous
research has established satisfactory reliability of the scales, this study relies and builds on previous establishments of the psychometric properties of the scales. Nevertheless, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha (α) to ensure the internal validity. In this test a Cronbach’s Alpha with a value of .7 or higher was considered acceptable (Field, 2013). Table 1 gives an overview of scale validity. We conclude that all scales had satisfactory reliability alphas.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha (α)</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QCC (Bordia et al., 2004)</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004)</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational trust (McLeary &amp; Cruise, 2015)</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.1 QCC

QCC is measured using a Dutch translation of a seven item subscale which was developed by Bordia et al. (2004). Respondents are asked to rate the items based on their evaluation of the quality of the official information provided by the organization about the current change process. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (a very small degree) to 7 (a very large degree). A lower score indicates a lower perceived QCC. A sample item is “the official information provided about the change was accurate”. The reliability, using Cronbach’s alpha, was .80. In line with prior research, our test for reliability within this research population delivers a satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha for these items.

3.3.2 Uncertainty

Uncertainty is measured using a Dutch translation of a nine item subscale developed by Bordia et al. (2004). Respondents are asked to rate the items based on their feelings of uncertainty regarding the organizational change in the past three months. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (a very small degree) to 7 (a very large degree). A lower
score indicates less experience of uncertainty. A sample item is “uncertainty regarding the possibility of a promotion”. The reliability, using Cronbach’s alpha, was .87. In line with prior research, our test for reliability within this research population delivers a satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha for these items.

One item (item 1) was designed specifically for employees working within a hospital; “whether you will have to relocate to another section of the hospital”. We have changed the word “hospital” into “organization” to make it more context specific. We deemed it necessary to incorporate this item as relocation is also part of the change initiatives within the organization used for this study. The reliability analysis showed that removal of this item lead to a lower overall Cronbach’s alpha (α = .87). We are therefore confident that changing the content of this item does not influence scale validity.

To the uncertainty scale we will add one item concerning uncertainty about job (in)security as this item was not used by the researchers. With a substantial body of empirical research regarding (potential) job loss as a major cause for uncertainty (e.g. Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Bordia et al., 2006; Smet et al., 2016) we deemed is necessary to incorporate this item (item 10, see appendix A). The reliability analysis showed that removal of this item lead to a lower overall Cronbach’s alpha (α = .85). We are therefore confident that adding this item does not negatively influence scale validity and reliability.

We also will also measure if respondents know the personal consequences of the organizational change by using a one item subscale; “the consequences of the organizational change initiatives for me as an individual are clear”. Uncertainty rises when unexplained events occur (DiFonzo et al., 1994) and an individual is unable to predict something accurately (Milliken, 1987). However, once unexplained events become explained, i.e. the individual outcome of change initiatives becomes clear to the individual and an individual is better able to predict his/her future, the experience of uncertainty can change into the
experience of certainty. The scales essentially measure the same but in opposites. This item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (a very small degree) to 7 (a very large degree). A low score indicates that the individual consequences of the organizational change initiatives are less clear. Reliability for this item cannot be tested as it is a one item scale.

### 3.3.3 Organizational trust

Organizational trust is measured using a Dutch translation of a ten item subscale which were developed by McLeary and Cruise (2015). Respondents are asked to rate the items based on their experience of organizational trust in the past three months. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (a very small degree) to 7 (a very large degree). A lower score indicates less experience of organizational trust. A sample item is “the organization treats people like me fairly and justly”. The reliability, using Cronbach’s alpha for the items combined was .85. In line with prior research, our test for reliability within this research population delivers a satisfactory Cronbach’s alpha for these items.

### 3.3.4 Rumors

To measure the report of rumors, respondents are also asked to rate the following two items on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always, every day): “How often do you hear rumors within your organization?” and “how often do you hear rumors about dismissals in your organization? This is based on a Dutch translation of the two item subscale used by Smet et al. (2016). The researchers established inter-item correlations at .72, .72, and .73 for T1, T2, and T3, respectively. Our factor analysis showed that the two items could be loaded onto one factor making the items fit for scale construction.

As an exploratory variable, we will also measure what types of rumors are reported during organizational change. For this, we will use methodology based on the study by Bordia et al. (2006). By collecting rumors by an open-ended question, the researchers categorized the collected rumors into different types of rumors. For reliability, the researchers used an
independent judge who coded a random of 10% in each category. Coding consistency was assessed by the coefficient Kappa. The Kappa values ranged from .74 to 1.0 for the categories and were all statistically significant at \( p \leq .01 \), which provided confidence in the reliability of the content analysis. Instead of using open-ended questions, we will ask respondents to state the type of rumors they hear the most based on these predetermined categories. We will use the seven most popular categories based of the number of respondents in the study by Bordia et al. (2006) who reported rumors within that specific category. Categories will be presented in their positive and negative opposites to determine if the rumors respondents report are of a positive or negative nature. This distinction is made as research has shown negative rumors to be more pervasive during organizational change (Bordia et al., 2006) and the expectation that employees will primarily scan for negative information during organizational change to assess the level of threat to their personal situation (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Sample rumor categories are “job security” and “work practice changes”.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 gives an overview of means (\( M \)), standard deviations (\( SD \)) and Pearson’s correlations (\( r \)) of all research variables including the control variables.

**Table 2**

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. QCC</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uncertainty</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational trust</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Report of rumors</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowing the change outcome</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Age</td>
<td>43.17</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Years of employment</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.87**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 1 assumes that the more an employee experiences uncertainty, the less an employee will perceive QCC. To test this hypothesis a regression analysis was performed in which QCC served as the dependent variable and the experience of uncertainty and certainty (knowing the change outcome) served as the predictor variables. Baron and Kenny (1986) argue that for a control variable to be entered into a regression analysis, a significant correlation must exist between the control variables and the dependent and predictor variables. Based on table 2, we can conclude that the control variables do not significantly correlate with the predictor and dependent variables. Therefore, control variables are discarded from analysis as they do not explain a significant amount of variance. A simple regression was therefore performed instead of a multiple regression. Results showed that the predictor variable uncertainty explained a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .07; F = 7.51; p \leq .01$; such that more experience of uncertainty is related negatively to perceived QCC ($\beta = -0.12; t = -2.74; p \leq .01$). Results further showed that the predictor variable knowing the change outcome also explained a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .20; F = 27.97; p \leq .01$; such that more experience of certainty is related positively to perceived QCC ($\beta = 1.46; t = 5.29; p \leq .01$). Based on these results we accept H1.

Hypothesis 2 assumes that the more an employee experiences organizational trust, the more an employee will perceive QCC. To test this hypothesis a simple regression analysis was performed in which QCC served as the dependent variable and organizational trust served as the predictor variable. No control variables were added to the equation as correlations between control variables, dependent variables and predictor variables were not significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Results showed that the predictor variable organizational trust explained a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .15; F = 17.97; p \leq .01$; such that more
experience of organizational trust is related positively to perceived QCC ($\beta = .28; t = 4.24; p \leq .01$). Based on these results we accept H2.

Hypothesis 3 assumes that the more an employee perceives QCC, the less an employee will report hearing rumors. To test this hypothesis a multiple regression analysis was performed in which the report of rumors served as the dependent variable and QCC served as the predictor variable. No control variables were added to the equation as correlations between control variables, dependent variables and predictor variables were not significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Results showed that the predictor variable QCC explained a significant amount of variance, $R^2 = .11; F = 13.62; p \leq .01$; such that the perception of more QCC negatively to the report of rumors ($\beta = -.13; t = -3.69; p \leq .01$). Based on these results we accept H3.

4.2 Mediation Analysis (Hypothesis 4)

To test the prediction that QCC mediates between uncertainty, and the report of rumors, we conducted a mediated regression along the lines suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Baron and Kenny argue that for mediation to be established, the independent variable (uncertainty) and the dependent variable (report of rumors) should be correlated ($r = .30, p \leq .01$, see Table 2), that the independent variable (uncertainty) and the mediator (QCC) should be correlated ($r = -.25, p \leq .01$, see Table 2), that the mediator (QCC) and the dependent variable (report of rumors) should be correlated ($r = -.33, p \leq .01$, see Table 2), and that the originally significant correlation between independent and dependent variable is reduced to non-significance when the mediator is controlled for. To test this last requirement, we regressed uncertainty on the report of rumors after entering QCC as a control variable. Results are shown in Table 3. The originally significant regression ($\beta = .05, p \leq .01$) was reduced to lower significance when QCC was controlled for ($\beta = .04, p \leq .05$). A Sobel test (Sobel, 1982)
confirmed the significance of the indirect path \((Z = 2.05, p = .04)\). These results partially support Hypothesis 4.

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Uncertainty and QCC on Report of Rumors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables in the equation</th>
<th>Variables controlled for in the equation</th>
<th>(\beta)</th>
<th>(\Delta\beta)</th>
<th>(R^2)</th>
<th>(\Delta R^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>QCC</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCC</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.13**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>QCC</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(p \leq .05\)
** \(p \leq .01\)

In the column labeled "\(\beta\)", \(\beta\)-weights for uncertainty, and QCC are reported. The column labeled "\(\Delta\beta\)" shows the change in \(\beta\)-weight for uncertainty when the proposed intermediate variable is added to the equation. The column labeled "\(R^2\)" shows the total variance explained by the variables in the equation. The column labeled \(\Delta R^2\) shows the variance accounted for by uncertainty when the proposed intermediate variable is added to the equation.

4.3 Mediation Analysis (Hypothesis 5)

To test the prediction that QCC mediates between organizational trust and the report of rumors, we conducted a mediated regression along the lines suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Baron and Kenny argue that for mediation to be established, the independent variable (organizational trust) and the dependent variable (report of rumors) should be correlated \((r = -.29, p \leq .01,\) see Table 2), that the independent variable (organizational trust) and the mediator (QCC) should be correlated \((r = .38, p \leq .01,\) see Table 2), that the mediator (QCC) and the dependent variable (report of rumors) should be correlated \((r = -.33, p \leq .01,\) see Table 2), and that the originally significant correlation between independent and dependent variable is reduced to non-significance when the mediator is controlled for. To test this last
requirement, we regressed organizational trust on the report of rumors after entering QCC as a control variable. Results are shown in Table 4. The originally significant regression ($\beta = -0.08$, $p \leq 0.01$) was reduced to lower significance when QCC was controlled for ($\beta = 0.06$, $p \leq 0.05$). A Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) confirmed the significance of the indirect path ($Z = -2.08$, $p = 0.04$). These results partially support Hypothesis 5.

**Table 4**

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Organizational Trust and QCC on Report of Rumors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables in the equation</th>
<th>Variables controlled for in the equation</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$\Delta \beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QCC</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.13**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational trust</td>
<td>QCC</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p \leq 0.05$

** $p \leq 0.01$

In the column labeled "$\beta$", $\beta$-weights for organizational trust, and QCC are reported. The column labeled "$\Delta \beta$" shows the change in $\beta$-weight for organizational trust when the proposed intermediate variable is added to the equation. The column labeled "$R^2$" shows the total variance explained by the variables in the equation. The column labeled $\Delta R^2$ shows the variance accounted for by organizational trust when the proposed intermediate variable is added to the equation.

**4.4 Rumor categories**

What types of rumors are commonly reported during organizational change? Table 5 shows that respondents reported hearing rumors in specific categories 568 times. Of these rumors, 512 were negative (90.1%) and 56 were positive (9.9%). The most commonly reported rumors were about job loss, negative changes to the organizational structure, a decline in job facilities and negative work practice changes.
5. Discussion

In this study, we researched the influence of employee’s experience of uncertainty and organizational trust on an employee’s perception of QCC and subsequent reporting of rumors. Our findings provide evidence that employees report hearing rumors in a higher frequency when QCC provided by the organization is perceived as poor. This finding has also been empirically demonstrated by other researchers who have shown rumors to be rampant when change communication is perceived as poor (e.g. DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998b). However, prior research seems to place an emphasis on the organization designing high quality change-related communication as playing a key role in employee wellbeing during organizational change (e.g. Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Based on our findings we however argue that the perception of QCC lies not solely in the content and design of the change-related communication, but also on the level of uncertainty and organizational trust experienced by employees; how an employee feels forms and shapes his/her perception of information. This demonstrates the highly subjective nature of change-related communication. Although it is to be expected that poorly designed change-related information will cause the perception of poor QCC (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991), having well designed change-related information is in no way a guarantee that employees will automatically perceive QCC. This is dependent on their experience of uncertainty, organizational trust and perhaps other factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rumor Category</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work practice changes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advancement</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job facilities</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Report of Rumors in Different Rumor Categories Showing Both N Score and Percentages.
Our findings fit the uncertainty reduction theory (Kramer, 1999) in the sense that people experiencing uncertainty are motivated to seek information in order to reduce this experienced uncertainty. Information can provide input for making an uncertain situation more certain, hence giving people back a sense of prediction and understanding of the world around them (Fiske, 2009; Milliken, 1987). Interestingly, we found that knowing the personal outcome of a change event (i.e. the experience of certainty) was a better predictor for the perception of QCC than the experience of uncertainty. Perhaps an explanation can be found in Kramer’s theory (1999) that less quality change-related information is needed as uncertainty no longer needs to be reduced. However, as Napier et al. (1992) argue, no amount of information will ever be sufficient enough to completely reduce the experience of uncertainty which perhaps explains the moderate strength of these relationships we found in our results.

Our research also provides evidence that employees become more aware of rumors when uncertainty and declined organizational trust are experienced and QCC is subsequently perceived as poor. As our results suggest that the relationship between QCC and the report of rumors is weak, we conclude that reporting rumors is not fully explained by perceiving QCC. An explanation can perhaps be found in the sense-making function of rumors (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007a). Jimmieson et al. (2004) have argued that employees go through a process of sense-making during organizational change in order to establish a sense of prediction and understanding. Perhaps receiving rumors is about much more than just gathering information to make sense of what’s going on and what the consequences are to an employee’s position within the organization. Perhaps rumors have much more in common with the construct of gossip than has been previously established by other scholars. The general definition of gossip is the exchange of (evaluative) information about absent third parties (Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). DiFonzo and Bordia (2007b) state that the information from rumors is used to make sense of ambiguous information and manage risk. They state that gossip arises in
reaction to (the threat) of social isolation. Rumor is used to gain control over one’s situation and prepare for negative scenario’s (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b) whereas gossip is primarily used for social functions such as being part of group life (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swann, 2006; Dunbar, 2004), to entertain (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Ben-Ze’ev & Goodman, 1994; Rosnow, 1977), to release pent up emotions (Altuntaş, Şahin Altun, & Çevik Akyil, 2014; Grosser et al., 2012; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005), to gather information (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Emler, 1990; Wert & Salovey, 2004) and to exert negative influence (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Dijkstra, Beersma, & Van Leeuwen, 2014; Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012). We however argue that rumors and gossip perhaps share common functions. For instance, the reality of organizational change is that employees are not isolated but exchange information in social interaction with other employees. Perhaps sharing rumors between people could also be a way to cope with the (harsh) realities of organizational change and therefore have important social functions which are comparable to gossip. Rumors therefore do perhaps not just function as a means to fill the informational gaps.

The findings also fit the theory on trust playing an important role in valuing the source which provides the change related information (Giffin, 1967). Indeed, when trust in the organization in higher, more QCC is perceived and subsequently less rumors are reported. An interesting additional finding is that knowing the outcome of the change event had a weak positive relationship with organizational trust which is somewhat counter intuitive. The literature on psychological contracts (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1989) provides a possible explanation for this relationship in concluding that the change outcome may have had no adverse effects for the employees in this study. This lead to a rise in organizational trust as the employees perceive the organization as having fulfilled its psychological obligations towards the employee in the sense that there are no adverse changes
for the employee due to the change event; the opposite of a psychological contract violation. Another possible explanation for this effect is provided by Van der Smissen et al. (2013). The researchers found that an employee’s perception of a violation of the psychological contract is dependent on an employee’s attitude towards organizational change. Perhaps in this study positive attitudes towards change were already held by employees. As we did not ask respondents about the known outcome of the change event to be negative or positive, we cannot know for sure. Perhaps this is an interesting avenue to pursue in future research.

The types of rumors reported are in line with the findings by Bordia et al. (2006). In both studies around 90% of all reported rumors were negative and the most commonly reported rumor categories were job security and changes in the organizational structure. This supports the theory that negative information has a higher propensity than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001) and that employees seek negative information during organizational change in order to prepare for a worst case scenario (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007b). Furthermore, the high amount of negative rumors measured also gives support to the theory that employees scan the environment for information more profusely as they become more vigilant for potential violations of the psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

6. Practical contributions

Based on our findings a case can be made for organizations not putting all their effort in the design and content of change-related information. At least equal focus should be given in addressing employee’s feelings of uncertainty and creating a climate for employees to vent and discuss these feelings. Perhaps this approach could function as a double-edged sword; providing a climate for uncertainty to be addressed and discussed, could perhaps increase employees’ trust in the organization leading to a better chance of a successful change event.
Our findings provide evidence that organizational trust is a more powerful determinant for QCC and the report of rumors, so strategies aimed at raising the level of trust seem sensible.

Furthermore, we suggest that organizational practitioners stop viewing rumors as the ugly by-product of organizational change or even view the very existence of rumors during organizational change as a confirmation that change-related communication has failed. To discard rumors in this manner is to deny employees a necessary sense-making process which helps them understand their changing work environment and cope with the realities of change. People feel the need to be able to make sound predictions over their own future. Instead of adding more (meaningless) content to the change-communication in the hope to fulfill presumed employee expectations to continuously disclose information, view rumors as triggers that sense-making processes are activated. By locating and accepting rumor activity, the organizational practitioner can perhaps create a climate where employees can vent their emotions. Our findings lay a first foundation in understanding that rumors will take place regardless of the amount of information that has been and will be disclosed because reporting rumors is in part a “symptom” of uncertainty and declined organizational trust.

7. Limitations and future directions

Our study views the report of rumors as an isolated variable which is perceived by an individual employee. However, in reality rumors are not isolated but are transmitted and received during social interactions between employees. Future research should therefore aim to create a better understanding of the sociology involved in organizational change environments to perhaps help create a better understanding of the dynamics of rumors and their sense-making function.

Our study has shown that employees collect information both from official information provided by the organization and from rumors. We have also established that perceived poor QCC is a precursor for the report of more rumors when uncertainty and
declined organizational trust are experienced. We however have not established the relative impact of information collected from both sources; does the information from official channels have more or less impact on employees than rumors? Clues arise in the dynamics of organizational trust where lower trust can lead to a decline in source credibility. In this case information provided by the organization is not (fully) believed and employees automatically rely more on information from rumors making a case for rumors having a stronger impact. We argue that future research should study impact differences between the types of change-related information and the subsequent impact to employee’s overall perception of organizational change.

Furthermore, we believe that longitudinal studies are needed to allow stronger inferences to be drawn as our study was cross-sectional and therefore causality cannot be demonstrated. Organizational change goes through many stages from the premature rumor (pun intended) that change may be imminent to the actual change in organizational structure and work practices. Smet et al. (2016) for instance measured QCC and rumors at three six-month intervals during an organizational change event and could therefore incorporate the full spectrum of organizational change. Our research was conducted at one set point in time and we therefore do not know if the dynamics change over time and during different stages. For instance, the mean value for knowing the consequences of the change event was 4.64 (on a seven-point scale) implying that respondents had an above average knowledge of the personal consequences of the change events. This finding does not surprise us as the organizational changes were initiated in December 2015 and were therefore already in an advanced stage.

The overall low amount of variance explained by uncertainty and organizational trust in the relationship with QCC, combined with the highly subjective nature of perceiving QCC, suggest that much more is going on in the process of evaluating change-related communication. Furthermore, the control variables used in this study (age, years of
employment and educational level) did not have any explanatory power in the model. Our study has focused on two antecedents of perceiving QCC (uncertainty and organizational trust) but perhaps more variables have explanatory value. For instance, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) have argued that variables such as locus of control, conservatism, dependence and the need for security influence the way an employee’s assesses the level of threat to job security. We therefore argue that future research should incorporate other independent variables related to individual differences in the model to help explain the dynamics of QCC and subsequent reporting of rumors.

Finally, our model does not include a vicious or reciprocal cycle. One could argue that the model works both ways; an extensive report of rumors could make employees believe that change-communication must be poor (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007a) and this could lead to higher levels of uncertainty and declined organizational trust. Smet et al. (2016) are, to the best of our knowledge, the first researchers to study reciprocity in the relationship with QCC and rumors. We encourage future research to incorporate reciprocity into our research model.

8. Conclusion

Our main research question was: do the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust during organizational change have a relationship with the report of rumors through perceived quality change-related communication (QCC)? From our results, we can conclude that the experience of uncertainty and organizational trust have a relationship with perceived QCC. However, we can conclude that these relationships are weak for both uncertainty and organizational trust. In this relationship, organizational trust has a higher explanatory value than uncertainty. Furthermore, we established that the relationship between uncertainty and the report of rumors and the relationship between organizational trust and the report of rumors, is partially mediated by QCC. Hence, when employees experience more uncertainty
and less organizational trust, they perceive less QCC and report more rumors. In line with our expectations, negative rumors are most commonly reported during organizational change.

With this study we believe we have contributed to narrowing the gap in the change management literature regarding the role different sources of communication play in influencing employees’ attitudes towards change (Allen et al., 2007). Our research has shown that uncertainty and declined organizational trust, which are common outcomes of organizational change, can shape the way change-related communication from the organization is perceived. A differing perception of change-related information is a theoretical step towards understanding how an employee’s attitude towards change is shaped.
References


### Appendix A: Overview of items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quality of change communication (Bordia et al., 2004)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The official information provided about the change:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. kept you informed throughout the change process, even after the official announcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. included information about changes to the organization’s structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. addressed your personal concerns regarding the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. was accurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. gave as much information as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. involved employees in the change process and decisions made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. communicated the reasons for the change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Whether you will have to relocate to another section of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The level of influence you will have over changes in your job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Whether the culture of the organization will change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Whether you will fit in the culture of the “new” organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Whether you will get to work with people you have become friends with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The possibility of a promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Whether you will have to learn new job skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. The extent to which your job role/tasks will change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Whether your pay/salary will change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Whether you will lose your job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Organizational trust (McLeary &amp; Cruise, 2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. I feel very confident about the skills of this organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. This organization is known to be successful at the things it tries to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The organization treats people like me fairly and justly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. The organization can be relied on to keep its promises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Sound principles seem to guide the behavior of this organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. This organization does not mislead people like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Whenever this organization makes a decision I know it will be concerned about people like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. I believe this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. This organization is interested in the wellbeing of people like me, not just itself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Report of rumors (Smet et al., 2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. How often do you hear rumors within your organization? (This may concern the rumor itself or the news that a rumor is circulating.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How often do you hear rumors about dismissals in your organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Knowing the change outcome (the experience of certainty)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The consequences of the organizational change initiatives for me as an individual are clear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>