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Article

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Being “in the Know”: the Effectiveness of Organizational Instruments in Enhancing Employees’ Attention and Affective Commitment to Major Change

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Abstract For a firm’s change initiative to succeed, its employees must be committed to its implementation. Yet managers struggle to attain or enhance this commitment, particularly in the case of a major change program. Building on the attention-based view and a 2019 survey of employees of a leading German multinational corporation that had recently implemented a major change program, we examine how three organizational instruments influence employees’ attention, and thereby their affective commitment to change: information about the change initiative, participation in its implementation, and financial benefit from its outcome. While each organizational instrument improves employees’ affective commitment to change, we find that information, which allows employees to be “in the know”, has by far the greatest effect. Our observation that the organizational instrument demanding the fewest resources from management seems the most effective suggests that more resources do not always lead to better results, as the attention-based view often assumes.

Keywords Change Management · Employees’ Commitment to Change · Attention-Based View · Organization Design

JEL M10 · M19

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1 Introduction

In the autumn of 2020, the Otto Group announced a major restructuring, from being an online retailer to an online platform following Amazon's model. The following year, Volkswagen's chief executive outlined his plan to transform VW from a car manufacturer into a software-driven mobility provider. In the summer of 2024, Linde signed a landmark agreement to build and operate North America's largest clean hydrogen production facility, marking a strategic shift from traditional gas supply to clean energy solutions.

Stories like these routinely punctuate the business news, as large incumbents reshape their strategies in their quest to remain competitive (Stouten et al. 2018). Due to both, the urgency and scale of these changes, top managements tend to make decisions around them with minimal involvement from individuals lower in the organizational hierarchy. Instead, because they know that the organization's commitment is indispensable to any change success (Sterling 2003; Stieger et al. 2012), they dedicate substantial resources to engaging employees in the implementation process.

It is a smart investment: A main reason many major change projects fall short of expectations (Baculard et al. 2017) is a lack of support from the employees meant to implement them—mainly department heads, team leads, and waged staff. Many firms attempt to head this off by fostering employees' commitment, a well-established foundation for success in change initiatives (for reviews, see, e.g., Da Ros et al. 2023; Jaros 2010).

Research on the antecedents of employee commitment to change tends to focus on small, singular change events (e.g., Chen and Wang 2007; Conway and Monks 2008; Lau and Woodman 1995), such as the introduction of new HR practices. In contrast, major change programs remain less explored. And yet it is particularly challenging to marshal employee commitment to large-scale change, in part because big shifts often require that decades-old work routines be altered. Studies indicate that firms tend to actively intervene in these cases, designing and institutionalizing the change process by means of systems, processes, and practices that target the whole organizational environment, with commitment to change as the specific goal (Da Ros et al. 2023; Stouten et al. 2018). These efforts typically involve firms' resource investment in one or more of the three most established change-management tools (or, in our terminology, *organizational instruments*): information provision, employee participation, and respective financial incentives (e.g., Kotter 1995; Armenakis and Harris 2002).

The use of these instruments can be understood against the background of the attention-based view (ABV) (Ocasio 1997, 2011; Ocasio et al. 2023), which posits that organizational outcomes, such as the success of a major change program, are fundamentally shaped by what captures and holds *attention*. While the ABV largely explores the attention of decision-makers, our study focuses on employees' attention. Specifically, we develop hypotheses around the questions whether and how well the employed organizational instruments direct employees' attention to a common goal.

To capture how the use of these instruments translates into commitment to a major change program, we focus on how employees perceived the level of information

they were given about the change (i.e., its quantity and quality); how they viewed the opportunity to participate in the implementation of the change program, and whether they enrolled in a monthly investment plan, that was further incentivized by the firm's matching contribution. When it comes to information and participation, we concentrate on employees' perception. We argue it is the perception, and not the instruments per se, that will affect whether or not the change wins employees' attention and, in turn, their commitment. Whether or not to take a financial stake in the change, however, is not a question of perception, but a simple yes or no usage decision—thus our decision to analyze it differently from the other two instruments.

We assess not only each organizational instrument's impact on commitment but consider also its resource-intensity for the firm. In the first case—the provision of information—the resource commitment refers largely to top management's time and effort. In contrast, participation is much more resource-intensive than information provision; not just because more people are involved, but because managers need to listen to employees' suggestions, discuss them, provide feedback, and reach compromises. Likewise, in the firm under study, monthly investment plans absorb substantial resources, especially as employees receive matching employer contributions.

Against this background and relying on the ABV, we explore the following research question: To what extent is employees' *affective commitment* to a major change program influenced by their perceptions of information and participation, and their (potential) financial benefit? Affective commitment to change—wherein employees actively embrace change implementation rather than merely comply out of obligation (Armenakis and Harris 2009; Coetsee 1999)—is crucial for major transformation programs like those at Otto, VW, and Linde. Fostering such willing engagement increases the likelihood of success of these high-stake changes. We address our research question using a dataset of 306 employees at a multinational corporation (MNC) headquartered in Germany.

We find that all three instruments positively impact employees' attention to change and thus their affective commitment to change. Within this positive trend, however, there are differences. Most notably, employees' affective commitment to change is highest when the employees feel “in the know”—which is to say, when their perception is that they have been sufficiently informed about the change.

Our findings contribute to three bodies of literature: research on the ABV, change management, and more broadly, management and strategy. First, even though employees are acknowledged as one of the central players in the ABV (Ocasio 2011), most studies examining attention focus on the firm's top management (Brielmaier and Friesl 2023a), and empirical results on directing employees' attention are sparse. We know from prior work (Haas et al. 2015) that routine as well as novel problems often fail to attract attention among employees. Our study goes beyond these results by pinpointing and analyzing which organizational instruments help a firm's management to steer the attention of employees, thereby enhancing their affective commitment to a major change program.

Second, while ABV studies commonly link resource allocation and attention (e.g., Ocasio 1997; Ocasio and Joseph 2017), Boynton (2024) argued more recently that the relationship between the two is not well understood and deserves further examination. We answer this call for research by studying this relation in the case of

a major change. Our results propose that firms can find success in using a mix of the three most established organizational instruments to enhance employees' attention and affective commitment to change. Our empirical findings also offer support for prioritizing information provision among these instruments. Not only does information appear to have the greatest impact on employees' affective commitment, but it is the most resource-efficient.

Finally, our findings on the overall and relative effectiveness of organizational instruments—and, more specifically, their perception by employees—speak to research on change management (see e.g., Oreg et al. 2011, Stouten et al. 2018 for reviews). Our empirical results suggest that, even in the whirlwind of a major change, management can enhance employees' affective commitment to change through tried and proven organizational instruments. Up to now managers have often lacked clarity on whether their efforts promote a genuine willingness to engage in major change amongst employees. While our findings support that these efforts are worthwhile, our results on the importance of information indicate that managers need not necessarily utilize the most resource-intensive organizational instruments to attain or enhance affective commitment.

2 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Employees' Attention to Change

Firms that want to instill affective commitment to a major change program in their employees need, as a first step, to direct those employees' attention to this change. Attention constitutes a determinant and a necessary precondition for individual decision-making (Ocasio 1997), including the decision to commit. We draw on the ABV to deepen and extend our understanding of how attention to a major change can be attained or enhanced.

The study of attention—defined as organizational decision-makers' "noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort" (Ocasio 1997, p. 187)—has a long history, particularly when focused on executives as those decision-makers. Amongst the theories that explain how organizations can direct attention, the most notable one is the attention-based view (ABV).

The ABV, developed by Ocasio (1997) in the 1990s, builds explicitly on the Behavioral Theory of the Firm (BTOF), which established attention as a limited yet valuable resource for organizations by introducing the concept of *bounded rationality* (Simon 1947). This notion captures humans' inability to fully grasp the consequences of their actions, others' evaluations, or available alternatives (March et al. 1958; Cyert and March 1963), and is inherently linked to selective attention. Because individuals can focus on only a few problems at once due to cognitive limitations, selective attention serves as the primary constraint bounding rationality, creating the need for organizations to direct attention through structural design.

Among BTOF scholars, Simon in particular emphasized the dual role of structure and cognition. He recognized that individuals' decisions are shaped both by their limited attentional capacity and by organizational influences. Ocasio (1997)

built on these ideas with the ABV, solidifying a framework for understanding how organizations actively steer attention to shape strategic outcomes. He emphasized how attention determines the issues and actions that firms prioritize. The ABV's strategic view of attention distinguishes it from earlier attention theories. Instead of simply acknowledging the central role organizations play in shaping individuals' attention, the ABV recognizes firms themselves as attention-distribution systems. They use stimuli to direct their members' attention towards favorable outcomes (Ocasio 2011).

Ocasio (1997) introduces three meta-theoretical principles that govern attention distribution in firms and explain organizational action and adaptation. First, attention is a necessary condition for decision-making: The more individuals focus on certain issues, the more likely those outcomes are to materialize. Second, attention is *situated*, meaning that the context in which people operate affects both their attention and decision-making. Third, attention is structurally distributed: Organizations shape the contexts in which decision-makers find themselves, and influence their members' situated attention means crafting these contexts with care. They do this through elements of organizational architecture. These might be structures, processes, or practices, but we focus on three organizational instruments: information about the change, participation in implementing the change, and financial benefits from the change, if achieved. These and other instruments or parts of the organizational architecture can be defined as succeeding when they channel attention, bringing about desired outcomes such as affective commitment to change. They do so by providing stimuli that lead individuals (who face competing demands and who have limited attentional capacity) to narrow their focus to problems like change, leveraging the tendency to attend more to issues perceived as more valuable or legitimate (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008; Haas et al. 2015; Hoffman and Ocasio 2001).

Organizational instruments require investments of managerial time and effort. In Ocasio's (1997) seminal framework, resources represent one of the firm's key attention regulators, influencing what decision-makers notice, interpret, and act upon. The relationship between resources and attention has long been attested by theoretical work, implicitly assuming that more resources lead to better results. Fewer studies have put the relation to an empirical test and even less have acknowledged its nuanced nature, with the recent exception of Boynton (2024).

The ABV has not yet been applied to scenarios in which the goal is affective commitment to change. This is an outcome that turns on channeling the attention of employees rather than top managers. These employees shoulder a substantial cognitive load, not only because they will likely implement the change on top of their regular responsibilities, but also because they are likely to worry about how it may affect their personal future. Under such conditions, creating employees' willingness to commit becomes particularly challenging.

2.2 From Attention to Employees' Affective Commitment to Change

Whether a major change program succeeds depends on a company's ability to attain or enhance employees' attention. We argue that attention is necessary but not sufficient: it must also translate into commitment to change. While *commitment to*

change is a novel focus in the attention-based literature, it is a dominant topic in empirical studies on change (Stouten et al. 2018). As change is made up of employees' efforts, its success hinges on their willingness to carry out the firm's plans. Without employee commitment, the most promising plans are bound to fail (Cunningham 2006; Huy 2002).

While definitions of commitment to change vary, all emphasize that committed employees internalize the change program, are attached to it, or are involved in achieving its goals (Jaros 2010). Moreover, commitment is more than the absence of negative attitudes about change. Instead, Herold and colleagues (2007) highlight how committed employees contribute to successful outcomes by proactively and continuously engaging in change implementation.

Employees can be committed to change because they want to be, need to be, or ought to be (Armenakis and Harris 2009; Coetsee 1999). Affective commitment to change (the "want to be" category) is considered the most desirable and effective of all three (Parish et al. 2008), as it creates the "vital bond" between employees and change goals (Conner 1993, p. 147). While fear ("need to be") or obligation ("ought to be") may drive individuals to certain goals, these motivations are difficult to sustain since they tend to exhaust people. Moreover, the intrinsic rewards of wanting to do something and then doing it surpass those of acting on duty or principle.

Securing affective commitment to change is especially challenging in major change programs, given that employees may harbor substantial resistance to such events (see, e.g., Mishra and Spreitzer 1998). Resistance is mainly driven by fear of layoffs or uncertainty about the future value of one's knowledge and skills. Additionally, people generally dislike breaking with habits and routines—particular ones that have solidified over a long time. Even employees who appear to superficially support implementation may sabotage success by minimizing their efforts or otherwise delaying progress—both common resistance tactics (Kotter 1996). A key concern of management, therefore, is to enhance affective commitment to change through the organizational context.

2.3 Hypotheses

Drawing on the ABV, we argue that a firm can utilize a mix of organizational instruments to attain or enhance employees' affective commitment to change. As depicted in Fig. 1, we consider the impact of (1) perceptions of change-related information, (2) perceptions of participation levels in change implementation, and (3) financial benefits on employees' affective commitment. We argue that all three organizational instruments increase affective commitment. In addition (4), we are interested in comparing the relative effectiveness of organizational instruments, to provide deeper insights into the connection between resources and goal achievement.

Organizational Instruments

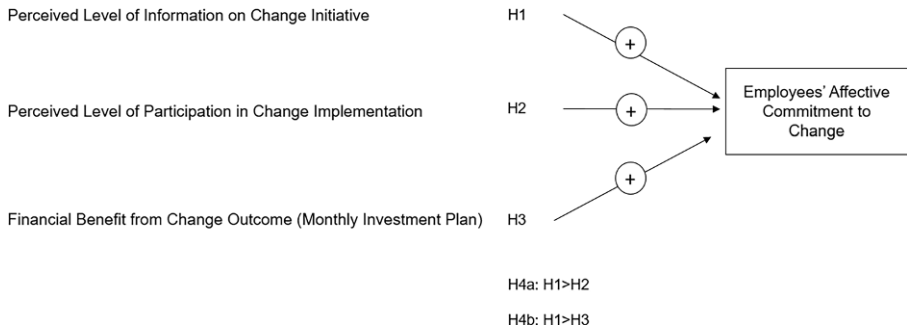


Fig. 1 Antecedents of Employees' Affective Commitment to a Major Change Program

2.3.1 Perceived Level of Information On the Change Initiative and Affective Commitment

We argue that employees' perceived level of information will strengthen their affective commitment to major change. Information enhances how individuals value change, which, following the ABV, increases their attention (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008; Haas et al. 2015; Hoffman and Ocasio 2001). Company-provided information helps employees recognize and understand the nature and necessity of change—an essential first step, or basic awareness, known to foster greater attention to it (e.g., Cameron and Green 2019; Lewis and Seibold 1998). While there are cases in which companies may overwhelm employees with too much or irrelevant information (Oreg 2006; Oreg et al. 2011), or badly sequence its delivery (Armenakis and Harris 2002), we assume that MNCs like the one under examination possess the expertise to present information well. Research suggests that when employees perceive information as abundant and of high quality, they are often better able to grasp the rationale behind organizational changes (Holt et al. 2007). In addition, sufficient and meaningful information can help reduce unnecessary fears. Even if the change program brings about negative consequences for some employees, they will better be able to cope if they do not feel they were kept in the dark (Schweiger and DeNisi 1991).

Equally or even more important than providing clarity and transparency, keeping employees “in the know” builds feelings of inclusion, trust, and belonging—if not a sense of being part of management's inner circle. Employees may recognize that, even under challenging circumstances, organizations tend to prioritize keeping their most valued stakeholders informed (Müller-Stewens and Lechner 2003; Johnson et al. 2006); thus by sharing information with employees, companies underscore that the employees are valued. We consider such valuation to be particularly crucial during times of major transition, when many employees experience substantial anxiety about their future roles.

Moreover, we recognize that company-provided information helps counteract the negative toll that other information sources can take on employees' perceptions and

attention—most notably, rumors among staff or leaks to the media. Rumors, which events like a major change initiative almost inevitably invite, fuel negativity, uncertainty, and anxiety around the initiative (e.g., Schweiger and DeNisi 1991). They often misrepresent the change and employees' roles in it. Rumor-driven discussions waste valuable time, energy, and cognitive resources—all of which are scarce during a major change implementation (Labianca et al. 2000). By proactively disseminating clear and reliable information, companies can weed out distractions, making the change more salient and hence, attractive to attend to. Moreover, they can shape the narrative of change to their advantage. Meanwhile, if employees feel they are not getting sufficient information from the company, this may heighten their feelings of exclusion or disconnection, leaving them with a sense of being the “last to know”.

In summary, we expect company-provided information to capture employees' attention to change by helping to understand what is expected of them, reducing competing distractions, and signaling value. As this provides the conditions for attention to develop, which is necessary for attachment and commitment to change (Ocasio 1997; Pierce et al. 2001), we hypothesize:

H1 *The employees' perceived level of information on a major change program is positively associated with their affective commitment to change.*

2.3.2 *Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation and Affective Commitment*

We anticipate that employees' perceived participation in the implementation of change will strengthen their affective commitment. Employees can engage in the change implementation process in various ways, such as providing input on how to adjust work processes or daily tasks related to change or suggesting training programs that teach essential new skills.

Similarly to information, we expect perceived participation to improve employees' assessment of the change and filter out competing stimuli for their attention. Participation is known to foster feelings of control, thereby influencing people's frame of mind toward both material and immaterial objects (Dixon and Street 1975; Furby 1978), increasing their willingness to devote more time and energy to these objects. Like the heightened awareness and deeper sense of belonging created by information, we expect employees' greater feelings of control resulting from participation to direct their attention and commitment towards change.

Participation offers employees the opportunity to influence and adapt the implementation of change in ways that align with their needs. This makes the change more valuable and legitimate in their eyes, which benefits their attention (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008; Haas et al. 2015; Hoffman and Ocasio 2001)—at least when their suggestions are implemented. Employees may experience a boost in self-evaluation and commitment based on being active participants rather than passive observers or, worse yet, objects acted upon. This can also diminish their sense of threat and instill in them the feeling that they are capable of meeting upcoming challenges (Brockner et al. 1988; Felps et al. 2006).

While we argue that feelings of control are powerful in drawing attention to change, we also acknowledge that employees face multiple challenges in attaining these feelings. Even though greater involvement may motivate employees, it can also fuel frustrations (Baptista et al. 2017), a phenomenon sometimes referred to as a “commitment dilemma” (Stieger et al. 2012, Hautz et al. 2017). For example, when employee suggestions are not implemented, participation can have adverse effects. Moreover, individuals may continue to invest time and effort in unsuccessful targets of their attention due to sunk costs (Arkes and Blumer 1985), making them resentful. While we recognize these challenges, we argue that feelings of control predominate and in turn foster attention to change. Considering that attention is necessary for commitment to change (Ocasio 1997), and individuals develop stronger attachments to things they are more invested in (Pierce et al. 2001), we hypothesize:

H2 The employees’ perceived level of participation in a major change program is positively associated with their affective commitment to change.

2.3.3 Financial Benefit from the Change Outcome and Affective Commitment

We expect that employees’ prospect of financially benefiting from the change outcome, in this case through a monthly investment plan, will improve their affective commitment to the change. An investment plan allows employees to reap a share in the rewards of a successful change implementation, alongside other motivating factors. We anticipate that plans like these will help align employees’ personal goals with those of the company.

The divergence between individual and organizational goals is long-established (e.g., Osterloh et al. 1997). Unlike intrinsic incentives, monetary incentives provide a tangible and immediate reward for employees, making the success of the change valuable to them personally. This is in line with the ABV, which suggests that individuals attend more to issues they deem more valuable or legitimate (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008; Haas et al. 2015; Hoffman and Ocasio 2001). Moreover, financial investment in the change outcome directs attention to change through a second channel: the prospect of financial rewards motivates employees to invest more time and effort in achieving the desired results (Pendleton et al. 1998). These investments (time and effort) are palpable elements of an employee’s attention, as defined by Ocasio (1997), and of attachment, as explained by Chi and Han (2008). They may increase even further, as the employer matches the employees’ financial contributions; the employees dedicating even more time and resources to the firm in response can be seen as a form of reciprocation. Taken together, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3 The employees who stand to benefit financially from the outcome of a major change program are more affectively committed to it than those who do not.

2.3.4 *Relative Importance of Perceived Level of Information On the Change Initiative*

Among the three organizational instruments studied, information requires fewer company resources than participation or financial incentives do. Yet we expect perceived levels of information to be particularly effective in directing employees' attention and affective commitment to change. Often, top-level executives are so immersed in developing a major change program that they are convinced everyone is aware of the necessity for change and how to put it into practice (Galbraith 2018). For employees, however, major change programs often come as a shock and raise feelings of anxiety and stress (Dahl 2011). Therefore, ample and transparent information is an extremely important first step in raising attention for change.

Information provided by top-level executives can easily reach all employees affected by a major change. In comparison, not all employees will be willing or able to participate in its implementation, even if managers invest substantial time and effort to interact with them. And while we expect that participation is a valuable organizational instrument to foster attention as well as affective commitment, we note that there are some downsides as well. Aside from the afore-mentioned participation challenges, participating in a change is more demanding than learning about it. Given that not all jobs require employees to develop and assert opinions (Rudolph et al. 2021; Morrison 2014; Yousaf et al. 2015), this may force some employees out of their comfort zones, leaving them feeling overwhelmed or under pressure. If employees hesitate to share their suggestions and opinions, as participation feels less natural to them than simply receiving information, they may nonetheless worry that, in staying silent, they are contributing less than their peers. While we expect that inviting employees to participate in change implementation has a positive impact on commitment to change, we argue that the effect will be smaller than simply providing them with ample and transparent information.

Similarly, we expect the prospect of financial rewards to enhance employees' commitment to change, but doubt that monthly investment plans can alleviate employees' anxieties and fears in the same way information can. First, information is in the "here and now", while monthly investment plans refer to future and thus more uncertain outcomes. Second, a high perceived level of information can help to build confidence in the major change plans of the firm's top management (Armenakis and Harris 2002; Norman et al. 2010; Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2016), while monthly investment plans depend not only on the future outcome of change, but also on other factors outside employees' (and even employers') influence. Even when not taking factors like the general development of the industry and economy into account, employees need to trust that the change program, if successfully carried out, will translate into greater profits for the company. Taken together, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4a The effect of employees' perceived level of information on a major change program outperforms the effect of their perceived level of participation in strengthening their affective commitment to change.

H4b The effect of employees' perceived level of information on a major change program outperforms the effect of their financial benefit in strengthening their affective commitment to change.

3 Data and Method

3.1 Institutional Setting, Sample, and Survey Method

We test our hypotheses using a dataset of 306 employees working for a leading MNC headquartered in Germany (>300,000 employees) that had recently implemented a major change.

3.1.1 Institutional Setting

The focal company's major change program was implemented between 2014 and 2019. Strategically, this program centered around seven main goals: (1) increasing company value, (2) sharpening the business focus, (3) being a partner of choice for customers, (4) getting closer to the respective markets, (5) fostering lean governance and continuous optimization, (6) being an employer of choice, and, (7) igniting pride and passion for the company through ownership culture. Each of these seven objectives was associated with a specific key performance indicator, which was to be achieved using the three strategic levers of accountability, adaptability, and focus. The company's strategic change was accompanied by a fundamental organizational change, implemented across all units and affecting every employee. The reasons behind these changes were similar to those motivating other conglomerates: the company's size and complexity hindered its ability to quickly adapt to a rapidly changing business environment.

3.1.2 Sample

Our sample covers international employees of the focal company who participated in an online survey distributed through virtual postings within the company's internal social network in 2019. Of the 1,463 employees who saw the postings on the internal social network, 306 completed the survey. This equates to a response rate of roughly 25%. Of the survey respondents, 44% were women, 61% had a Master's degree, and two thirds had been at the company for at least seven years and held the hierarchical position of waged staff. The three most common age categories were 35–44 (37%), 45–54 (28%), and 25–34 (24%). Appendix A provides a full overview of the socio-demographic and organizational composition of our categorical data.

3.1.3 Survey Method

Our cross-sectional data were collected in May 2019, roughly two months after all the implementation steps of the focal change program were completed. We conducted our survey via an internal survey tool that complied with the focal company's

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Key Variables, $n = 306$, $*p < 0.01$

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Affective Commitment to Change	3.23	0.71	1	5											
2 Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	3.06	0.70	1	5	0.74*										
3 Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation	2.99	0.84	1	5	0.53*	0.60*									
4 Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)	0.55	0.50	0	1	0.17*	0.19*	0.13								
5 Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	3.46	0.78	1	5	0.30*	0.34*	0.55*	0.10							
6 Change Role Female	0.71	0.45	0	1	0.05	0.00	0.07	-0.07	-0.03						
7 English Survey	0.44	0.50	0	1	0.03	0.00	0.07	-0.11	0.05	-0.05					
8 Hierarchical Level: Waged Staff	0.37	0.48	0	1	0.10	0.10	-0.00	-0.11	-0.05	-0.02	-0.12				
9 Hierarchical Level: Team Leads	0.66	0.47	0	1	-0.10	-0.15*	-0.14	-0.03	-0.01	-0.17*	0.16*	-0.23*	1.00		
10 Hierarchical Level: Department Heads	0.20	0.40	0	1	-0.00	0.01	0.03	-0.03	0.05	0.07	-0.08	0.08	-0.70*	1.00	
11	0.14	0.34	0	1	0.14	0.19*	0.15*	0.07	-0.04	0.15*	-0.12	0.23*	-0.56*	-0.20*	

 $N = 306$ * $p < 0.01$

data protection requirements and guaranteed the anonymity of participants. Each employee could access and fill out our survey in either German or English; 63% of the individuals in our sample filled out the survey in German (see Table 1). Appendix B provides an overview of all survey questions in the sequence that respondents viewed them in both languages.

We relied on the techniques of a tailored design method to design our survey postings (Dillman et al. 2014). Specifically, we used the techniques *advance notice*, *relevance*, *personalization*, *university involvement*, *incentive*, and *follow-up*. *Advance notice* means we warned potential participants that they would soon be invited to participate in a survey (Edwards et al. 2002). Similar to the foot-in-door technique (Anseel et al. 2010), this creates a sense of obligation to participate in the survey when it is finally distributed. To reach a large number of employees during this initial contact, organizational multipliers were asked to spread the announcement and make posts about it in the firm's social network. Another common technique for increasing response rates is highlighting the *relevance* of the topic for the target group (Heberlein and Baumgartner 1978). According to Roth and Craig (1998), a topic should appear to be salient to users, which they define as both interesting and recent. To further encourage survey response, we used the signature technique *personalization*. The signature technique adds a personal touch to invitations at the end of the message (Dillman and Frey 1974; Yammarino et al. 1991). We opted to use a video and written introduction in our survey post.

Based on the widely recognized benefits of highlighting *university involvement* (Dillman 1978; Edwards et al. 2002; Fox et al. 1988), we clarified that the survey was part of academic research. In addition, we used non-monetary *incentives* to enhance participation. Both monetary (Church 1993; Hopkins and Gullickson 1992; Yammarino et al. 1991) and non-monetary incentives (Gendall et al. 1998) can benefit response rates of surveys. We offered participants the reward of receiving a summary of our study's findings at the end of the survey.

Lastly, we used *follow-ups* to enhance survey response. Specifically, we re-contacted, reminded, and encouraged employees by e-mail to participate, using supportive language and e-mail design features (Groves et al. 1992; Paxon 1995; Porter and Whitcomb 2003). While we based our survey items on common practice in our research field, we used feedback from in-house company experts to slightly adapt questions to our institutional context. We present these adaptations in our methods sections and appendix.

3.2 Measures and Analysis Method

Unless stated otherwise, our empirical measures are based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from one ("strongly disagree") to five ("strongly agree"). We analyze arithmetic averages (means) of respondents' survey scores. In addition, we report the alpha reliability coefficients of these variables to offer insights into participants' response consistency across items.

Dependent Variable We measured our dependent variable *affective commitment to change* using the arithmetic mean of the respondents' survey scores across six

items adapted from existing measures (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), specifically: (1) “I believe in the value of [the focal change]”, (2) “I think management is making no mistake in the way [the focal change] is implemented”, (3) “[The focal change] is a good strategy for the company”, (4) “[The focal change] serves an important purpose”, (5) “Things wouldn’t be better without [the focal change]”, and (6) “I consider [the focal change] to be necessary”. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of our variable is $\alpha = 0.8564$.

Independent Variables We measured employees’ *perceived level of information on the change initiative* by using the arithmetic mean of the respondents’ survey scores across five items adapted from existing measures (Miller et al. 1994), specifically: (1) “the information I receive about [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers is useful for my work at the company”, (2) “The information I receive about [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers adequately answers my questions about the changes it will entail”, (3) “I received the information on [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers in a timely manner”, (4) “The information provided about [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers positively influence my view on [the company’s] future”, and (5) “Overall, I feel adequately informed by the information I receive about [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers”. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of our variable is $\alpha = 0.7867$.

We measured employees’ *perceived level of participation in change implementation* by using the arithmetic mean of the respondents’ survey scores across four items adapted from extant literature (Han et al. 2010; Locke and Schweiger 1979), specifically (1) “I have a say in the selection of training and further education decisions in order to better implement [the focal change] and its [strategic] levers, for example courses to acquire skills for focus (e.g. Personal Productivity or Time Management) or adaptability (e.g. Agile Project Management)”, (2) “I have a say in how we measure my own or my team’s performance with respect to [the focal change] and its [strategic] levers.”, (3) “I have a say in the adaptation of work processes in order to better implement [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers in my work environment (e.g. critical reflection of existing processes and proposal of new processes)”, and (4) “I have a say in how I adapt my daily work to better implement [the focal change] and its three [strategic] levers”. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of our participation variable is $\alpha = 0.7860$.

Our third independent variable, *financial benefit from change outcome (monthly investment plan)*, is binary. It is set to one if the employee said they took part in the company’s monthly investment plan and zero if they said they did not.

Control Variables Based on prior empirical findings on organizational change (Kooij et al. 2010; Mohamed et al. 2006; Monnot 2017), we consider that additional individual and organizational characteristics could also influence our results.

We included organizational and socio-demographic control variables in our empirical analyses. As organizational controls, we account for the leadership style that employees perceive their superior to have, focusing on transformational leadership based on its relevance for navigating change. We measured *perceived transformational leadership (superior)* using the arithmetic mean of the respondents’ survey

scores across seven items adapted from existing measures (Carless et al. 2000), specifically: (1) “My superior treats employees as individuals, supports and encourages their development”, (2) “My superior gives encouragement and recognition to employees”, (3) “My superior fosters trust involvement and cooperation among team members”, (4) “My superior encourages thinking about problems in new ways and questions assumptions”, (5) “My superior is clear about her/his values and practices what she/he preaches”, (6) “My superior evokes pride in others and inspires me”, and (7) “My superior communicates a clear and positive picture of [the focal change].” The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of this variable is of $\alpha = 0.8625$.

Next, we accounted for differences in the perceived *change role* employees took on. In the company undergoing the focal change, all employees were expected to shoulder a specific change role. During implementation, some employees focused on establishing the foundations for change within day-to-day operations—for example, by developing new structures and processes—while others were responsible for driving the change within their designated scope. In line with this, the variable *change role* captures the type of role each survey respondent identified with. It takes a value of one if the respondent reported actively driving change, and zero if they indicated that their primary focus was to provide the groundwork for the change. *Female* is a dummy variable taking on the value of one if the employees’ gender is female, zero if otherwise. We proxy for employees’ nationality by controlling for their survey language. *English survey* is a dummy variable taking on the value of one if the employee filled out the survey in English, zero if they instead filled it out in German, i.e., the alternative language option. We accounted for differences in employees’ hierarchical levels: *Waged staff*, *team leads*, and *department heads* are all dummy variables taking on the value of one if the employees belong to the respective employee group, zero if otherwise. In order to account for possible differences in employees’ ages, organizational units, education, and tenure—but still comply with internal data protection laws—we used categorical dummies on our remaining socio-demographic controls. Our age categories are as follows: 15–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65+. Similarly, tenure is categorized into the following ranges: 1–3, 4–6, 7–10, and 10+. Appendix A depicts the organizational unit (9) and education categories (8) our analyses account for. For anonymity reasons, we use alphabetical letters rather than the names of organizational units.

We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with robust standard errors for our analyses. Studies have confirmed the appropriateness of multivariate parametric techniques for analyses based on Likert items (Carifio and Perla 2007; Norman 2010).

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for continuous and binary variables in our sample. It suggests that employees’ perceived level of information on the change initiative ($r = 0.74$, $p = 0.000$), perceived level of participation in

change implementation ($r=0.53$, $p=0.000$), and the financial benefit from its outcome ($r=0.17$, $p=0.003$) all positively and significantly correlate with their affective commitment to change. The variance inflation factors (VIF) of these variables are far below the troubling threshold of ten (e.g., VIF perceived level of information on change initiative=1.80; VIF perceived level of participation in change implementation=2.20, VIF financial benefit from change outcome=1.19, VIF perceived transformational leadership=1.67).

4.2 Main Regression Analyses and Post-hoc Analyses

4.2.1 Main Regression Results

Table 2 presents the results of our main regression analyses. Model 1 shows the impact of the control variables on employees' affective commitment to change (1). Models 2–4 depict the results of the control variables and the three independent variables: *perceived level of information on change initiative* (2), *perceived level of participation in change implementation* (3), and *financial benefit from change outcome* (4). Finally, Model 5 presents the results of the full model, which serves as the foundation for our interpretations of the effects of the independent variables discussed below.

Before delving into the description and interpretation of our main results, it is worth noting that the comparison of results in Table 2 shows substantially more predictive power when our independent variables are included, compared to the base model. This increase is primarily driven by employees' perceptions of information related to the major change program. As shown in Table 2, the adjusted R-squared of Model 5—our primary model—is more than five times higher than that of Model 1. Moreover, we observe no significant differences in commitment between team leads, department heads, and waged staff across all models. Waged staff serve as the baseline category, excluded to avoid multicollinearity due to the dummy variable trap. As the models do not include interaction terms, the estimated effects can be interpreted as average effects across all employee groups.

Model 5 shows that employees who perceive themselves as having more information on the change initiative display on average higher commitment to it than their counterparts who feel less well-informed. For every one-point increase in perceived information (on a scale from 1 to 5), employee commitment increases by 0.694 points ($p=0.000$) on the same scale. These results support Hypothesis 1. Model 5 also shows that, when respondents' perceived level of participation in change implementation rises by one point (on a scale from 1 to 5), their affective commitment increases by 0.113 points ($p=0.025$). Regarding financial benefit, employees with a monthly investment plan have a 0.099 ($p=0.079$) higher commitment score than those without (on a scale from 1 to 5). The results support Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3.

Testing hypotheses 4a and 4b requires more than a simple visual comparison of independent variable regression coefficients in Table 2. These effect sizes mask that control variables reduce the proportion of variance they explain in affective commitment. Moreover, as indicated by significant correlations in Table 1, they

Table 2 Regressions Linking Organizational Instruments and Employees' Affective Commitment to a Major Change Program, DV = Affective Commitment to Change (Baseline: Waged Staff)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	–	0.765*** (0.046)	–	–	0.694*** (0.049)
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation		–	0.430*** (0.056)		0.113* (0.050)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)			–	0.255** (0.083)	0.099+ (0.056)
<i>Organizational and Socio-Demographic Controls</i>					
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	0.264*** (0.057)	0.022 (0.040)	–0.003 (0.064)	0.246*** (0.057)	–0.033 (0.046)
Change Role	0.095 (0.093)	0.137* (0.065)	0.045 (0.080)	0.127 (0.096)	0.132* (0.063)
Female	0.044 (0.084)	0.049 (0.060)	0.001 (0.078)	0.077 (0.082)	0.050 (0.059)
English Survey	–0.047 (0.269)	–0.188 (0.176)	–0.084 (0.235)	–0.001 (0.263)	–0.166 (0.173)
Hierarchical Level: Team Leads	–0.001 (0.113)	–0.009 (0.087)	–0.017 (0.103)	0.017 (0.113)	–0.006 (0.087)
Hierarchical Level: Department Heads	0.243+ (0.135)	0.002 (0.097)	0.111 (0.117)	0.214 (0.134)	–0.021 (0.093)
Education Category Dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Tenure Category Dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Age Category Dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Organizational Unit Dummies	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Constant	2.387*** (0.413)	0.951*** (0.283)	2.233*** (0.399)	2.308*** (0.409)	1.013*** (0.276)
Observations	306	306	306	306	306
Adj. R-squared	0.116	0.577	0.284	0.143	0.588
F value	12.12***	3.11***	25.55***	15.52***	2.48***

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

explain different shares of variance in the predictors themselves. In addition, while the financial benefit from the outcome is measured on a binary scale, the scale of our information and participation variables are measured on the same continuous scale (i.e., from 1 to 5), complicating comparison. Given these challenges, we use Wald tests and comparisons of raw correlations as indicators for hypotheses 4a and 4b. Accounting for both differences in covariance and measurement between variables (Harrell 2001), the Wald test is the standard approach for testing for differences in coefficient magnitudes—in our case, for assessing whether the coefficient of *perceived level of information on change* differed significantly from those of the other two independent variables. Implemented as F-tests, our Wald tests rejected the equality of the effects $x_1 = x_2$ as well as $x_1 = x_3$ ($p = 0.000$).

In addition to running Wald tests, we examined raw, bivariate correlations between our independent variables and affective commitment to change (Table 1). These correlations reflect the direct relationship between variables, ignoring the influence of other confounders. The results in Table 1 show that the correlation between perceived information and affective commitment is strong and significant ($r=0.74$, $p=0.000$), exceeding that of perceived participation ($r=0.53$, $p=0.000$), and the financial benefit ($r=0.17$, $p=0.003$). These findings provide initial support for hypotheses H4a and H4b, highlighting the relative importance of information in strengthening employees' affective commitment to change.

In summary, we find support for all our hypotheses. On average, employees' *perceived level of information on change*, *perceived level of participation in change implementation*, and *financial benefit from change outcome* all strengthen their affective commitment to change; moreover, we find initial support that the effect of information outperforms all others.

4.2.2 Post-Hoc Analyses

We ran additional analyses to provide deeper insights into why the effect of information was so powerful. Both produced results consistent with our theorizing and testing explanations. One approach was to explore whether different groups of employees reacted differently to organizational instruments, as we suggested in developing hypotheses 4a and 4b. Others investigated the potential role that leadership style and interactions between organizational instruments played in driving our results.

Exploring Differences in Response to Organizational Instruments by Hierarchical Level

Employees who implement change do not start with a blank slate. Their thinking and behavior is shaped by the demands of their day-to-day work, which establish schemata—mental frameworks or organized patterns of thought and behavior that help people interpret new information as well as experiences (Labianca et al. 2000). These schemata give form and meaning to employees' experiences and contain general knowledge of a domain. They assist employees in assessing incoming stimuli, for example on how decision-making is handled in an organization. In doing so, they play a central role in shaping attention (Ocasio 2011). These cognitive structures are strongly ingrained and resist change (Taylor and Crocker 1981; Nystrom and Starbuck 1984; Reger and Palmer 1996; Ross et al. 1977). Moreover, schemata are often shared among groups of employees, particularly those at the same hierarchical level, due to their similar tasks and responsibilities.

Hierarchical levels reflect employees' structural positions in the organization. As Ocasio (1997, p. 197) explains, employees' structural positions specify “(a) the functions and orientations of decision-makers, and (b) their interrelationships with other structural positions internal and external to the firm.” Consider department heads. They primarily focus on long-term planning and abstract thinking in their day-to-day work, holding significant decision-making authority compared to their

counterparts at lower hierarchical levels. In contrast, team leads strive for short-term, team-level results. While focusing on the performance of the team for whom they are responsible, their day-to-day work is more operational than that of more strategically oriented department heads. Meanwhile, waged staff—the lowest hierarchical level in our study—are primarily concerned with their individual contribution to the overall performance outcome.

Table 3 depicts that, for waged staff, a one-point increase in perceived information (on a scale from 1 to 5) on average leads to an increase in affective commitment to change by 0.724 points on the same scale ($p=0.000$). The non-significant interaction terms between information and employee group dummies indicate that information effects do not differ significantly across hierarchical levels. While we can compute the total effects of information on affective commitment for team leads and department heads using the estimates in Table 3—0.559 for team leads ($r=0.724-0.165$) and 0.632 for department heads ($r=0.724-0.092$)—determining whether these effects differ significantly from zero requires linear combination tests. This is because the regression output does not report the covariances between coefficients, which are necessary to correctly calculate the standard errors and assess the statistical significance of these combined effects. For both team leads and department heads, the results of the linear combination tests confirm that the total information effects are statistically significant ($p=0.000$ in both cases). Overall, results capture that, consistent with our arguments in the hypothesis section, employees across all three hierarchical levels respond positively to information. All effects are significant and positive.

Regarding the effects of perceived participation on affective commitment, we infer that, for waged staff, a one-point increase in participation (on a scale from 1 to 5) does not lead to a significant change in affective commitment (the baseline effect of $r=0.061$ is insignificant, $p=0.320$). Table 3 indicates no significant difference between team leads and waged staff in their response to participation, as captured by the insignificant interaction term of participation with the team leads dummy variable. In addition, a linear combination test confirms that also the total participation effect for team leads ($r=0.138$, calculated as $0.061+0.077$) is not statistically significant ($p=0.191$). In contrast, department heads respond much better to perceived participation than waged staff. This is indicated by the significant positive interaction term of participation with the department heads dummy variable ($r=0.249$, $p=0.056$). Their total effect is strong and significant at 0.310 ($p=0.008$), which combines the effect of participation ($r=0.061$) with the interaction ($r=0.249$). We conclude that only department heads respond positively and significantly to participation in our sample.

With respect to the effects of financial benefits on affective commitment, results in Table 3 highlight that for members of the waged staff, monthly investment plans have a significant positive effect: For these employees, taking part in monthly investment plans on average leads to a 0.142 ($p=0.029$) increase in affective commitment to change. Table 3 shows that responses to financial benefits differ between team leads and waged staff, as indicated by the significant negative interaction of financial benefits with the team leads dummy variable. A linear combination test fails to reject that the total effect of financial benefits for team leads is equal to zero

Table 3 Main Post-Hoc Analysis on Organizational Instruments and Employees' Affective Commitment to a Major Change Program, DV = Affective Commitment to Change (Baseline: Waged Staff)

Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	0.724*** (0.057)
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative*Team Leads	-0.165 (0.141)
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative*Department Heads	-0.092 (0.184)
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation	0.061 (0.061)
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation*Team Leads	0.077 (0.118)
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Initiative*Department Heads	0.249+ (0.130)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)	0.142* (0.064)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)*Team Leads	-0.268+ (0.153)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)*Department Heads	0.170 (0.143)
<i>Organizational and Socio-Demographic Controls</i>	
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	-0.022 (0.045)
Change Role	0.134* (0.063)
Female	0.058 (0.058)
English Survey	-0.208 (0.175)
Hierarchical Level: Team Leads	0.416 (0.368)
Hierarchical Level: Department Heads	-0.632 (0.434)
Education Category Dummies	YES
Tenure Category Dummies	YES
Age Category Dummies	YES
Organizational Unit Dummies	YES
Constant	1.035*** (0.288)
Observations	306
Adj. R-squared	0.597
F value	47.05***

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

Table 4 Theoretical Alternative Explanations, DV = Affective Commitment to Change (Baseline: Waged Staff)

	Alternative Explanation 1: "Leadership Drives Effects of All Instruments"	Alternative Explanation 2: "Information on Change Drives Effects of Other Instruments"
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	0.824*** (0.208)	0.757*** (0.154)
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative*	-0.039	—
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	(0.062)	
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation	-0.027 (0.194)	0.162 (0.181)
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Initiative*	0.040	—
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	(0.053)	
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation*Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	—	-0.014 (0.054)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)	0.141 (0.261)	0.243 (0.270)
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)*Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	-0.012 (0.074)	—
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)*Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	—	-0.047 (0.085)
<i>Organizational and Socio-Demographic Controls</i>		
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	-0.023 (0.164)	-0.034 (0.045)
Change Role	0.131* (0.065)	0.137* (0.064)
Female	0.048 (0.060)	0.048 (0.059)
English Survey	-0.165 (0.175)	-0.163 (0.174)
Hierarchical Level: Team Leads	-0.007 (0.087)	-0.011 (0.087)
Hierarchical Level: Department Heads	-0.023 (0.093)	-0.026 (0.095)
Education Category Dummies	YES	YES
Tenure Category Dummies	YES	YES
Age Category Dummies	YES	YES
Organizational Unit Dummies	YES	YES

Table 4 (Continued)

	Alternative Explanation 1: "Leadership Drives Effects of All Instruments"	Alternative Explanation 2: "Information on Change Drives Effects of Other Instruments"
Constant	0.987+ (0.591)	0.800 (0.552)
Observations	306	306
Adj. R-squared	0.585	0.586
F value	11.86***	41.47***

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

($r = 0.142 - 0.268 = -0.126$, $p = 0.363$). We infer that team leads respond significantly less to financial benefits than waged staff, however not negatively. In contrast, we observe no significant difference in response to monthly investment plans between department heads and waged staff, as reflected by the insignificant interaction term of financial benefits with the department heads dummy variable. Nevertheless, linear combination testing confirms a significant positive effect of financial benefits for department heads ($r = 0.312$, calculated as $0.142 + 0.170$, $p = 0.008$). We conclude that monthly investment plans show differential effectiveness across hierarchical levels: Our analyses suggest that they are effective for department heads and waged staff, yet ineffective for team leads. In addition to supporting hypotheses 4a and 4b, these results suggest that department heads and waged staff drive our earlier support of Hypothesis 3.

Next, we considered alternative explanations—beyond the alignment of instruments with employees' work routines and schemata—that might account for our findings on the effectiveness of organizational instruments, particularly the role of information, in enhancing affective commitment to change. Possibly, differences in the leadership style of superiors could explain results. In addition, information's dominance over other instruments might stem from information being a prerequisite for effective participation or learning about monthly investment plans. As shown in Table 4, we found no support for these explanations: The interaction of the leadership dummy variable with our instruments was insignificant (first column). The same was true for the interaction effects between information, participation, and financial benefits, lending further support for our hypothesized explanations (second column).

4.3 Robustness Tests

We also investigated alternative empirical explanations for our main findings. Specifically, we questioned whether measuring perceived information as a continuous variable, rather than as binary one like the financial benefit, could have influenced our conclusion. To rule out specification differences as a potential cause of our results, we redefined employees' perceived information and participation as dummy variables, allowing for better comparability of their effect sizes across instruments.

Specifically, *high perceived level of information on change initiative* takes on the value of one if the employee reported an above-average information level on the focal change program, zero if they instead reported an average or below-average level. Similarly, the independent variable *high perceived level of participation in change implementation* takes on the value of one if the employee reported an above-average participation level in change implementation and zero if they indicated an average or below-average one. The results, in Table 5 (first column), highlight how information continues to have the strongest effect size ($r=0.690$, $p=0.000$) even when all organizational instruments are measured as binary variables, excluding this empirical explanation in driving our results.

In addition, we took the potential influence of reverse causality in explaining our results into account. Since the data were collected from the same survey and respondents, we considered the possibility that the information effect might be driven by biases in perception. Specifically, we tried to alleviate concerns that employees with higher affective commitment to change in our survey might perceive themselves as better informed about the change initiative than they actually are. To do so, we replaced our information measure with data from a separate survey conducted independently but concurrently with ours: the focal company's global engagement survey. In replacing our data on information with its data, we exploited that respondents' answers to our survey were made independently from those of the engagement survey. Moreover, we considered that participants constituting these surveys were very different, implying that the answers of one group could impossibly drive responses of the other.

The global engagement survey's data collection process shared several similarities with our study: it was conducted virtually in May 2019 and was open to all employees. Consistent with best practices in survey administration, it was promoted through multiple communication channels, including email, the intranet, and social media. A key difference, however, lay in the different aims of the surveys. Whereas our survey was designed for academic study, the global engagement survey was intended for practical evaluation. Beyond meeting the company's reporting requirements, its primary objective was to generate insights on employee engagement and its underlying drivers in this critical period of change.

An overview of the global engagement survey's sociodemographic and organizational composition, as well as its response rates, can be found in Appendix C. The scope of the surveys was very different: in total, 246,907 employees participated in the company's global engagement survey, compared with 306 in our study.

Following close consultation with company experts, and because it aligns closely with our argument about the connection between information, attention, and commitment to change, we used the global engagement survey's question "I understand how my work contributes to [the company's] success" as our proxy for information. This question was intended to capture whether employees understood how their work contributed to the organization's success—a notion that, according to company experts at the time, was synonymous with the success of the major change program.

The company regarded responses to this question as a key feedback and performance indicator, recognizing that employees have a fundamental need to feel

Table 5 Empirical Alternative Explanations, DV = Affective Commitment to Change (Baseline: Waged Staff)

	Alternative Explanation 1: "Operationalization Differences Driving Results" Mitigation Test: Binary Independent Variables Only	Alternative Explanations 2 & 3: "Reverse Causality of Information Driving Results" Mitigation Test: Global Survey Proxy Measure for Information
Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative (Proxy)	—	2.299+ (1.383)
High Perceived Level of Information on Change Initiative	0.690*** (0.079)	—
Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation	—	0.433*** (0.062)
High Perceived Level of Participation in Change Implementation	0.269*** (0.077)	—
Financial Benefit from Change Outcome (Monthly Investment Plan)	0.114 (0.070)	0.163* (0.082)
<i>Organizational and Socio-Demographic Controls</i>		
Perceived Transformational Leadership (Superior)	0.037 (0.053)	0.006 (0.067)
Change Role	0.087 (0.077)	−0.006 (0.086)
Female	−0.019 (0.069)	0.002 (0.084)
English Survey	0.015 (0.208)	0.202* (0.083)
Hierarchical Level: Team Leads	0.032 (0.098)	−0.036 (0.107)
Hierarchical Level: Department Heads	0.070 (0.116)	0.026 (0.123)
Education Category Dummies	YES	YES
Tenure Category Dummies	YES	YES
Age Category Dummies	YES	YES
Organizational Unit Dummies	YES	YES
Constant	2.478*** (0.331)	−7.808 (5.638)
Observations	306	252
Adj. R-squared	0.422	0.306
F value	29.74***	93.34***

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$

connected to a larger purpose and to make a meaningful impact. In this case, that meant contributing to the success of the company and its change initiative. Moreover, the company acknowledged that employees' understanding of how their work contributes to the whole is essential for aligning priorities, conveying meaning and purpose as well as fostering a sense of belonging and confidence.

Overall, 185,268 employees answered the question. Responses varied between 3.997 and 4.185 on a Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Assuming that (despite differences in survey participants) average responses within each sample approximate the population mean and are thus comparable, we matched this information proxy from the independent survey to our data based on respondents' organizational unit membership.

The results, shown in Table 5 (second column), indicate that information continues to have the largest effect size ($r = 2.299$, $p = 0.098$) on affective commitment to change, even when measured using data from an independent survey as a proxy. Specifically, a one-point increase in employees' understanding of how their work contributes to the company's success on a scale from 1 to 5 results in a 2.299-point increase in their affective commitment to change on the same scale ($p = 0.098$), compared with 0.433 for perceived participation ($p = 0.000$) and 0.163 for financial benefit ($p = 0.048$). Wald tests confirm that these three effect magnitudes differ significantly from one another ($p = 0.028$). Notably, the dominant effect of information persists despite the proxy exhibiting much lower variation than our original measure, as it averages across 185,268 respondents rather than 306.

Aside from suggesting that reverse causality is only a minor concern, these results—based on data from two different sources—also imply that common method bias is not driving our results (which may affect studies with only one data source). Another test eases concerns in this regard as well: One common approach to infer whether cross-sectional studies are subject to common method bias is to look at whether correlations between variables with different scales exist (Lindell and Whitney 2001). In the common method bias case, high correlations between such variables are likely to be visible. In our study, the greatest distinction in scales of variables exists between binary measures, such as *change role* or *English survey*, and measures derived using Likert scales, such as affective commitment to change. As depicted in Table 1, their correlations are very low. Overall, all our robustness tests support our previous arguments and findings.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Result Summary

Results of our study may appeal to scholars interested in change management and, more broadly, management and strategy. We provide novel insights into how firms can enhance employees' attention and increase affective commitment to a major change program. While our findings support all three of our hypotheses related to

affective commitment being influenced by perceptions of information and participation, as well as financial benefit from the change outcome, we find that information has the strongest effect.

Ample and transparent information channels employees' affective commitment to change, despite demanding the least resources from management. It fosters trust in the change-related decisions of top management, reduces rumors about the change and appeals to all employees, regardless of their hierarchical position. Everyone affected by the change program has a "natural" interest in learning more about it. In other words, being "in the know" helps employees to better understand the change program and develop affective commitment towards it.

Our findings contribute to ABV research in several important ways. First, while we build on existing ABV theory—particularly the proposition that organizations can direct individuals' situated attention toward favorable outcomes—scholars have established a direct link between firms' resource commitment and attention direction (Ocasio 1997), implicitly assuming that "more is better". However, Boynton (2024) recently argued that this relationship may be more nuanced and called for additional research. Our study of a major change at a German MNC provides deeper insights into these nuances.

We show that the relation between resource commitment and attention direction deviates from common assumptions in the ABV: information—the least resource-intensive instrument for firms to implement—proves most effective in channeling employees' attention and affective commitment to a major change. To this date, the vast majority of the ABV studies focuses on executives and how firms can channel their attention to strategic issues of high priority. Up to now, little is known about how executives can guide employees' attention to foster affective commitment to change. Even the scarce body of ABV studies that center on employees analyze outcomes other than affective commitment to change (see Brielmaier and Friesl 2023a for a recent overview). Gaining more insights into the antecedents of employees' attention seems warranted as the success of change implementation hinges on employees' support. As highlighted by previous research, there are unique challenges in directing employees' attention to problems: Most notably, Haas et al. (2015) document an inverse, U-shaped relationship between problem complexity and the attention participants allocate in online communities. The authors find that two types of problems fail to attract attention: (1) short, narrow, and routine problems that have low salience and (2) very long, broad, or novel problems (due to the cognitive load they impose). Building on this research but going beyond it, we provide insights into how firms can gain and enhance attention for a novel problem—in our case, a major change program.

Even more broadly, our results may appeal to scholars interested in change management, a literature that bridges theory and practice (Stouten et al. 2018). Complementing results of change studies that have shown that excessive, irrelevant, or poorly delivered information can overwhelm employees (Oreg 2006; Oreg et al. 2011; Armenakis and Harris 2002), our findings suggest that ample and transparent information can be highly effective in guiding employees through change—particularly when a firm knows how to frame and present it effectively. In addition, our findings demonstrate that contemporary firms can successfully achieve key goals, such

as increasing employees' affective commitment to a major change program, by using "traditional" change management instruments such as information, participation, and financial rewards. Managers in modern firms may question whether these instruments are outdated, and consider turning to new approaches such as mindfulness trainings, nudge-based tools, or serious games. This shift is supported by recent research highlighting the effectiveness of measures, such as mindfulness trainings (e.g., Mellner et al. 2022). At the same time, scholars like Purser and Milillo (2015) have raised concerns that mindfulness trainings can be denatured or misappropriated when implemented in corporate contexts, questioning the overall appropriateness of such applications in organizations. While our study does not compare the effectiveness of traditional versus newer instruments, it suggests that the established methods deliver meaningful results. For some organizations, these traditional instruments may be more practical to implement. We argue that they provide several advantages in the event of a major change implementation. One is that management can leverage them directly and consistently, whereas newer instruments, like mindfulness trainings, are often organized in the form of one-off seminars. Even when apps or platforms provide consistent access to newer tools, previous research underscores the need to balance stability and change during major transitions (Klärner and Raisch 2013). Rather than struggling with yet another novelty burden, employees implementing change may value and appreciate the simplicity that more familiar organizational instruments provide—in particular that of information, which is familiar to all.

Our post-hoc analyses respond to the recent calls by Brielmaier and Friesl (2023a) to provide deeper insights into how firms can direct the attention of different employee groups. Amongst others, existing research on entrepreneurship (e.g., Ren and Guo 2011; Kleinbaum and Tushman 2007) tends to differentiate middle managers based on their organizational units and interconnections. Distinguishing between department heads, team leads, and waged staff we go beyond that and find both, commonalities and differences in how employees on different hierarchical levels respond to organizational instruments directed at increasing their commitment to change. As noted, we discovered that employees at all levels responded positively and strongly to information. In contrast, participation enhances affective commitment only among department heads. One possible explanation is that, as argued in our hypothesis development, employees at different hierarchies of the firm do not share the same ability and willingness to speak up or the same level of comfort in asserting themselves. Department heads in particular may feel more confident that their input matters, due to their authority and expertise. They also tend to have the clearest understanding of the needs within their departments in relation to the change program. Moreover, they are most accustomed to interacting with top management and are more practiced at voicing their opinions. While one might expect team leads—who serve as intermediaries between department heads and waged staff—to show initiative regarding participation, they may lack the time and energy to do so in the event of a major change. Moreover, they may rely on the department heads to come up with suggestions for change implementation. Finally, we find that monthly investment plans tend to foster affective commitment to change primarily at the extremes of the hierarchical levels under study—namely, among department heads and waged staff—while having no significant effect on team leads. Our results suggest

that department heads and waged staff expect a net gain from pursuing the prospect of financial rewards, whereas for team leads, the perceived costs and benefits appear to offset one another. In contrast to differences in participation between employee groups, this finding is unlikely to be explained by organizational variables alone. It is more plausible that cognitive or psychological mechanisms beyond the scope of our study contribute to this result. We encourage future research to investigate these underlying dynamics and provide greater insight into this divergence. Overall, it seems that organizational instruments must be tailored to specific groups of employees if their main focus is to gain and enhance attention for change and respective affective commitment.

The findings from our post-hoc analyses of different employee groups' reactions to organizational instruments may also interest ABV researchers studying attention contests and employee engagement in organizational initiatives. Recent theoretical work highlights that employee engagement will suffer if there is a contest between the attention structure of change initiatives and the attention structure of the main organization (Brielmaier and Friesl 2023b). Our results provide a first indication that, if a given instrument aligns with employees' work routines and attitudes, it is more likely to foster affective commitment to change. These findings deepen our understanding of how multiple, overlapping attention structures within a firm, such as organizational instruments and structural positions, can collide or come into conflict. Implicitly, they suggest potential solutions for how management might address this dilemma: by employing instruments that generate fewer attention conflicts, such as information.

5.1.2 *Boundary Conditions and Result Transfer*

Our study focused on a large MNC, raising the question of whether the findings also apply to smaller firms or firms with different organizational structures. Compared to small companies, large corporations tend to have more resources and formalized structures in place, which can facilitate the use of organizational instruments. Nevertheless, we argue that small firms can adopt these instruments in a resource-efficient and flexible manner. We elaborate on these adaptations in our practical takeaways section.

MNCs like the one investigated here also tend to have larger shares of older and longer-tenured employees than do smaller firms. As reflected by Appendix A, roughly half the employees in our sample had been at the company for more than ten years. While one might assume that older or more tenured employees respond better to traditional organizational instruments than their younger peers or newer employees, additional analyses including moderation effects of age and tenure categories rendered insignificant results. We cautiously conclude that our results are likely to apply more broadly—at least to established firms—, but welcome further research in this area.

In addition to having a different composition of staff, smaller companies might have different levels of formalization than the MNC we studied. Specifically, they are likely to be less hierarchical and more likely to have looser job descriptions. This may affect to some extent the transferability of our results. Lower formalization may

mean that a wider range of employees, beyond top management—for example, team leads and waged staff—are more willing to participate and contribute. Participation might therefore act as a stronger lever for affective commitment in these contexts. Formalization of firms tends to coincide with stricter job definitions; when differences between jobs are less pronounced—for example, when middle managers take on operational tasks typically handled by less senior staff, as may be the case at startups due to limited personnel or financial constraints—differences in employee responses at different hierarchical levels may also be less pronounced.

Our study offers three practical takeaways regarding the organizational instruments under study. First, the least resource-intensive organizational instrument—information—appears to be the most effective at fostering affective commitment to change. This suggests that, especially in resource-constrained environments, management can focus on providing information to enhance employees' attention and commitment to change. Second, considering that the more resource-intensive instruments may not appeal equally to all employees, management can deliberately limit participation to employee groups that feel more comfortable with asserting themselves, such as department heads. Alternatively, employees lower down the structural hierarchy could be offered training to enhance their ability and willingness to participate in change implementation.

Third, as incentives have a positive yet low effect for department heads and waged staff in our study, managers may consider tying them to the success of a specific change program more directly (opposed to tying them to the performance of the overall company, as in this study's case), although it is certainly more challenging to offer tailor-made incentive programs than broad monthly investment plans. Moreover, and again in contrast to monthly investment plans, incentives tied to a specific change program have a much shorter duration and need to be regularly adapted. Still, the benefit of tailor-made incentive programs is that they direct employees' attention directly to the issue at hand and have an additional informational value: By granting these incentives, management emphasizes the importance of the change program and shows that the affective commitment of employees is valued.

5.1.3 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Although we believe our results can, to some extent, be transferred to major change programs and firms of a different nature than that we studied, we acknowledge that our analysis is restricted to the implementation of a major change program in a large German firm. Both the change program and the firm under study have elements of specificity. Research has long highlighted that firms' experience of change depends on their history (Fox-Wolfgramm et al. 1998). Future research may address the question of how far our results are transferable.

Second, our study relies on cross-sectional data surrounding the implementation of the focal change program. We chose 2019 as our time point of data collection as it was the year in which the implementation was completed. We thus captured a complete picture of employee responses rather than just an intermittent status quo. Based on the confounding impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we refrained from

collecting data in the years that followed. While we acknowledge that the nature of our data prevents us from inferring any causal relationships, it provides us with rich, real-world insights that are highly relevant in change management. We invite other researchers to replicate our findings at different time points—both during and after the finalization of a major change program implementation, for example. We acknowledge that employee composition may vary across different phases of change, particularly in cases involving restructuring that includes layoffs.

The generalizability of our findings to earlier phases of change implementation warrants further investigation. Nevertheless, our results represent an important initial step upon which future research can build.

Due to corporate privacy concerns, we used an internal company survey tool to collect the primary data for our study. While we acknowledge that relying on a single survey represents a limitation, we conducted additional analyses to address potential concerns about common method bias and reverse causality. One such test involved pairing our data with responses from a second, independent company survey. These robustness checks supported our findings, suggesting that these empirical challenges are relatively minor. We encourage future replication efforts.

Finally, while we have focused on traditional organizational instruments that are very well established in change management, other instruments may also be effective in channeling attention and creating affective commitment to a major change. We invite future research to provide insights into the instruments, old and new, that we did not cover.

6 Conclusion

The objective of our paper was to identify and analyze antecedents to employees' affective commitment to a major change. Building on the ABV and using real-world data from a leading German MNC, we analyze the effectiveness of organizational instruments in enhancing employees' attention and affective commitment. We find support for our expectation that employees' commitment is enhanced by their perceptions of information and participation as well as their financial benefit from the change outcome. Moreover, our results indicate that receiving ample and transparent information—that is, being “in the know”—makes employees most inclined to commit to a major change.

Our study contributes to the ABV by highlighting that the link between resources and attention is more nuanced than many ABV scholars assume, encouraging further exploration. Contrary to common ABV assumption that implicitly assumes “more is better” (e.g., Ocasio 1997), we find that that in the case of a major change, the organizational instrument demanding the fewest resources from management is most effective in fostering employees' affective commitment. Our results yield important practical implications by providing contemporary firms with insights into whether and which organizational instruments are effective at enhancing genuine buy-in to a major change program.

Our finding on the importance of information seems relevant for practitioners because many executives still believe that the most resource-intensive instruments are

most consequential in promoting buy-in to change. Our study suggests that organizations can achieve greater employee commitment with relatively simple means. This is “good news”, as it allows top management to allocate resources to other critical areas during major change. Traditional organizational instruments—most notably, information—appear to offer an attractive solution.

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Data Availability Despite anonymization, the data set generated and analyzed during the current study is not publically available based on its sensitivity. However, it can be provided to SBUR by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest A. Daskalov, A. Tuschke and N. Stampfl declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethical standards The authors declare that the survey underlying the current study fulfills the strict data protection requirements of the focal firm, which oversaw its implementation. All data on participants was anonymized. Survey participation was voluntary. Survey participants well as the management of the focal firm under study consented to its data being shared and published in an academic journal in the depicted form.

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