Ambivalence Toward Imposed Change:
The Conflict Between Dispositional Resistance to Change and the Orientation Toward the Change Agent

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Following an analysis of the concept of "imposed change," we propose 2 factors that jointly contribute to an individual's experience of ambivalence to imposed change. In a secondary analysis of data ($N = 172$) and 2 field studies ($N = 104$, $N = 89$), we showed that individuals' personal orientation toward change interacts with their orientation toward the change agent and yields ambivalence. Specifically, among employees with a positive orientation toward the change agent (i.e., high trust in management, identification with the organization), the relationship between employees' dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence was positive. The opposite pattern emerged among employees with a negative orientation toward the change agent (Studies 2 and 3). Our findings suggest that researchers may have been misinterpreting employees' reactions to change, neglecting the possibility that some may simultaneously hold strong, yet conflicting, views about the change. By accounting for, and predicting, ambivalence, these studies provide a more accurate explanation of employees' responses to change.

Keywords: resistance to change, ambivalence, identification, trust

Numerous studies have been dedicated to understanding and predicting employees' reactions to organizational change (e.g., Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). In these studies, researchers explored the factors that influence individuals' willingness and ability to adjust to new organizational circumstances. A wide variety of variables have been considered as antecedents of change reactions. However, studies of these reactions focused on either support of or resistance to change, overlooking the possibility that people may have intricate reactions that involve both strong support and resistance (i.e., ambivalence; see Piderit, 2000, for a conceptual article on the subject). Accordingly, we suggest that employees' reactions to change may be more complex than has been considered.

Failing to consider the possibility of ambivalence often leads to the misinterpretation of employees' reactions to change such that

individuals who are presently perceived as indifferent may actually hold strong, yet conflicting, views about the change. Such misinterpretations detract from both the accuracy and validity of current research findings and practitioners' ability to successfully implement change in organizations. If researchers and practitioners are to gain a more realistic understanding of how employees respond to organizational change, the existence of ambivalence must be acknowledged, assessed, and systematically predicted. This was our aim in the present set of studies.

First, we offer a theoretical framework that helps integrate the various variables that have been considered in prior research and predicts when employees would be most likely to feel supportive of, resistant to, or ambivalent toward organizational change. As we elaborate below, following an analysis of the concept of "imposed change," we identify two key factors that influence employees' reactions to organizational change: (a) aspects related to how employees feel about the concept of change (e.g., Oreg, 2003) and (b) aspects related to how they feel about the change agent (e.g., Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). We then suggest that in the context of imposed organizational change, these two factors may conflict with each other and yield ambivalence toward the change.

Ambivalence in Organizations

Ambivalence is defined here as an attitude comprising both positive and negative reactions to an object (Kaplan, 1972; van Harreveld, van der Pligt, & de Liver, 2009). The stronger these reactions, the higher the ambivalence will be. Drawing on N. E. Miller's (1951) and Lewin's (1935) seminal works on conflict, ambivalence can be expected whenever two (or more) forces drive an individual in opposite directions. Ambivalence has been said to have several meaningful consequences for both individuals' per-

sonal experiences and their perceptions and decisions (e.g., Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002). Phenomenologically, ambivalence is often experienced as unpleasant (Newby-Clark et al., 2002; van Harreveld et al., 2009). At the same time, people holding ambivalent attitudes tend to process information more systematically (Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996), in a more controlled and reflective, rather than automatic, manner (Cunningham, Johnson, Gatenby, Gore, & Banaji, 2003), and tend to provide descriptions that are more balanced and accurate than those made by individuals not experiencing ambivalence (Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2004).

In the organizational literature, however, the concept has been addressed mostly in conceptual articles (e.g., Piderit, 2000; Pratt & Barnett, 1997). For example, employees who identify with conflicting ideals within the organization, and who therefore experience ambivalence, were described as effective change agents because they provide a more balanced and realistic perspective of the opportunities and threats that the change offered (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Ambivalent employees have therefore been said to act as constructive critics, entertaining the possibility of both maintaining the status quo and implementing change in the organization (Piderit, 2000; Pratt & Barnett, 1997).

Thus, knowledge about employees' ambivalence during change would be valuable for at least two reasons. First, ambivalent employees need particular support and guidance during the change to alleviate the discomfort that ambivalence creates. Second, they can provide a valuable perspective about the change that could assist change agents in both design and implementation. As a start, researchers should acknowledge the existence of ambivalence toward change and should aim to empirically identify it and its potential sources.

Most commonly, researchers focus on employees' support of, or resistance to, organizational change (see Oreg, 2006, for a discussion of this point) using constructs such as openness to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 2007), commitment to change (Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006), resistance to change (Lines, 2004), or stress from change (Ashford, 1988). Some of these (e.g., openness, readiness) tap positive reactions, whereas others (e.g., resistance, stress) tap negative reactions. Accordingly, participants in these studies are asked to rate the degree to which they agree or disagree with statements such as "Overall, the proposed changes are for the better" (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), "I am fully supportive of this change" (Fedor et al., 2006), and "Right now I am somewhat resistant to the changes proposed" (V. D. Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994). Reaction (e.g., readiness, resistance) scores are then obtained by calculating a participant's average response across items. Participants' responses are easily interpreted in the case of high and low scores, but not midrange scores. In the case of a support-for-change scale, for example, high scores are seen as indicating support, and low scores are typically viewed as reflecting resistance. A midrange score, however, is typically interpreted as indicating a mild or indifferent attitude toward the change, even though it could actually reflect strong feelings about the change, both supportive and resistant. In other words, current approaches do not distinguish ambivalent from indifferent or mild attitudes. In the social psychological literature on attitudes, this problem has become known as the "bipolar problem" and has elicited a growing interest in the study of ambivalence and its causes (e.g., Kaplan, 1972; van Harreveld et al., 2009).

To date, research on ambivalence in the context of organizational change is very limited. In one qualitative study, 14 managers' ambivalence was shown to contribute to employees' resistance to changes in an aerospace company (Larson & Tompkins, 2005). In another qualitative study of 20 senior civil servants, participants were asked to reflect on their experience of change (Randall & Procter, 2008). On the basis of participants' responses, the authors discussed the importance of considering the full complexity of employee attitudes, rather than focusing on support or resistance. In a recent quantitative study, we linked ambivalence to type of change, and argued that imposed change should yield greater ambivalence than voluntary change (Sverdlik & Oreg, 2009). However, we did not directly assess ambivalence in that study and only inferred its existence from the patterns of relationships among the variables in the study (we elaborate on this study below). As far as we could determine, no previous study of organizational change has directly measured and tried to explain employees' ambivalence toward change.

Ambivalence in the Context of Imposed Change

The psychological literature includes research on a large variety of changes, including changes in the life cycle (e.g., Bardi & Ryff, 2007; Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009), career and job changes (e.g., Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005; Rudisill & Edwards, 2002), transitions from one culture to another (e.g., Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Ethier & Deaux, 1994), political and societal changes (e.g., Sloutsky & Searle-White, 1993; Wieczorkowska & Burnstein, 2001), and organizational changes (cf. Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Despite these varied change contexts, the above lines of investigation consider motivational processes that are quite similar. They all explore the factors that influence individuals' willingness and ability to adjust to new circumstances.

An important factor that distinguishes between the various types of change, however, and that has yet to be incorporated into studies of change, is the amount of discretion that individuals have in adopting the change. Whereas some changes are voluntary, others are imposed, and whereas reactions to any change are influenced by how the individual feels about the notion of change, reactions to imposed (vs. voluntary) change are also influenced by how the individual feels about the imposition. We suggest that in the context of imposed organizational change, these two influences could conflict with each other and yield ambivalence.

Indeed, as we suggested above, the elements of the term *imposed change* readily indicate these two key forces that can influence individuals' responses. An individual's reaction to an imposed change is a function of how the individual reacts to change and how the individual reacts to being the object of an imposition. In a recent study, we (Sverdlik & Oreg, 2009) adopted a dispositional perspective using Schwartz's (1992) theory of personal values and argued that the preference for stability (vs. change) is inherently linked with the inclination to comply, given that both reflect aspects of individuals' conservation values (Schwartz, 1992). Similarly, we noted that the preference for novelty and change is inherently linked with one's preference for autonomy, because both are aspects of individuals' openness values.

We therefore suggested that when both instability and compliance are elicited, as in the case of imposed change, most individuals will experience some degree of internal conflict. For those who value conservation, their preference for stability predisposes them to resist change, yet their inclination to comply predisposes them to support it. In contrast, for those valuing openness, the preference for novelty predisposes individuals to support change, yet their preference for autonomy predisposes them to resist the imposition. Confirming our hypotheses, we found that when individuals were not required to comply (i.e., when the change was voluntary), only the preference for stability explained responses to a given change, yielding a negative relationship between conservation values and support for the change. In contrast, when the change was imposed, there was no significant relationship between conservation and support for the change. The expected pattern was also found for openness values. This supported our framework and implied that when change is imposed, individuals may be experiencing ambivalence. Ambivalence in this case, however, was inferred only from the pattern of relationships between values and support for change and was not actually measured. Furthermore, in that previous study we considered ambivalence to be ubiquitous and did not explore individual differences in its experience.

Although most of the studies on reactions to change do consider individual differences in employees' responses, they do not address the two elements of the orientation toward change and the orientation toward being imposed upon. Nevertheless, they often include assessments of one of these elements and, as such, provide a preliminary basis for our discussion of the conflict between the two. We review studies on each of these factors next.

Individuals' Orientation Toward Change

Several researchers proposed that employees' reactions to organizational change are influenced by how individuals more generally feel about the concept of change (e.g., Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Walker, Armenakis, & Bernerth, 2007). Many of these studies adopted a dispositional perspective and demonstrated relationships between employees' personality and their reactions to change. Among these studies, perhaps most directly related to the notion of change, is the concept of dispositional resistance to change (Oreg, 2003; Oreg et al., 2008). In a series of studies, dispositional resistance to change was established as a meaningful concept for capturing individual differences in the personality-based inclination to resist change. In several studies, dispositional resistance to change correlated with specific change-related responses and choices, including attitudes toward specific organizational changes, change-related occupational choices, the willingness to adopt new technology, and initiating change in one's daily routine (Nov & Ye, 2008; Oreg, 2003, 2006; Oreg, Nevo, Metzer, Leder, & Castro, 2009). The main argument in these studies is that individuals differ in their personal orientation toward the notion of stability versus change and that this personal orientation influences how individuals respond to specific changes.

Individuals' Response to Being Imposed Upon

A separate line of research on reactions to organizational change focused on factors that relate to how individuals respond when organizational decisions are dictated and imposed on them. In one way or another, such studies have to do with the notion of compliance. Reactions to being imposed upon can take on many forms, involving varying degrees of compliance, ranging from absolute conformity to blatant disobedience and resistance. In the organizational context, compliance is defined as the "internalization and acceptance of the organization's rules and procedures as well as adherence to and loyal following of them" (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007, p. 1132).

A great deal of work has been devoted to explaining the conditions under which individuals will comply with or resist prescribed edicts (e.g., Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Den Hartog et al., 2007). Whereas in the Sverdlik and Oreg (2009) study compliance was explained by referring to individuals' personality dispositions, most of the research on the topic indicates context-related factors, such as how one perceives and feels about the imposing agent (for a review, see Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Several researchers demonstrated that compliance increases when the imposing agent is perceived as credible, competent, and trustworthy (cf. Koslowsky & Schwarzwald, 2001) and, in the case that the imposing agent is a collective (e.g., group, organization), when one feels a sense of belongingness and attachment to, and identification with, the agent (e.g., De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2002; Den Hartog et al., 2007; V. D. Miller et al., 1994).

In the organizational context, the imposing agent is typically the organization's management, but it is frequently viewed as the organization itself. This is because of employees' tendency to personify organizations and view them interchangeably with those in the organization who control employees' resources (e.g., management; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Levinson, 1965). Employees' orientations toward the collective and toward the collective's leader are tightly linked, and one often serves as a reflection of the other. Correspondingly, definitions of constructs that reflect an orientation toward the collective (e.g., identification) often refer to the collective's leader (e.g., trust in authority), and vice versa. For example, researchers of identification indicate that a key manifestation of individuals' identification with a collective is the appreciation of and deference to the collective's leader (e.g., Duckitt, 1989; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008). Reciprocally, research on trust suggests that trust in authority (e.g., management) develops from the social identification with the collective (e.g., the organization; Kramer, Hanna, Su, & Wei, 2001; Tyler, 2001). On this basis, we suggest that employees' orientation toward an imposing agent can be assessed with constructs that involve both attitudes toward the organization (e.g., organizational identification) and attitudes toward the organization's leadership (e.g., trust in management).

Although most of the change reaction studies mentioned earlier considered either the orientation toward change or the orientation toward the change agent, some have considered both (e.g., Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000; Lau & Woodman, 1995). None, however, considered the possibility that these factors may evoke opposite reactions. For example, in some situations an employee's personal orientation toward the notion of change predisposes him or her to look favorably on a given organizational change, yet the employee's orientation toward the agent imposing the change yields an unfavorable response to the change initiative. In such a case, the employee is likely to experience ambivalence. Similarly, ambivalence could arise when the employee is negatively disposed

toward the idea of change, yet is positively oriented toward the imposing agent.[1]

The Present Studies

Given our argument that ambivalence results from a conflict between the orientation toward change and the orientation toward the change agent, our focus in the present studies is on the interactive effect of the two on employees' ambivalence about specific organizational changes. We used dispositional resistance to change to assess employees' orientation toward change and trust in management and organizational identification to assess employees' orientation toward the change agent. We expect that the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence toward the specific change will depend on the orientation toward the agent (i.e., trust in management, organizational identification). In other words, the orientation toward the change agent will moderate the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence. Specifically, among individuals who hold a positive orientation toward the change agent, higher levels of dispositional resistance to change will be associated with higher levels of ambivalence. On the other hand, among those who hold a negative orientation toward the change agent, higher levels of dispositional resistance to change will be associated with lower levels of ambivalence. Thus, our main hypothesis is

> *Hypothesis 1:* Employees' orientation toward the change agent will moderate the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence such that among employees with a positive orientation toward the agent, the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence will be positive, whereas among employees with a negative orientation toward the agent, the relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence will be negative.

In addition, we wished to examine the relationship between the more commonly explored variable of support for change and ambivalence toward change. As noted above, when responding to uniform reaction-to-change scales (e.g., support for change), ambivalent individuals score somewhere in between support and resistance. Although they can find some positive aspects in the change, which espouse support, they also find negative aspects, which elicit resistance. In contrast, those who either fully endorse the change or entirely object to it are likely to experience very little ambivalence. We therefore expect a nonlinear relationship between ambivalence and support such that those who obtain mid-range support scores will experience a high level of ambivalence in comparison to those who strongly support or strongly oppose the change. We therefore hypothesize

> *Hypothesis 2:* There will be a quadratic, inverse U-shaped relationship between support and ambivalence.

We tested Hypothesis 1 in three field studies. In Study 1, previously published data were used to calculate an index of ambivalence to show that in the context of an imposed change, employees' orientation toward the change agent moderates the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence toward the change (Hypothesis 1). In Study 2 we as-

sessed ambivalence more directly and retested Hypothesis 1 in a field study of an organization undergoing a management-initiated change. In Study 3 we demonstrated the moderation effect again, in the context of an externally imposed change, and tested Hypothesis 2 concerning the relationship between resistance to change and ambivalence toward it.

Study 1

As a preliminary test of the propositions above, we used Oreg's (2006) data and conducted a secondary analysis to create an index of ambivalence that was not considered in the original study. In Oreg's study, a large variety of variables were linked with individuals' reactions to an imposed organizational change. The reaction on which Oreg focused was employees' resistance to an organizational change, conceptualized as a negative attitude toward the change. Ambivalence was not included in the hypotheses, nor was it measured. Nevertheless, as we explain below, the scale used for measuring resistance to the change can be used to create an index of ambivalence. Furthermore, two of the antecedent variables that Oreg considered are relevant for our conceptualizations here and allowed us to test Hypothesis 1. The first of these antecedents is employees' dispositional resistance to change. In line with our definition here, this variable was defined and operationalized to reflect individuals' personality-based inclination to resist changes (Oreg, 2003).

The second variable is employees' trust in management, which relates to our interest in the orientation toward the change agent. Trust in management was defined as the degree of "faith employees . . . have concerning management's ability to steer the organization" (Oreg, 2006, p. 87). Among the findings reported in Oreg (2006), dispositional resistance to change was positively related, and trust in management negatively related, to employees' resistance to the imposed change.

Finally, although ambivalence was not assessed in Oreg's (2006) study, the items used to measure employees' reactions to the change can be used to assess a form of ambivalence (we explain how in the Method section). The literature on ambivalence discusses two approaches to the measurement of ambivalence (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1996, 2001). One is by explicitly asking individuals about the extent to which they feel ambivalent. This approach taps what is termed *felt* ambivalence. In the second approach, ambivalence is indicated when an individual reports both positive and negative reactions toward the same object (Newby-Clark et al., 2002). This approach refers to *potential* ambivalence (van Harreveld et al., 2009). Although the two types of ambivalence are related (e.g., Priester & Petty, 1996, 2001), they are nevertheless distinct in that felt ambivalence requires individuals' awareness of the discrepancy between positive and negative reactions and the conflict that results from this discrepancy (e.g., Petty, Tormala, Briñol, & Jarvis, 2006; van Harreveld

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[1] Certainly there may be other, situation-specific factors that could elicit ambivalence, such as when an employee is positively oriented toward both change and the change agent, yet the content of the change (e.g., loss of benefits) would be personally detrimental to the employee. We believe, however, that examining the orientations toward change and toward the change agent is particularly interesting because it addresses key factors that generalize beyond any specific organizational change.

et al., 2009). Because Oreg's (2006) study was not about ambivalence, and therefore felt ambivalence was not assessed, our focus in this preliminary study is on relationships with potential ambivalence.

Method

Participants and procedure. The data we used in this study were collected by Oreg (2006) from an organization in the defense industry that had undergone a merger and an overall restructuring and transition to a matrix organizational structure (Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978). Data were collected several months into the change, before the transition had been completed. Of the 800 surveys administered, 236 responded (30%). Of the 236 respondents, 172 provided data that allowed us to calculate the ambivalence measure. Of these, 88% were men, and 54% had a managerial position (i.e., had at least one subordinate), which corresponded with the overall distribution of employees in the organization. The mean age was 42.57 years (SD = 7.32), and the mean years of tenure was 13.89 (SD = 11.54). Employees in the organization obtained relatively high levels of education, with 37% holding a graduate degree, 35% an undergraduate degree, and 20% a technical degree, and 8% had lower levels of education, most of whom earned a high school degree.

Measures. For all of the variables measured in this study, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Dispositional resistance to change. Dispositional resistance to change was measured with Oreg's (2003) 17-item Resistance to Change Scale. The scale has been validated in more than 25 samples from 19 countries (Oreg et al., 2008; Stewart, May, McCarthy, & Puffer, 2009) and has consistently demonstrated high validity. Sample items include "I'd rather do the things I'm used to than try out new and different ones" and "When I am informed of a change in plans, I get a bit stressed out." The scale's reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) in the present study was .86.

Trust in management. Trust in management was measured with three items designed to tap employees' faith in management's ability to steer the organization. The items were "I have the feeling that the leader of this change knows what he or she is doing," "Overall, I get the feeling that you can count on the organization's management," and "I believe that if management is suggesting this change, they are well informed and have good reasons for it." The scale's coefficient alpha was .92.

Ambivalence. For calculating ambivalence, we used Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin's (1995) operationalizations of ambivalence. Thompson et al. suggested that beyond simultaneously experiencing positive and negative attitudes, ambivalence will be particularly strong when these positive and negative attitudes are strong. They therefore proposed the following equation, which takes into consideration both the balance between positive and negative reactions and the intensity of these reactions:

$$Ambivalence = \left(\frac{Positive + Negative}{2}\right) - |Positive - Negative|.$$

In this equation, the intensity of the attitudes is considered by calculating the mean attitude (positive and negative) strength, and the balance between them is calculated through the absolute value of their difference. Thus, the stronger the positive and negative attitudes, and the more similar they are in magnitude, the greater will the ambivalence be. In addition to Thompson et al. (1995), others have used this operationalization and found it to successfully capture ambivalence (e.g., Armitage & Conner, 2000; Ojala, 2008).

To calculate the positive and negative attitudes indicated in Thompson et al.'s (1995) equation, we used six items from Oreg's (2006) change-attitude scale. In all the items, respondents are asked to report how they feel, think, or intend to behave in response to the change, with some items being positively worded to reflect a favorable reaction and other items worded negatively to reflect an unfavorable reaction. We used three positively worded items (e.g., "I am excited about the change") to create the positive attitude component and three negatively worded items (e.g., "I have a bad feeling about the change") to create the negative attitude component. For each component, one item was affective, one was cognitive, and one was behavioral.

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1. Also included are employees' age and tenure in the organization.[2] To test Hypothesis 1, we used Aiken and West's (1991) procedure for testing interaction effects. After centering the dispositional resistance to change and trust variables, we included in a multiple regression analysis the two centered variables along with their product. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. As hypothesized, the interaction effect was significant. The significant interaction was maintained when including the control variables in the analysis. To determine the particular pattern of relationships that underlies the interaction, we plotted the relationships between dispositional resistance and ambivalence and calculated the simple slopes for high- and low-trust conditions, assessed at one standard deviation above and below the variable's mean (see Figure 1).

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the relationships only partially support our hypothesis. Although we obtained the hypothesized positive relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence among individuals high in trust, simple slope = .50, $t(170)$ = 2.79, $p < .01$, the relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence was not significantly different from zero among those low in trust. Thus, whereas for individuals with a positive orientation toward the change agent, high dispositional resistance to change yielded the greater ambivalence we hypothesized, for individuals with a negative orientation toward the agent, low dispositional resistance was not associated with the greater ambivalence we hypothesized in this condition. One explanation for this may have to do with how the employees weighed the negative and positive items in our measure of potential ambivalence. When calculating the ambivalence score, we assumed that positive and

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[2] In each of our studies we included demographic variables on which we had data and that could potentially covary with the independent and dependent variables.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Variables in Study 1

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age (years)	42.57	7.32	—				
2. Tenure (years)	13.89	11.54	.32**	—			
3. Dispositional resistance to change	3.20	0.74	.19*	−.07	—		
4. Trust in management	3.84	1.38	−.01	−.09	−.06	—	
5. Ambivalence toward the change	1.49	1.41	−.14	−.04	.16*	−.01	—

Note. $N = 172$.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

negative items have equal weight. However, there is research that suggests that a negativity bias might exist in people's attitude formation whereby negative cues are given more weight than positive cues (e.g., Cacioppo & Gardner, 1993; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Taylor, 1991). Specifically, this research suggests that when both positive and negative attributes of an object are identified, and an individual assigns these attributes ratings with an opposite sign and the same magnitude, the individuals' overall impression of the object will be negative rather than balanced (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989).

In our present case, this would mean that although high ambivalence scores indicate, as intended, that the individual holds both positive and negative views of the change, it may also indicate an overall negative impression of the change, in which case this measure of ambivalence also serves as a measure of resistance (i.e., negative attitude) to the change. Although we have no means of verifying whether this negativity bias had indeed occurred, such an explanation is consistent with both the lack of a negative slope in the low-trust condition and the unexpected positive relationship between dispositional resistance and this measure of ambivalence (see Table 2). We designed Study 2 to reassess the internal conflict with a direct measure of felt ambivalence that avoids this potential problem.

Study 2

In Study 2 we tested Hypothesis 1 again, this time with a direct measure of ambivalence. As in Study 1, we used dispositional resistance to change for capturing employees' orientation toward the notion of change. Instead of trust in management, however, we used employees' organizational identification for capturing employees' orientation toward the change agent. The concept of identification has been studied extensively from a variety of the-

oretical standpoints (e.g., Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). The concept is typically described as reflecting individuals' self perceptions vis-à-vis a given reference group. In a recent integrative review, identification was defined as a multidimensional construct, including aspects such as the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the group and an inclination to comply with group norms and leader guidelines (Roccas et al., 2008). Thus, when organizational leaders impose a change on their subordinates, identification, like trust, is expected to increase support for the change.

Therefore, information on employees' dispositional resistance to change and organizational identification would offer another opportunity to examine the existence of an internal conflict in the context of imposed change. Faced with a change imposed by management, employees with a positive orientation toward change, yet with a sense of alienation (i.e., lack of identification) toward the organization, are expected to experience ambivalence. Similarly, employees with a negative orientation toward change and high levels of identification should also experience ambivalence. In line with Hypothesis 1, we expect that among employees with high levels of identification with the organization, the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence will be positive, whereas among those who hold low levels of identification, the relationship will be negative.

Method

Organizational context. The change in this study involved the relocation of a university's campus. The new campus was built

Table 2
Interaction Analysis for Dispositional Resistance to Change and Trust in Management Predicting Ambivalence in Study 1

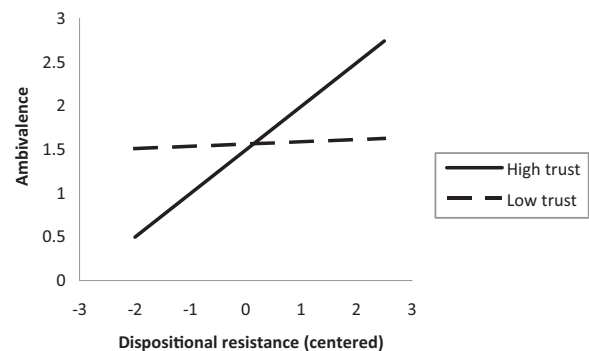| Variable	B	SE	β
Dispositional resistance to change (RTC)	0.31	.14	.16*
Trust in management	−0.03	.08	−.03
RTC × Trust	0.19	.09	.15*
R^2		.05	

Note. $N = 172$.
* $p < .05$.

Figure 1. Plot of interaction effect in Study 1.

over the course of several years and was designed to include all administrative and academic departments in one location. Whereas the main campus used to be located in a central city, it was now transferred to a more peripheral town. Thus, although the change held promise for a number of potential improvements (e.g., a new and conveniently designed campus), it also involved a number of disadvantages, such as more commuting time to and from work.

The study was part of a broader research project for which we collected data on a large number of variables from university employees. Part of this project, including the data on dispositional resistance to change, but involving different outcomes and different hypotheses, was published in Sverdlik and Oreg (2009).[3]

Participants and procedure. The campus included approximately 500 employees. We sent questionnaires to each of the employees via e-mail asking for their voluntary participation in the study. Questionnaires were sent a number of months before the relocation had taken place, yet well after the change was first announced. In response, 117 questionnaires were completed, 104 of which were usable and included data on all variables. Closely corresponding to the distribution of employee demographics in the university, 66% were female (68% were female university-wide), the mean age was 39.65 years ($SD = 10.4$; 45.5 was the mean age university-wide), and 77% were full-time employees (63% university-wide). Both administrative and academic employees were included in the sample. Forty-one percent were members of the academic staff (45% university-wide).

Measures. For all the variables measured in this study, scale response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Dispositional resistance to change. As in Study 1, dispositional resistance to change was measured with the 17-item Resistance to Change Scale (Oreg, 2003). The scale's coefficient alpha in the present study was .88.

Identification with the organization. Identification with the organization was measured with eight items from the Roccas et al. (2008) identification questionnaire. The scale was tested in previous studies and found to be a reliable and valid measure of identification (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006; for a review, see Roccas et al. 2008). Sample items are "Being an employee of the university is an important part of my identity" and "I am strongly committed to the university." The scale's reliability coefficient alpha in the present study was .87.

Ambivalence. Ambivalence toward the organizational change was measured with four items composed for this study: "When I think about the relocation of the university campus I have both good and bad thoughts," "When I think about the relocation of the university campus I experience both good and bad feelings," "I find it difficult to decide whether the relocation is bad or good," and "In general, I am very ambivalent about the relocation." The scale's coefficient alpha was .85.

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables in this study are presented in Table 3. To retest Hypothesis 1, we followed the same procedures as those used in Study 1. We regressed ambivalence onto dispositional resistance, identification, and the product of the two variables (both terms were centered before including them in the analysis and before calculating the product; see Table 4). As hypothesized, the interaction term significantly predicted ambivalence. Figure 2 presents mean ambivalence ratings as a function of dispositional resistance to change and identification with the organization. As can be seen, in line with our predictions, among employees with high levels of identification (one standard deviation above the mean) the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and ambivalence was positive, simple slope $= .79$, $t(104) = 2.99$, $p < .01$, whereas among employees with low levels of identification (one standard deviation below the mean) the relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence was negative, simple slope $= -.49$, $t(104) = 1.67$, $p < .05$. Unlike in Study 1, the (unhypothesized) correlation between dispositional resistance and ambivalence was not significant. When we included the control variables in the analysis, the same pattern of findings was obtained.

These findings demonstrate the interactive effects of the orientation toward change and toward the change agent on employees' ambivalence in the context of an imposed change. Our evidence in the present study is stronger than in Study 1 not only because we found support for both sides of the hypothesized interaction pattern (i.e., both the positive and negative slope) but also because ambivalence was now directly assessed.

Nevertheless, one of our main reasons for studying ambivalence was our belief that by focusing on uniform (of either support or resistance) reactions to change, researchers may have been misinterpreting midrange reaction scores as mild or indifferent attitudes, instead of as ambivalence. This premise was yet to be tested. We tested this assumption in a third study, in which we measured both ambivalence and support for change.

Study 3

In the present study we examined employees' responses to an organizational restructuring initiative in the Israeli Electric Company. Israel has only one electric company, which, to date, is government owned and provides most of the country's electricity. Several months before our study began, the Israeli parliament proposed an organizational reform that would involve a partial privatization of the company, which would include a large-scale organizational restructuring. Variations of this proposition have been discussed by parliament and in the media for over a decade and have been a continuing source of tension among company members. It was just before we conducted our study, however, that a concrete plan had been presented and was en route to receive final approval. Following the introduction of this plan, employees exhibited high levels of involvement and a variety of reactions, including groups of employees and members of the company's management who participated in strikes and demonstrations against the government's plan. Despite the fact that the change had not yet been made formal, employees were well into the anticipatory stage of the change process (e.g., Paulsen et al., 2005), in which employees' sense of control is lowest (e.g., Fugate, Kinicki, & Scheck, 2002), and their responses have a great impact on the success or failure of the organizational change. Our entrance to the organization was therefore at a stage in the change process that is of key interest and relevance to both researchers and practitioners.

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[3] None of the relationships reported in this study have been published.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Variables in Study 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age (years)	39.65	10.38	—					
2. Employment status[a]	0.78	0.42	−.14	—				
3. Position[b]	0.58	0.50	−.35**	.39**	—			
4. Dispositional resistance to change	2.95	0.70	−.15	.04	.15	—		
5. Identification	4.57	0.86	.26**	.12	.07	−.15	—	
6. Ambivalence toward the change	2.85	1.15	−.08	−.03	−.12	.15	.01	—

Note. $N = 104$.
[a] Coded 0 = part time, 1 = full time.   [b] Coded 0 = academic, 1 = administrative.
** $p < .01$.

As a start, we wished to examine how the orientations toward change and change agent were related to employees' support of the change. Contrary to the two previous studies, in which the change agent was from within the organization, in this study the agent (i.e., the government) was external. As in Study 1, we looked at trust, but this time toward the external agent rather than management. We expected trust in the change agent to be positively related to support for the change. In contrast, individuals' dispositional resistance to change was expected to be negatively related to support for the change. We then turned to examine the interactive effects of dispositional resistance and trust on ambivalence (Hypothesis 1). Finally, we examined the relationship indicated in Hypothesis 2, between support for change and ambivalence toward it. As explained in our introduction, we hypothesized a quadratic, inverse U-shaped relationship between support and ambivalence.

Method

Participants and procedure. Participants were the 150 tenured indoor employees in one of the five regional districts of the electric company. We specifically sampled indoor employees, for whom the change was expected to be of most relevance. Surveys and addressed envelopes were distributed among employees and returned directly to the researchers, maintaining survey anonymity. Of the 150 questionnaires distributed, we obtained 89 usable responses. Of these, 49% were filled out by men, 42% by women, and 9% by individuals who did not report their sex. The mean age was 45 years ($SD = 6.83$). Twenty-five percent of the respondents reported working in the company between 10 and 15 years, 36% reported between 16 and 20 years, 17% reported between 21 and 25 years, and 17% reported more than 26 years. Five percent did not report their tenure in the company.

Table 4
Interaction Analysis for Dispositional Resistance to Change and Identification Predicting Ambivalence in Study 2

Variable	B	SE	β
Dispositional resistance to change (RTC)	0.19	.16	.12
Identification	0.00	.15	.00
RTC × Identification	0.61	.21	.28**
R^2		.10	

Note. $N = 104$.
** $p < .01$.

Measures. As in the previous study, scale response options for each of the variables ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Dispositional resistance to change. Dispositional resistance to change was measured as in Studies 1 and 2, with Oreg's (2003) Resistance to Change Scale. The scale's coefficient alpha in the present study was .90.

Trust in the change agent. Trust in the change agent was measured with three items composed for the context of this study. The items were "I trust those who initiated this change," "I fear that the initiator of this change is not motivated by pure reasons" (reverse coded), and "I believe that the initiative for the change stems from a genuine desire to promote the company and its employees." The scale's coefficient alpha was .92.

Ambivalence. Ambivalence toward the change was measured with the same ambivalence scale used in Study 2. The scale's reliability coefficient alpha in the present study was .86.

Support for the organizational change. Support for the organizational change was measured with two of the behavioral intention items from Oreg's (2006) change-attitude scale, which was used in previous studies to assess employees' reaction to the change (e.g., Oreg & Berson, in press; van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). The items we used ask directly about the degree to which employees' support the given organizational change. The items were "I express my support for the relocation initiative" and "I talk a lot with others about the advantages of the relocation initiative." The scale's reliability coefficient in the present study was .69. Although this value is slightly lower than the accepted .70 value, it is not unreasonable considering the small number of items in the scale.
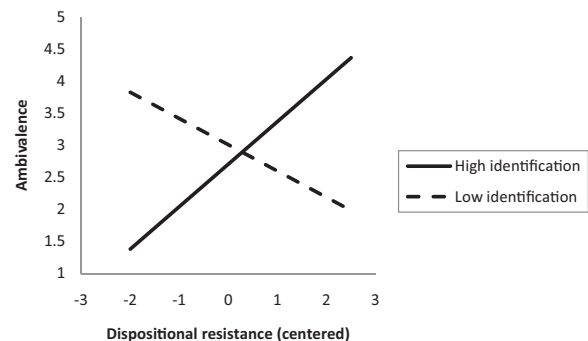

Figure 2. Plot of interaction effect in Study 2.

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables in the study are presented in Table 5. Consistent with previous work, trust was positively correlated with support for the organizational change. Also in line with previous work, there was a negative correlation between dispositional resistance and support for the specific change ($p < .05$).

To test Hypothesis 1, we followed the procedures used in Studies 1 and 2 for testing the interaction effect. As Table 6 demonstrates, the interaction effect was significant. Next, we plotted the relationship between trust and ambivalence across high (one standard deviation above the mean) and low (one standard deviation below the mean) levels of dispositional resistance to change. As can be seen in Figure 3, the results support our hypothesis, with a positive relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence among employees high in trust, simple slope $= .54$, $t(89) = 2.72$, $p < .01$, and a negative relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence among those low in trust, simple slope $= -.36$, $t(89) = -2.04$, $p < .05$. The same pattern of findings was obtained when including the control variables in the analysis.

Unlike the results in the two previous studies, there was a main effect for the orientation toward the change agent (i.e., trust; see Table 6 and Figure 3). A possible explanation for this effect may have to do with the fact that the change was initiated and imposed by an external entity (in this case, the government). In this particular context, there may be an added complexity to the change situation in that the interests of the country, whose leaders initiated the change, may not necessarily coincide with those of the company. Indeed, among the change protesters were both employees and members of management. Because employees in this situation have two relevant affiliations—to the organization and to the state—trust in the change agent may instill ambivalence because of perceived conflicts between the good of the organization and the good of the nation. Such internal conflicts are not expected to arise when trust in the external change agent is low, because regardless of the affiliation in focus, low trust should yield little willingness to comply with the change. Clearly this explanation is merely speculative, and additional research, directly comparing internally and externally imposed changes, should be conducted to explain this effect more conclusively.

To test Hypothesis 2 about the relationship between support and ambivalence, we conducted a polynomial regression analysis by regressing ambivalence on both support and the squared value of support.[4] Evidence for a quadratic, inverse U, relationship between variables appears as a significant negative effect for the quadratic term (Aiken, West, & Pitts, 2003). As expected, the quadratic term was significant and negative ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$), supporting our claim that common scales of reactions to change may be confounding mild reactions with ambivalent ones.

General Discussion

In the present studies we demonstrated an interplay of key forces that takes place in the context of imposed change. In three studies we showed that individuals' personal orientation toward the notion of change interacts with their orientation toward the change agent and may result in ambivalence. In all three studies

the orientation toward the change agent moderated the relationship between dispositional resistance to change and employees' ambivalence such that it was positive only among employees with a positive orientation toward the change agent. In contrast, with the exception of Study 1, in which only potential ambivalence was assessed, the relationship between dispositional resistance and ambivalence was negative among employees with a negative orientation toward the change agent.

By focusing on the orientations toward change and the change agent, our framework integrates literature that has been relatively desultory, comprising seemingly distinct sets of variables as antecedents of employees' reactions to change. Furthermore, we demonstrated how these orientations can conflict with each other and result in the experience of ambivalence. By considering the possibility of this internal conflict, we further demonstrated how midrange scores on common support-for-change scales, which may have been misinterpreted as representing indifference, could actually reflect ambivalence. This was most explicitly demonstrated in Study 3, in which we found support for the hypothesized curvilinear relationship between support for change and ambivalence toward it.

We present the possibility of a negativity bias (e.g., Cacioppo & Gardner, 1993; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Taylor, 1991) as an explanation for the lack of a negative relationship in the low-trust condition in Study 1. This suggests that the measure of potential ambivalence we used may not be as reliable as measures of felt ambivalence, which further highlights the importance of explicitly and directly assessing ambivalence.

A consistent pattern throughout the three studies was that the effect of dispositional resistance on ambivalence was weaker among individuals with a negative orientation toward the agent (i.e., low trust or identification). One explanation for this may be related to the nature of the constructs and scales with which we measured the orientation toward the agent. Specifically, whereas high scores on trust most explicitly indicate high trust, low scores may only partially indicate mistrust. Although we believe that an employee selecting *strongly disagree* (1) or *disagree* (2) on a trust scale (including items such as "Overall, I get the feeling that you can count on the organization's management") is reflecting at least some degree of mistrust, the potency of this negative orientation may nevertheless be weaker than that of the scale's positive pole. This proposition could be tested in future work in which the measures used for assessing the orientation toward the change agent will involve constructs with a negative conceptualization of the orientation, such as mistrust or alienation.

Although others before us have argued that ambivalence toward change is an important phenomenon (e.g., Piderit, 2000), we believe our studies are the first in which ambivalence is quantitatively assessed and in which the process through which it may emerge is demonstrated. Furthermore, in line with previous research on attitudinal ambivalence (e.g., van Harreveld et al., 2009), our findings show that the typical bipolar scales used for measuring resistance to or support for change draw the spotlight away from those individuals who are by no means indifferent to the

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[4] To avoid multicolinearity, the support variable was centered prior to calculating the squared term and prior to its inclusion in the analysis (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Variables in Study 3

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age (years)	45.00	6.83	—					
2. Tenure[a]	2.27	1.05	.61**	—				
3. Dispositional resistance to change	3.18	0.70	.01	.03	—			
4. Trust in change agent	2.53	1.22	.12	.31**	.04	—		
5. Ambivalence toward the change	3.47	1.02	.12	.06	.05	.37**	—	
6. Support in the change	2.34	0.91	.14	.13	−.19†	.31**	.10	—

Note. $N = 89$.
[a] Coded $1 = 10–15$ years, $2 = 16–20$ years, $3 = 20–25$ years, $4 = 26+$ years.
† $p = .08$. ** $p < .01$.

change and who often have very good reasons to resist it as well as support it.

Contrary to indifferent individuals, those who are ambivalent embody a broad awareness to the many implications of organizational change and can be particularly informative for those aiming to learn about it. Thus, our findings highlight a portion of the employee population that may have been overlooked in prior research and yet may hold the key to better understanding the intricacies of imposed organizational change. Future research should focus on how these ambivalent individuals might differ from those who more one-sidedly support or resist change. As an example, a specific research direction could include an examination of how ambivalence toward change is related to individuals' processing of new information concerning the change.

From an applied perspective, we believe our findings provide a number of insights that could benefit managers in the process of designing and implementing organizational change. First, managers can benefit from awareness of the differential impact that engendering trust will have on employees with different dispositional orientations toward change. Whereas creating a positive rapport with employees and engendering trust may be sufficient for eliciting support for an organizational change among employees who are predisposed to like change, those who hold a negative view of change can be expected to feel ambivalent. By identifying these employees in advance, managers can work with them to learn from their perspective of the advantages and disadvantages of the change and help them work through their reservations and doubts about it.

Second, recognizing the potential conflict that can arise in the context of imposed change should behoove managers to consider how they might mitigate the imposed nature of the changes they initiate. This corresponds with recommendations to increase em-

ployee involvement and participation in organizational change (cf. Pasmore & Fagans, 1992), which, in a sense, reduce the degree to which the change is imposed. In particular for employees who generally like change, yet who hold a negative orientation toward the change agent, reducing the imposition will reduce ambivalence and increase support for the change. Reducing the imposition, however, should not be expected to result in support among all employees, given that those who are predisposed against change are still likely to prefer the status quo. For a portion of these employees, namely, those who hold a positive orientation toward management, imposing the change (as opposed to making it voluntary) may actually be beneficial, because it will yield ambivalence rather than absolute resistance. Eliciting ambivalence rather than resistance may be advantageous because, compared with resistant employees, ambivalent employees are more likely to be open to persuasion, given their tendency to consider a broader range of perspectives (e.g., Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Overall, being in tune with employees' orientation toward change and toward management can help managers plan change and anticipate and prepare for the different types of responses they will face.

Given that the conflict we demonstrated here is between an inherent disposition (i.e., dispositional resistance to change), assumed to be stable (Oreg, 2003), and a more malleable attitude (i.e., the orientation toward the change agent, in the form of trust or identification), efforts to alleviate ambivalence should focus on improving the latter. This corresponds with numerous findings that emphasize the overall importance of eliciting trust and identification (e.g., Lipponen, Bardi, & Haapamäki, 2008; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Our findings highlight the particular value of promoting a positive orientation toward the organization and its management during times of change.

Table 6
Interaction Analysis for Dispositional Resistance to Change and Trust in Management Predicting Ambivalence in Study 3

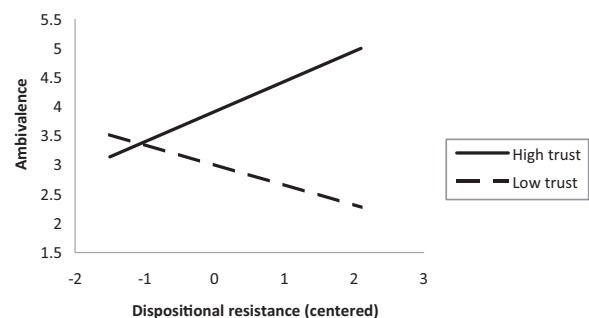| Variable	B	SE	β
Dispositional resistance to change (RTC)	0.09	.14	.06
Trust	0.43	.09	.51***
RTC × Trust	0.45	.13	.35***
R^2		.22	

Note. $N = 89$.
*** $p < .001$.

Figure 3. Plot of interaction effect in Study 3.

A potential limitation of our studies comes from the fact that our data were collected from a single source, with the same survey methodology. This can sometimes lead to inflated correlations between predictor and criterion (i.e., mono-method bias; e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). However, in the present studies our focus was on the interaction between two variables in their effect on the criterion, rather than on simple predictor–criterion relationships. This should alleviate concerns for mono-method bias given that it is not a correlation we are looking for, but rather differences among correlations across values of the moderating variable (e.g., Evans, 1985). To the extent that each of these correlations might be similarly inflated due to mono-method bias, this inflation would be canceled out when considering the differences among correlations.

Another point to consider is that in Study 2, our finding concerning the conflict between dispositional resistance to change and organizational identification emerged in the context of a relatively superficial change, involving an organizational relocation. On its own, such a change is not expected to alter the organization's core values, with which employees may identify. In this context it made sense to expect identification to represent compliance with the organization's management. In contrast, when an organization undergoes changes that more directly and deeply concern the organization's core values, identification could likely elicit resistance or at least ambivalence rather than compliance, as it is the essence with which people identify that is being changed. Future studies could explore the interaction between identification and type of change in their effect on employees' reactions to change.

In conclusion, the study of reactions to organizational change cannot be complete without considering a more complex set of responses than has been traditionally assessed. In highlighting the imposed nature that characterizes most organizational changes, and by considering the possibility of ambivalent responses, we hope to have contributed to more fully understanding the myriad of forces that underlie employees' reactions to organizational change.

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