

The Relationship between Employee Disposition, Negative Work Experience, and Commitment to Change: A Conceptual Framework

Anam Bukhari¹, Shahid Nawaz²

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of Management Sciences, Institute of Business, Management and Administrative Sciences (IBMAS&AS), The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Email: anum.bukhari407@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Institute of Business, Management and Administrative Sciences (IBMAS&AS), The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. Email: shahidnawaz702@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Achieving employee commitment to change is an urgent issue in most organizations and it has been of great interest to scholars over the last few years. It is against this backdrop that the current paper explores a set of variables that influence the commitment of employees to change behavior in the organizational context with special interest to how employee disposition (positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and trait cynicism) and negative work experience (psychological contract violation, perceived organizational politics, and job stress in combination with change fatigue) interact to influence the commitment to change. Based on the Social Exchange Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory, the paper further discusses the middle role of employee ostracism in mediating employee disposition and negative work experience with commitment to change. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to develop a solid theoretical framework that included books, empirical studies, theoretical articles, and peer-reviewed scholarly work on commitment to change and its related factors. The suggested framework will contribute to the developing body of literature on the interaction between employee disposition, negative work experience, ostracism of employees, and commitment to change.



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Corresponding Author's Email: shahidnawaz702@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The conceptualization of commitment to change, and its close equivalent change readiness, as a psychological attachment that employees develop to organizational change initiatives has been generally understood by scholars. Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) alongside W. Lam and Liu (2014) initially conceptualized the commitment-to-change behavior as the psychological attachment and readiness to support organizational change initiatives, and change resistance as the negative responses and opposition by employees towards organizational change initiatives. Employee-level resistance to change has become one of the burning issues among employers because it is indicative of a long-standing challenge that modern practitioners and scholars face equally (Damawan & Azizah, 2020; Rehman et al., 2021). To provide an example, in modern companies that strive to undergo digital transformation and restructuring, about 70 percent of change initiatives fail due to employee resistance and lack of commitment (Prosci, 2025). Cynicism and withdrawal behaviors are also significantly

exhibited by a significant proportion of organizational members due to numerous reasons whenever change occurs (Behazad, 2020; Helvaci & Kiliçoglu, 2018). Similarly, according to Khaw et al. (2023) and Grossman Group (2025, April 8), the recent statistics indicate that almost 65 percent of employees, when confronting change in an organization, exhibit some form of resistance or negative response, such as anxiety, stress, and psychological withdrawal as they struggle to find a sense of stability and predictability in the volatile situation. More than that, in modern organizations, whether locally or globally, most qualitative and quantitative studies indicate that change commitment is a continuous issue, especially at the times of significant organizational changes, due to the profound nature of human emotions and workplace relations (Gao-Urhahn et al., 2016; Limon, 2021).

Employee commitment to change is one of the more urgent issues in any organization worldwide since organizational changes are intrinsically complicated and require significant adaptability by the employees compared to organizations with more stable environments (Brown et al., 2018). In line with this, low levels of commitment to change predispose organizations to two types of losses. The former entails direct expenses that include failed change programs, decreased productivity, increased turnover, and loss of competitive position (Dilekçi et al., 2025). The second is indirect costs, such as reputational damage, loss of employee morale, and reduced innovation potential of the firm in general. One of the most underlying causes is that most organizations do not have well-developed change management practices and conducive cultural frameworks that in turn lead to poor commitment among employees during transformation (Applebaum, 2010). This scenario deserves more focus by employers and researchers in comprehending the factors that prompt employees to resist or welcome change initiatives in an organization (Bernerth, 2010).

1.1. Gap of the Study

Admittedly, many studies have aimed to determine the motivators of employee commitment to change (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; Gao-Urhahn et al., 2016; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012; Rehman et al., 2021; W. Lam & Liu, 2014). Nevertheless, regardless of this amount of work, none of these studies examined have utilized Social Exchange Theory in combination with Conservation of Resources Theory in explaining how employee disposition, negative work experience, and commitment to change relate through the mediating effect of employee ostracism (Grossman Group, 2025, April 8).

Previous literature has recognized the relationships between employee disposition, negative work experience, and commitment to change, but without explaining how these relationships occur (Dilekçi et al., 2025; Prosci, 2025). The current research builds on the current body of knowledge by establishing employee ostracism as an intervening variable that assists in clarifying the causal relationship between employee disposition, and negative work experience to commitment to change (Shaaban & Rabie, 2025; Zhou & Sun, 2025).

There is a relatively small number of studies that have considered employee ostracism as a mediator with respect to commitment to change; significant examples are studies by Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014); Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012); W. Lam and Liu (2014) and Gao-Urhahn et al. (2016). They found that employees who had faced high levels of workplace ostracism were less inclined to commit themselves to change initiatives at the organization. Based on this, the present paper believes that the degree of the relationship between the disposition of the employees, negative

experience of work and commitment to change will depend on the degree to which the employees are ostracized at the workplace.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Employee Disposition (ED) and Commitment to Change

2.1.1. Positive Affectivity and Change Commitment

Positive affectivity is a concept that describes the tendency of an individual to feel enthusiastic, energetic, and optimistic in the workplace, and this tendency is directly related to an affective commitment to organizational change. The fact that a significant literature review on the relationship between positive affectivity and commitment to change has always indicated a significant impact of positive affectivity in determining how employees will develop attitudinal responses to change in their organizations (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). Previous studies on positive affectivity have indicated generally that employees with higher scores on this trait are more likely to develop more positive perceptions of change initiatives, in part because they interpret organizational change as an opportunity to enhance their own development as opposed to a cause of fear.

Employment relationship commitment has traditionally been considered an indispensable currency of increasing the success of the change by developing positive attitudes and behaviors among the employees (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). In the workplace setting, positive affectivity can be conceptualized as a psychological tendency to develop positive emotions and positive perspectives that facilitate an individual in adapting to new organizational realities, and people who have higher scores on this trait can better maintain emotional balance during changes.

In addition, Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) demonstrated that followers can be emotionally contagious and personally concerned by transformational leaders who act in a supportive manner and who personally demonstrate commitment to change, thereby fostering affective commitment in followers. Their multilevel test confirmed that positive leader behaviours and especially those which communicate optimism and empathy are significant predictors of employee openness to change. A similar conclusion is provided by Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) who reported that personality dimensions like extraversion and agreeableness contribute positively to affective and normative commitment by positive affective states, which suggests that positive affective individuals are more flexible to new structures and processes in the organization.

Positive affectivity has also been connected to organizational identification which has increasingly attracted academic attention. Similarly, W. Lam and Liu (2014) observed that organizational identification enhances affective commitment, and job performance, implying that employees who have strong organizational identification will be emotionally aligned with the organizational goals in change episode. In addition to it, longitudinal results of Gao-Urhahn et al. (2016) indicate that consistent positive affect and perceived support encourage affective commitment in the long run, providing some evidence of a reciprocal relationship between optimism and long-lasting organizational attachment.

2.1.2. Negative Affectivity and Resistance to Change

Negative affectivity refers to constant individual disposition that predisposes people to suffering, anxiety and pessimism, which predisposes people in the perception of change in an organization as threatening instead of being developmental. A large

amount of literature exploring the relationship between negative affectivity and resistance to change has shown that employees who score highly on negative affectivity often resist new policies, technologies and procedures, as they anticipate negative results and view change as a loss of control or stability (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012). Generally, change resistance is a group of negative cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions, which emerge when workers develop a sense of uncertainty or feel that there is a possible threat to their current positions.

Rehman et al. (2021) notes that change resistance does not simply mean a complete negative response to organizational change but, instead, a response to emotional concerns associated with the fear of losing comfort, security, or professional identity. Similarly, Damawan and Azizah (2020) also found that such resistance has psychological and behavioral aspects and they manifest when employees perceive change as a threat to their present working conditions. Also, Khaw et al. (2023) hypothesized that a leader can soften resistance effects by being open and showing empathy to employees, which can help them feel psychologically safe; conversely, leaders who model strict or resistant behaviors contribute to negative employee reactions to change.

Emotional inclination that employees accompany to the workplace is one of the salient drivers of resistance to change. Prosci (2025) emphasized that resistance is often a consequence of unresolved fears instead of a direct act of defiance, which presupposes that empathic communication and open engagement can significantly decrease the defensive reactions. Similarly, Struijs (2012) presented resistance to change as a multidimensional concept that entails cognitive disbelief, emotional discomfort, and withdrawal of behaviour and attributed it to turnover intention and job dissatisfaction.

Moreover, the Grossman Group (2025, April 8) has outlined the idea of workplace resistance as a natural human response based on uncertainty and fear of the unknown. Negatively affective employees are likely to positively reinforce those perceptions, which is associated with unwillingness to embrace new practices or support the process of change. Similarly, Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) found that affective commitment had a negative relationship with neuroticism in terms of positive affect, which provided empirical support to the relationship that existed between negative affectivity and less commitment to organizational initiatives.

2.2. Trait Cynicism and Organizational Change Outcomes

The pessimism towards change in an organization is a well-established belief that intended changes are insincere, unnecessary, or mismanaged, which consequently creates negative attitudes and opposition among the employees. The experience of researchers over the years has indicated that an element of cynicism can tend to emerge when workers feel that there is disconnect between the rhetoric of managers and the reality of their actions, or when a series of change programs fail to deliver the results promised to them (Helvacı & Kiliçoğlu, 2018). Generally speaking, organizational change cynicism may be considered as a negative psychological condition, which is associated with mistrust, skepticism, and disbelief towards organizational change endeavors.

Traits cynics who are high (and those who are high-low) often dismiss change programs as manipulative or useless and thus experience a decline in morale and weakened organizational identification. An example study by Behazad (2020) discovered a negative correlation between cynicism and organizational change and

trust, indicating that cynical workers tend to gossip and participate in other informal resistance actions. These patterns slowly erode commitment among persons and erode the perceived legitimacy of managerial decisions. In a similar study, Volpe et al. (2014) demonstrated that cynicism significantly reduces organization commitment and job satisfaction and at the same time, increases the turnover intention of employees. This trend indicates that cynicism is not only an affective obstacle to change but also a precipitant to broader withdrawal patterns.

Moreover, the latest findings provided by CUSIT Journals (2020, June 19) and ResearchGate (2025) prove that change-related cynicism preconditions the connection between the perceived organizational justice and commitment to change. Employees who perceive injustice or ambiguous management of change processes will develop more pronounced cynical attitudes, which will lead to a weakening of their desire to be aligned to organizational goals. In addition to this, the current literature suggests that persistent cynicism leads to psychological detachment, mistrust, and exhaustion of emotions, all of which undermine preparedness to change and dedication.

2.3. Negative Work Experience (NWE) and Commitment to Change

2.3.1. Psychological Contract Violation and Change Cynicism

A psychological contract reflects the unwritten expectations of employees regarding mutual obligations between the parties (employees and the organization) and employees. Empirical work on psychological contract violation has revealed that when such perceived obligations are not fulfilled, employees are usually disappointed, betrayed, and suspicious, which may degenerate into cynicism in an organization (Lapointe et al., 2022). In general terms, psychological contract breach is a key antecedent of cynicism, as employees interpret unfulfilled expectations as a failure in the social exchange relationship in terms of fairness and respect.

In an organizational setting, these violations undermine the emotional safety of employees and make them less willing to take part in the change process. In line with the preceding argument, the Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review (2024) indicated that not every social-exchange violation would have the same outcomes: the perception of a violation as intentional or unjust would have a stronger cynical response than the perception of a violation as inevitable. Similarly, Shaaban and Rabie (2025) also argued that constant breach of contract fosters an attitude of cynicism about the honesty and integrity of the organization, which in turn breeds an emotional aloofness and undermines commitment to change-related objectives.

Additionally, a significant positive relationship was observed between the perceptions of the employees of the breach of contracts and cognitive cynicism, according to Çetinkaya (2019) proving that violations change the perception of the employees towards the interpretation of the managerial intentions and the subsequent commitments. This point can also be elaborated upon by the findings of Yang and Chan (2024), who has shown that breach of contract escalates organizational cynicism, which, in turn, contributes to the overall resistance behavior. This trend implies that the breach of psychological contract does not only affect the morale of an individual but also the distrust spreads among various organizational levels. In addition, the confidence that employees have in the management and change programs is significantly reduced, and their commitment to change is decreased when employees feel that the organization is not fulfilling its implicit obligations. The literature therefore suggests that breaches of the psychological contract led to a mistrust atmosphere

undermining the psychological willingness of the employees to accept organizational change.

2.4. Perceived Organizational Politics and Employee Morale

Perceived organizational politics (POP) refers to how employees subjectively evaluate self-beneficial behavior, favoritism, and manipulative decision-making in the organization. Several studies have found that when organizational members perceive the presence of political maneuvering and unfairness in distributing rewards, their trust and morale will most likely decline, thus lessening organizational commitment and engagement (A Bodla et al., 2015). On a general note, morale and motivation of employees in highly politicized organizational settings is heavily defined by the quality of the exchange relations these employees have towards their supervisors and other employees.

A Bodla et al. (2015) argued that perceptions of organization politics significantly reduce the employee morale, and that social exchange perceptions partially mediate this relationship, explaining nearly three-quarters of the overall effect. Their empirical research in Pakistani organizations uncovered the pernicious effects that political behaviours have on the psychological condition of the employees. On the same note, Jabeen (2021) has stated that perceived organizational politics is always associated with negative organizational outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal behaviors. These are effects that can be traced back to the perceived violation of norms of fairness and the loss of trust in the organizational leadership.

Moreover, Dawo (2023) emphasized that the cultural tolerance of nepotism and unequal power balance may legitimize political practices in some organizational situations, thus mitigating the seeming harshness of its adverse consequences. However, this kind of normalization usually results in moral decline and loss of ethics in the long run. Conversely, Zhou and Sun (2025) noted that as much as political environments are sometimes conducive to the employee voice by allowing strategic flexibility, the long-term effects of organizational politics exposure tend to block positive involvement and damage psychological health. In general, the perceived organizational politics creates an atmosphere of suspicion and emotional exhaustion that negatively impact employee morale and commitment to organizational goals. Developing open systems and fostering fair social interactions would possibly contain this harmful effect on worker motivation and willingness to change.

2.5. Job Stress and Change Fatigue

Job stress and change fatigue is a common phenomenon in modern organizations that are experiencing continuous change. A growing body of literature has already shown that job stress manifests when employees feel they are mismatched between the work requirements and their ability to cope, and change fatigue is psychological and physical exhaustion due to the recurring or inadequately managed change activities (Brown et al., 2018). Generally speaking, organizational change processes are more likely to increase employee stress, which leads to decreased satisfaction, increased turnover, and emotional burnout.

Brown et al. (2018) insisted that the processes of organizational change cause significant stress that undermines the well-being of employees and organizational performance. On the same note, Applebaum (2010) and Bernerth (2010) found out that change exhaustion over time decreases resilience and commitment, which results

in fatigue undermining the adaptability and trust employees have on leadership. Limon (2021) illustrated in the educational sector that change fatigue significantly weakens job satisfaction and engagement, particularly in cases where employees struggle with miscommunication and inadequate support on the part of the manager. The research highlighted that the continuous exposure and implementation of change programs without adequate rest periods heightens the level of stress and destroys organizational commitment.

Besides, these findings are supported by recent evidence reported by Dilekçi et al. (2025), who indicate that occupational stress and burnout are the key antecedents of change fatigue and the quiet quitting behaviors, which highlights the significance of distributing workloads and emotional support systems in a balanced way during the period of transformation. To top this, organizational environments, long-term job stress and frequent change fatigue generate emotional depletion and cognitive overload, which directly undermine morale and commitment to change. The result of such a situation is that employees who work under these conditions tend to be defensive, have high levels of absenteeism, and performance that is lower and diminishes organizational efforts. Change fatigue and employee readiness to change can be then reduced by participative decision-making, open communication, and wellness programs, which will make the further implementation of changes easier.

3. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

Based on the discussion of previous literature, the conceptual framework of this paper is presented in Figure 1. This conceptual framework shows the relationship among variables of the study, specifically examining how employee disposition and negative work experience influence commitment to change through the mediating mechanism of employee ostracism.

The proposed model extends previous literature by integrating employee disposition factors (positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and trait cynicism) and negative work experience factors (psychological contract violation, perceived organizational politics, and job stress with change fatigue) as antecedents of commitment to change. Furthermore, this study introduces employee ostracism as a mediating variable to explain the underlying mechanisms through which these antecedents influence employees' commitment to organizational change initiatives.

Proposition 1: Employee disposition (positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and trait cynicism) is significantly related to employee ostracism.

Proposition 2: Negative work experience (psychological contract violation, perceived organizational politics, and job stress with change fatigue) is positively associated with employee ostracism.

Proposition 3: Employee ostracism is negatively associated with employees' commitment to change.

Proposition 4: The negative relationship between employee disposition and commitment to change is mediated by employee ostracism.

Proposition 5: The negative relationship between negative work experience and commitment to change is mediated by employee ostracism.

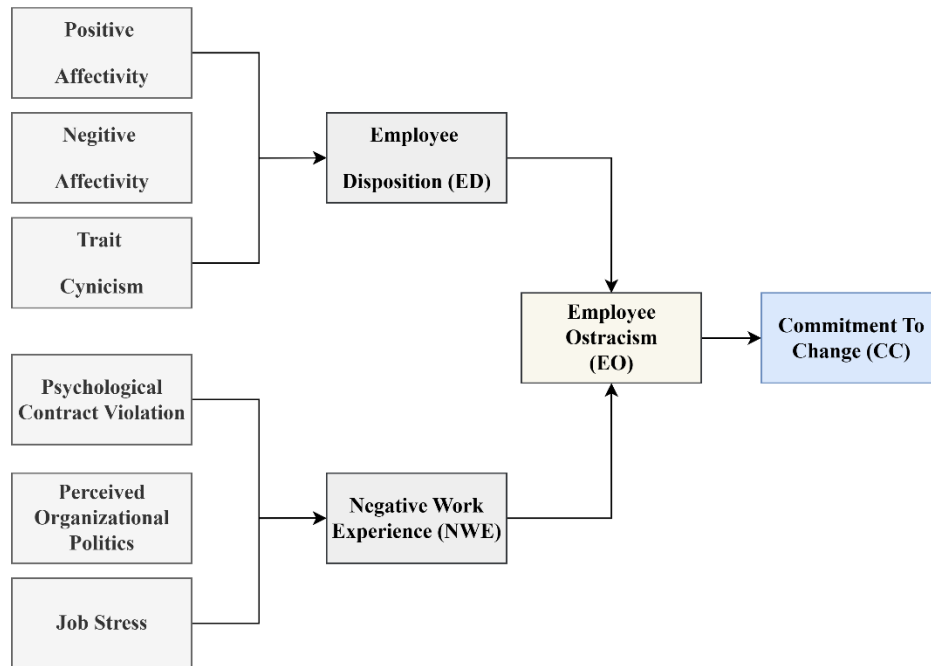


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4. Methodology

This paper sheds light on the major organizational and individual determinants that define and affect employee commitment to change in the workplace settings. To determine these aspects, the authors reviewed a wide scope of sources, such as databases, reports, books, theses, empirical and conceptual articles. The literature indicates that a combination of employee disposition (positive affectivity, negative affectivity and trait cynicism), negative work experience (psychological contract violation, perceived organizational politics and job stress and change fatigue), and employee ostracism influence the manner in which employees commit to change. The paper is rooted in the Social Exchange Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory, and provides an understanding of the importance of these variables in forecasting commitment to change, especially the important role of employee ostracism as a mediating factor, whereby dispositional and experience factors influence change attitudes and behavior in contemporary organizations.

5. Implications

Implementing the proposed framework will expand the knowledge that managers and organizations have about the employee-focused change management strategy. The current paper evidence, as well as the previous literature, shows that the disposition of employees and negative work experience, such as the violation of the psychological contract, organizational politics, and job stress, can be considered as effective predictors of commitment to change. Managerial focus on these factors, therefore, should not be at a lower level especially during critical transformation times. In addition to this, the paper also recommends that addressing workplace ostracism is an effective component of the toolkit that managers can use in order to develop change-ready workforce. This focus can be particularly useful considering that a great number of commitment-enhancing measures have been traditionally focused on fostering positive experiences, as opposed to directly focusing on the negative workplace dynamics. Change management is an activity whereby organizations provide psychological safety, inclusive communication, supportive leadership, fair treatment and structured stress management programs to their employees. To overcome employee resistance to change, organizations should focus on reducing ostracism and

managing negative work experiences in a manner that strengthens psychological connections with the employees. The employees will be likely to accept change programs voluntarily when they feel welcomed and supported at their workplace, further undermining the overall resistance to change.

Speaking of which, it is important that organizations not only keep emotionally invested employees but also remain vigilant of any exclusionary behaviors in the workplace that might have an impact on the most valued employees. It should be a two-pronged change readiness approach, one that promotes positive affectivity and mitigates workplace ostracism, on the one hand inclusive practices and on the other hand, breaking social barriers of exclusion. The rationale behind this is that the more the workplace experience of employees is skewed towards positive, inclusive instead of exclusionary, the more they are likely to give the change a boost and less likely to oppose change efforts.

Furthermore, the current research provides a recommendation that the top management should implement ostracism prevention initiatives that would focus on the belongingness needs of employees and offer them inclusive work environments that would satisfy them. This would also enhance the awareness of the top management on issues related to employee disposition and negative work experiences as they are associated with commitment-to-change behavior.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

Based on previous literature, a number of studies have recognized that there is a relationship between employee disposition, negative work experience and commitment to change with no specification of processes that describe how and why the relationships manifest. The current research contributes to the current literature by explaining how, and in what ways, these relationships work, with employee ostracism as the mediating factor. The research also makes a contribution to the field by putting the already discussed direct associations between employee disposition (positive affectivity, negative affectivity, trait cynicism), negative work experience (psychological contract violation, perceived organizational politics, job stress and change fatigue), and commitment to change into context as relationships that can be better explained by the mediating role of employee ostracism.

In general, based on previous literature, this paper contends that employees who feel that they are treated by the organization in a positive disposition, fair psychological contracts, less organizational politics, lower stress levels and are included in the work process develop a positive emotional attachment to organizational change efforts and hence reduce chances of change resistance. Meanwhile, the relationship between employee disposition and commitment to change will decline when employees are faced with high levels of workplace ostracism as well as negative work experiences.

Therefore, the literature provides a good support to the notion that employee disposition and negative work experience have a evident influence on commitment to change. It also shows that the failure to act on these factors might be among the possible explanations of why some organizations have not been able to significantly increase employee commitment to change.

It is hoped that future researchers will further investigate other variables that influence the commitment levels of employees to change and test the conceptual paper

presented empirically to enhance the body of literature of employee change management.

Author Contributions

Anam Bukhar: Write the initial complete draft.

Shahid Nawaz: Supervise and proofread the final draft.

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