





RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Employee change orientation (echo) framework: A meta-review and taxonomy

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## Abstract

Given the ubiquity of organizational change, it is fitting that considerable research has focused on employees' responses to change, much of it collated in review articles. With the aim of integrating this diverse review literature and providing an employee-centric theorization, we provide a meta-review, a systematic review of reviews. We present the meta-construct of employee change orientation (EChO), which aggregates employee responses, attitudes, behaviors, and the associated psychological mechanisms related to organizational change. Our meta-review includes 50 scholarly reviews published between 2001 and June 2025, drawing on 1,606 primary studies. Through a synthesis of these reviews, we present the EChO framework and taxonomy. We identify areas for improvement, particularly for research design, and generate key insights for change practitioners working with employees experiencing change. Our meta-review contributes by clarifying well-researched areas, extending theorizing, and highlighting the need for further research to understand how employee responses to change influence outcomes.

**Keywords:** organizational change; change responses; meta-review; employee change orientation; Employee responses to change; Employee attitudes; Organizational behavior; systematic review

Employees constantly experience societal, economic, technological, political, and organizational changes (Fraccaroli, Zaniboni, & Truxillo, 2024), meaning change is a normal part of working life. Employees are integral to organizational change initiatives through their recognition, adoption, and implementation of change (Oreg et al., 2018; Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2017). Organizational change scholars have made substantial progress in identifying the various psychological mechanisms explaining employees' responses (e.g., Bartunek & Jones, 2017; Oreg et al., 2018). There is also a developing understanding of employees' attitudes, feelings, and intentions toward and against change (Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021). However, questions remain about how employee change responses inform and impact change management practice and organizational change outcomes (Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez, & Hoegl, 2024; Schwarz & Bouckennooghe, 2021). In the related field of occupational health, scholars frequently link organizational change to adverse health outcomes for employees (e.g., Bamberger et al., 2012; Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023; de Jong et al., 2016), but with minimal investigation of either possible positive outcomes or the psychological mechanisms leading to outcomes (Fox et al., 2022). Job design research indicates that change can yield positive outcomes, for example, increasing employee control and participation (e.g., Knight & Parker, 2021). These different scholarly traditions have extended knowledge of organizational change,

but each within disciplinary silos with a specific change focus, whether achieving the organization's desired end goals, understanding employee change responses that hinder change implementation, or employee harm prevention.

This siloing has had several repercussions. First, it has led scholars to draw different conclusions based on which aspect of organizational change they are examining. For example, the occupational health literature recognizes organizational change as a hazard to employee health (de Jong *et al.*, 2016). Second, numerous relevant antecedents of employee change responses have been identified across multiple facets of change context, change type, change process, and the characteristics of the employees. However, it is unclear which is more important. Perhaps scholars have prioritized antecedents of organizational change since these can be modified to increase employees' support for change (Kim, Hornung, & Rousseau, 2011), equip employees for difficult change (Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022), or prepare managers to control aspects of a change to improve employee adaptation (Potosky & Azan, 2023). However, when these constructs are placed together, they reveal a crowded and overlapping set of ideas on the factors that influence employee responses to change (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Kiefer, 2005).

We propose establishing common ground across approaches to maximize the impact of future research via a comprehensive synthesis of past review research. To enable this, we provide a meta-review, which is a succinct state-of-the-art overview of the key fields of study (Jiang & Messersmith, 2017; Rojon, Okupe, & McDowall, 2021), in this case, employee responses to organizational change. As a review-of-reviews, a meta-review provides an effective method for combining findings from previous review articles to provide an expansive view of the current status quo in a field of literature and allows broad insights that, in turn, enable more influential future research (e.g., Jiang & Messersmith, 2017; Paulet, Holland, & Morgan, 2021). As a foundational part of this meta-review process, we developed a meta-construct to incorporate the range of employees' reactions and responses to change identified by other scholars. Specifically, *Employee Change Orientation* (EChO) encompasses employees' attitudes, reactions, responses, and behaviors to organizational change, and their psychological mechanisms. EChO is a malleable, state-like, situation-specific personal perspective underpinned by psychological mechanisms and manifesting in change-related attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Fugate, 2012; Park & Park, 2020). While arguably this meta-construct loses nuance from the underlying constructs it incorporates, for example, resistance and readiness to change, by delineating EChO we provide a focal point to link the multiplicity of perspectives. This enables us to take stock of the broader picture, identifying where we have rich evidence and where we lack understanding, the latter helping map out directions for future research. The comprehensive approach, as provided by a meta-review, also allows us to assess the impact of Piderit's (2000) much-cited article, promoting a nuanced multi-dimensional perspective that includes ambivalence as a change response.

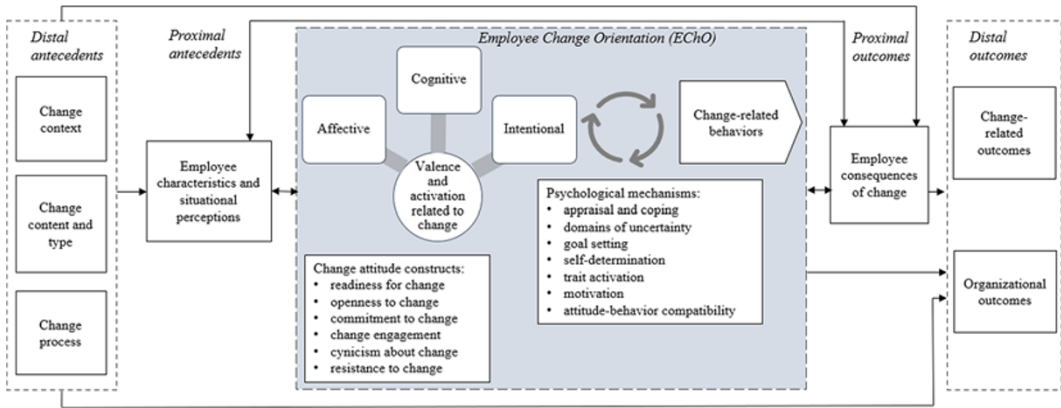
In line with the aims of the meta-review method, we systematically identify scholarly reviews of organizational change research that include aspects of employee change orientation and we follow a structured process to integrate them into a coherent body of knowledge (Booth & Carroll, 2015; Jiang & Messersmith, 2017). We pose the following research questions (RQ) to shape our meta-review:

**RQ1:** *In organizational change research, what constructs have been used to understand antecedents, employee change orientations, and outcomes?*

**RQ2:** *In organizational change research, how do these constructs relate to each other?*

**RQ3:** *Given the evidence to date, what are the pressing theoretical or empirical issues that can direct future organizational change responses research?*

We synthesize review literature findings across various disciplines, including management, organizational psychology, human resource management, change management, and occupational health.



**Figure 1.** The Employee Change Orientation (EChO) Framework.

From this, we deliver a new theoretical framework, a taxonomy of employee change orientation, and an overview of the status of the literature with recommendations to direct future research. Our meta-review makes two significant contributions to organizational change literature. Our primary contribution is to present a theoretical framework and meta-theory of employee change orientation, built from research evidence gathered across multiple disciplines, and contributing in multiple ways. Frameworks and the underlying meta-theory are two essential foundational elements for building theory, identifying key elements, and providing an organizing structure (Byron & Thatcher, 2016). Relatedly, this meta-review moves the organizational change field towards the development of a programmatic theory through integrating prior unit theories of employee change (Cronin, Stouten, & van Knippenberg, 2021) of employee change orientation. The EChO framework (Fig. 1) acts as a nexus for employee-centric organizational change researchers and practitioners to aid in decisions regarding what factors to consider, what they risk omitting, and how these factors relate to one another. For example, suppose a practitioner purely focuses on the attitude readiness for change and an employee outcome, such as engagement. In that case, they are forced to acknowledge how much of the organizational change evidence they are excluding. The second contribution enabled by our meta-review is to map pathways in the existing literature to identify both evidence-rich and evidence-poor areas, offering a clear rationale for future research agendas. To optimize the latter, we leverage insights from the diverse research approaches taken by past studies to provide extensive recommendations for future research that targets key areas of knowledge deficit.

## Method

In this section, we present the method based on the main stages in a meta-review adapted from Denyer and Tranfield (2009): (1) assessment and planning, (2) design and conduct of search, (3) selection and evaluation, (4) extraction and analysis, and (5) synthesis. For the full methodological details of the search and selection practices, see the supplementary materials in Appendix 1 and a process flow diagram in Appendix 2.

As a first step, we developed the protocol with search terms and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We selected the Scopus database because it provides extensive multidisciplinary indexing of peer-reviewed publications relevant to this review. As well as being cross-disciplinary, it has comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed sources and includes all journals listed in EBSCO (<https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus>). Second, we conducted a comprehensive search to identify review articles published from 1 January 2001 to June 2025. This timeframe allowed us to include reviews that had incorporated influential organizational change research published in the years prior (e.g., Armenarkis & Bedian, 1999; Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Ford, 1999; Piderit, 2000; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

The inclusion criteria were (1) the primary purpose of the review research paper was to contribute through the synthesis of empirical research studies published elsewhere; (2) the setting of empirical research included in each review was organizational change, including any that affected employees and their work; (3) the review included evaluations of as least one employee-level mechanism, reaction, response, orientation, behavior, or consequence related to organizational change; (4) the review was published in English in a peer-reviewed academic journal or book. We excluded reviews on the following criteria: (A) theoretical or conceptual essays focusing on developing theoretical models and propositions rather than synthesizing primary empirical research (e.g., Burnes, 2015; Oreg *et al.*, 2018; Potosky & Azan, 2023); (B) reviews in non-peer-reviewed books or theses; (C) primary research papers; (D) reviews that focused on direct employee interventions (e.g., Lambert, Trinh, & Ashford, 2022).

Title and abstract screening, and full-text review were carried out by the first author, with further appraisal by the second and third authors. We manually searched the references and citations of included reviews to identify any further review articles. Data were extracted, and the reviews were coded according to their research focus, antecedents, change responses, and outcomes. Details of the primary studies were extracted to check for overlapping inclusion. We applied an iterative best-fit framework synthesis approach (Booth & Carroll, 2015) to synthesize the extracted information and build the theoretical framework and taxonomy.

## Results

We identified 50 review articles for inclusion in the meta-review, covering over 1,606 primary studies. The most frequently cited research articles were Oreg (2006), included in seven reviews; Eby, Adams, Russell and Gaby (2000), Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), and Oreg (2003), included in six reviews each. Nine reviews contained insufficient information to enumerate and identify the included studies (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Fugate, 2012; Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Jundt, Shoss, & Huang, 2015; Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop, & Dunlop, 2024; Park & Park, 2020; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013; Santos de Souza & Chimenti, 2024; Yin, Mueller, & Wakslak, 2024).

Table 1 presents a summary of the information extracted from each review, organized by focus topic. The first group is the eight reviews focused on the antecedents of change context (Fugate, 2012; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Peng, Li, Wang, & Lin, 2020), change content and type (Knight & Parker, 2021; Trenerry *et al.*, 2021), change process (Hagel *et al.*, 2024), and employee characteristics (Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022; Vakola, Armenakis, & Oreg, 2013). The bulk of the reviews ( $n = 33$ ) focused on responses and reactions (e.g., Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011; Santos de Souza & Chimenti, 2024), attitudes (e.g., Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021; Choi, 2011), psychological mechanisms (e.g., Yin, Mueller, & Wakslak, 2024), and change behaviors (e.g., Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013; Derecho *et al.*, 2024). Notably, nine reviews from the occupational health field did not include specific change orientation factors, leaving an unexplained black box between the change and employee characteristic antecedents and employee change-related consequences as outcomes. These reviews focus on the impact of organizational change, such as reorganization, downsizing, and restructuring, on the outcomes of psychosocial factors and health (e.g., Bamberger *et al.*, 2012; Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2007; de Jong *et al.*, 2016). In the following section, we first introduce the EChO Framework (Fig. 1); second, we present the pathway analysis of the review literature that underpins the EChO framework (Fig. 2); finally, we introduce the EChO taxonomy (Fig. 3).

### *The employee change orientation (EChO) framework*

The EChO framework in Figure 1 is the product of our iterative synthesis process. This framework maps out the associations identified from the review literature between antecedents, EChO concepts, and the associated outcomes.

**Table 1.** Summary of reviews organized into reviews with a primary focus on antecedents, employee change orientation (EChO), and outcomes

Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
<b>Antecedents</b>	<b>Change context</b>			
	Leadership, management, HRM	<i>Responses to change</i>	--	Fugate (2012) F
	Change-focused leadership behavior–communication, support, attentiveness, participation	<i>Responses to change</i>	<i>Organizational</i> – performance <i>Change-related</i> – effectiveness	Oreg and Berson (2019) F,G
	Transformational leadership	<i>Attitudes to change</i> – commitment, readiness, openness, resistance, cynicism	--	Peng, Li, Wang and Lin (2020) F
	<b>Change content and type</b>			
	Job redesign interventions	<i>Change-related behavior</i>	<i>Employee consequences</i> – wellbeing, performance	Knight and Parker (2021) H
	Digital transformation – mandated /voluntary, task-technology fit, leadership, climate, employee involvement, support, autonomy <i>Employee characteristics</i> –tenure, age, gender, skills, resilience, adaptability, stress, wellbeing, job insecurity, perceptions, technology attitudes	<i>Change-related behavior</i> – acceptance, support, adoption	<i>Employee consequences</i> – career satisfaction, organizational commitment, depression, turnover intention <i>Change-related</i> – Implementation	Trenerry et al (2021) A, C, G
	<b>Change process</b>			
	Change management – communication, support, involvement, reinforcement, social influence, coercion	<i>Response to change</i> –proactivity, acceptance, resistance, and disengagement	<i>Employee consequences</i> – Job satisfaction, job performance	Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez and Hoegl (2024) F, C
	<b>Employee Characteristics</b>			
	Traits, personality, motivation Demographics	<i>Response to change</i> – explicit reactions – affect, cognition, behavior	--	Vakola, Armenakis and Oreg (2013) B
	Traits – risk-tolerance, positive self-concept <i>Change context</i> – culture <i>Change content</i> – stage, type,	<i>Response to change</i> – valence, coping, fairness, impact, uncertainty <i>Psychological mechanism</i> – Trait-activation	<i>Employee consequences</i> –wellbeing, insecurity, satisfaction, commitment, identification, <i>Organizational</i> – turnover intent, engagement, absenteeism, performance, turnover	Gonzalez, Portocarrero and Ekema (2022) A, D, C,G

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued.)

Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
<b>ECHO</b>	<i>Change context</i> <i>Employee characteristics</i> <i>Change process</i> <i>Change content</i>	<b>Responses to Change</b> Reactions to change–affective, cognitive, behavioral <i>Change-related behaviors</i>	<i>Employee consequences</i> – personal wellbeing, health, withdrawal; work-related job satisfaction, organizational commitment <i>Organizational</i> – performance	Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011) A, C,E, G,H
	<i>Change context</i> – leadership, emotional capacity, sensemaking, macro-environment, organizational culture <i>Change process</i> – Pace <i>Employee characteristics</i> – Traits	Emotional cognition, emotional deviation <i>Attitudes to change</i> <i>Psychological mechanisms</i> –coping, losses, gains, needs, defence	--	Santos de Souza and Chimenti (2024) A, D
	<i>Change process</i> <i>Change context</i> <i>Change content</i> <i>Employee characteristics</i>	<b>Attitudes to Change</b> Readiness Intentions	--	Holt, Armenakis, Harris and Feild (2007) A, D
	<i>Change process</i> –involvement, participation	Beliefs Readiness Adoption Commitment	--	Armenakis and Harris (2009) F, D
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> <i>Change process</i> <i>Change process</i> <i>Change context</i> <i>Change content</i>	Resistance Readiness Resistance	-- --	Erwin and Garman (2010) A Bouckennooghe (2010) F
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – schema, locus of control <i>Change-related behavior</i> – change engagement	Commitment <i>Change context</i> – leadership-style, HRM, job-level impact	--	Jaros (2010) A
	<i>Change process</i> <i>Change context</i> <i>Change type, Employee characteristics</i>	Readiness, commitment, openness, cynicism	--	Choi (2011) A
	<i>Change context</i> – External pressures, Internal enablers <i>Employee characteristics</i>	Readiness <i>Change-related behavior</i> – change supportive	<i>Employee consequences</i> – job performance and attitudes	Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis (2013) A, D, C, G

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued.)

Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
	--	Commitment <i>Change-related behavior</i> – change support, compliance, cooperation, championing	--	Bouckennooghe, Schwarz and Minbashian (2015) D
	--	Cynicism <i>Change-related behavior</i> – support	<i>Employee consequences</i> – job performance and attitudes	Thundiyil, Chiaburu, Oh, Banks and Peng (2015) D, C, G
	<i>Change context</i> <i>Change content</i> <i>Change process</i> <i>Employee characteristics</i>	Attitudes	--	Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar and Sanders (2021) A, D
	<i>Change context</i> – leadership communication	Reactions <i>Change-related behavior</i> – voice, exit, neglect, loyalty	--	Khaw et al (2023) F, D
	<i>Employee Characteristics</i> – dispositional resistance	Resistance	--	Mikel-Hong, Li, Yu and Chen (2023) B
	<i>Change content</i> – intervention characteristics <i>Change process</i> – external and organizational influence <i>Employee characteristics</i>	Resistance	<i>Change-related</i> – implementation	Huo et al (2023) H, G, I
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – personality, knowledge, fatigue, motivation, self-confidence, conservatism, uncertainty, insecurity <i>Change context</i> – communication, culture, management, values, structure	Resistance	--	Cheraghi, Ebrahimi, Kheibar and Sahebihagh (2023) A
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – stressors, workload, time effort, personal strategies, self-efficacy, access to resources <i>Change context</i> : educational setting, culture, social support, leadership support <i>Change process</i> -implementation	Readiness to change	--	Scott, Dawson and Quach (2025) A

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
	<i>Change type</i> – digital transformation <i>Employee characteristics</i> – job insecurity, lack of skills, technostress <i>Situational perceptions</i>	Resistance to digital transformation <i>Psychological mechanism</i> – loss of identity or social relations, appraisal of threat <i>Responses to change</i> – fear, anger, sad, anticipated job loss, misalignment, anxiety	--	Cieslak and Valor (2025) A,D
	<i>Change context</i> – organizational culture, trusting relationships, perceived support, resources, past experiences, communication <i>Individual characteristics</i> – commitment, engagement, personality traits, demographics, attitudes, experiences <i>Situational perceptions</i> – resource availability, informational assessment <i>Change type</i> – innovation, complexity, top-down versus bottom-up, sustainability <i>Change process</i> – implementation, passive versus active, clinical champions, process factors	Readiness for change <i>Responses to change</i> : confidence change can be implemented, change valence, and mission alignment	--	Caci et al (2025) A
--		<b>Psychological Mechanisms</b> Reaction trajectories <i>Change-related behavior</i>	--	Elrod and Tippet (2002) D
	<i>Individual characteristics</i> <i>Change process</i> – diagnosis, preparation, implementation, evaluation, institutionalisation, time <i>Change context</i> <i>Change type</i> – nature	Self-determination theory – internalization – mastery, meaning, belongingness <i>Change-related behavior</i> – Active resistance, passive resistance, compliance, cooperation, championing <i>Attitudes to change</i> – Commitment-continuance, normative, affective	<i>Change-related</i> – Change adoption and maintenance	Kamarova et al., (2024) A, D, G
	<i>Individual characteristics</i> – dispositional tendency to uncertainty	Domain of uncertainty goals, uncertainty, and information processing <i>Responses to change</i> – valence reactions	--	Yin, Mueller and Waksalak (2024) B, D

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Table 1. (Continued.)

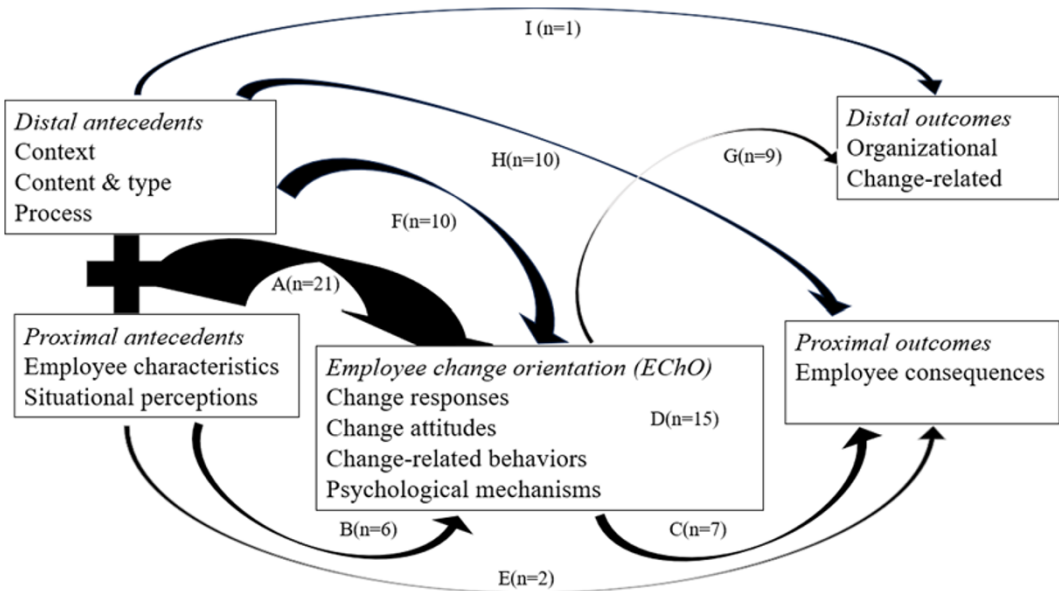
Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
	<b>Change-related behavior</b>			
	<i>Change context</i> – environmental or situational demands	Performance adaptation	--	Baard, Rench and Kozłowski (2013) F
	<i>Change context</i> – support	Change-oriented citizenship behavior (OCB_CH)	--	Chiaburu, Lorinkova and Van Dyne (2013) F
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – personality	Adaptive performance	--	Huang, Ryan, Zabel and Palmer (2014) B
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> <i>Change process</i> – training	Adaptive performance <i>Psychological mechanisms</i> – motivation, self-regulation, behavioral	--	Jundt, Shoss and Huang (2015) A, D
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> <i>Change content</i> – job-design	OCB_CH	--	Marinova, Peng, Lorinkova, Van Dyne and Chiaburu (2015) A
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – personality, ability, skills, knowledge, experience, age, self-efficacy, self-regulation, goal orientation, self-leadership <i>Change context</i> -autonomy, discretion, uncertainty, social ties, support, team learning climate, transformational leadership, clear vision, innovation climate, learning organization <i>Change content</i> – role change	Adaptive performance <i>Psychological mechanisms</i> – learning	--	Park and Park (2019) A, D
	<i>Change content</i> – coworker, software, emergencies <i>Employee characteristics</i> – goal orientation	Performance adaptation	--	Stasielowicz (2019) A
	<i>Change content</i> – coworker, software, emergencies <i>Employee characteristics</i> – cognitive ability	Performance adaptation	--	Stasielowicz (2020) A
	<i>Change process</i> objectives – performance, learning, awareness	Adaptive performance	--	Park and Park (2020) F
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – personality, job satisfaction	OCB_CH <i>Responses to change</i> – affect	--	Chiaburu et al (2022) B

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued.)

Primary Focus	Antecedents	EChO	Outcomes	Authors and pathway
	<i>Employee characteristics</i> – education, skills <i>Change process</i> – implementation, resources	<i>Change-related behavior</i> – technology adoption <i>Attitude to change</i> – resistance	– –	Derecho et al (2024) B
<b>Outcomes</b>			<b>Employee Consequences</b>	
	<i>Change type</i> – workplace reorganization	– –	Psychosocial, health	Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew and Whitehead (2007) H
	<i>Change type</i> – workplace reorganization	– –	Psychosocial, health	Egan, Bambra, Thomas, Petticrew, Whitehead, & Thomas (2007) H
	<i>Change type</i> – privatization	– –	Health and safety	Egan, Petticrew, Ogilvie, Hamilton, & Drever, (2007) H
	<i>Change type</i> – downsizing <i>Employee characteristics</i> – job insecurity	– –	Occupational health and safety Job loss	Quinlan and Bohle (2009) A, E
	<i>Change type</i> – organizational change	– –	Mental health	Bamberger et al (2012) H
	<i>Change type</i> – restructuring	– –	Wellbeing	de Jong et al (2016) H
	<i>Change type</i> – organizational change	– –	Sickness absence	Grønstad (2017) H
	<i>Change type</i> – technology change	– –	Mental health Wellbeing	Johnson et al (2020) H
	<i>Change type</i> – change control, participation, voice	– –	Wellbeing	Fox et al (2022) H
	<i>Change type</i> – rapid and continuous change, intensification of workload <i>Situational perception</i> – lack of control	<i>Change-related behavior</i> – exhaustion, powerlessness, passive acceptance	Change fatigue, burnout <i>Organizational</i> – increased absenteeism, turnover, and decreased productivity and commitment.	Beaulieu, Seneviratne and Nowell (2023) A, C, G

Note: The table is organized by the primary focus of included reviews, antecedents (change context, change content and type, change process, employee characteristics), EChO (responses to change, attitudes to change, psychological mechanisms), and outcomes (employee consequences). The text in italics links to the grouping subheadings in Figure 3, noting these are abbreviated. Letters A-H denote a pathway in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Pathway analysis and status-quo map applying the EChO Framework. Note: Each letter represents a pathway addressed in a published review. In brackets is the number of reviews that included studies of the pathway. A - both distal and proximal antecedents to EChO; B - proximal antecedents to EChO; C - EChO to proximal outcomes; D - EChO constructs and mechanisms; E - proximal antecedents to proximal outcomes; F - distal antecedents to EChO; G - EChO to Distal outcomes (7/9 organizational outcomes; 4/9 change-related outcomes); H - distal antecedents to proximal outcomes.

Distal Antecedents	Proximal Antecedents	EChO	Proximal Outcomes	Distal Outcomes
<b>Change Context</b> Leadership Management practices Organizational characteristics Social and external influence Industry Social support	<b>Employee Characteristics</b> <i>Characteristics</i> Personality traits e.g., risk tolerance, self-concept, locus of control, dispositional resistance Cognitive ability Demographics Competency e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities Change experience Wellbeing and health e.g., fatigue, stress, resilience Job tenure	<b>Responses to Change</b> Responses to change (affective, cognitive, intentional) modality with valence, activation Ambivalence to change  <b>Attitudes to Change</b> Readiness for change Openness to change Commitment to change Change engagement Cynicism about change Resistance to change  <b>Change-related Behavior</b> Change behavior, e.g., support, compliance, cooperation, acceptance, adoption, implementation, championing, exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, proactivity, capability, resistance, and engagement Adaptive performance Change-related organizational citizenship  <b>Psychological Mechanisms</b> Coping-cognitive appraisal Self-determination-mastery, meaning, and belongingness Trait activation Cognitive - attention, awareness, perception, metacognition, threat appraisal, goal setting, social cognition, stress, motivation, domain of uncertainty Intentional - agency, self-evaluation, intentions (proactivity, acceptance, resistance, and disengagement), coping strategies, powerlessness, planned Affective - emotional deviation, emotional cognition, positive affect Trajectory of reactions	<b>Employee Consequences of Change</b> Wellbeing and health, e.g., change fatigue, safety, sickness absence, mental health, psychosocial, stress, burnout Career satisfaction Job satisfaction Job loss Job performance Organizational commitment Work family/life balance Turnover intention	<b>Change-related</b> Effectiveness Failure Implementation  <b>Organizational</b> Organizational performance Absenteeism Turnover

**Figure 3.** The Employee Change Orientation (EChO) Taxonomy.

Working from the left of the framework in [Figure 1](#), antecedents are organized into descriptions of change context, change content and type, change process, and employee characteristics, as is common in the organizational change literature (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Choi, 2011). We then split these into *distal antecedents* on the left of [Figure 1](#) that provide boundary conditions to distinguish different varieties of organizational change. Change context includes factors such as organizational practices or leadership. Change content describes what types of change, for example, technology or restructuring. Change process is the way a specific change is implemented, such as change management practices. Next in are *proximal antecedents*, which are employee characteristics and current situational perceptions. Proximal antecedents represent the employee's current reality and perceptions, demographic characteristics, preferred ways of being and thinking, experiences, knowledge, skills, and abilities. These are the lenses through which the employees experience organizational change. A double-headed arrow between proximal antecedents and the grey EChO box represents that employee characteristics influence EChO, and that EChO can also impact employee characteristics.

The center of [Figure 1](#) (grey square) encompasses the various approaches to EChO across the reviews. The core elements comprise employee responses to change, made up of cognitive, affective, and intentional components, with both levels of valence and activation, linked to change-related behaviors. Change attitude constructs are an expression of EChO captured in many quantitative studies about employee change responses; we simplify our depiction of these by situating them as neighboring the core elements, because they may have various combinations of valence and activation across affective, cognitive, and intentional components. The reviews contain diverse theories linking to various psychological mechanisms that produce responses, attitudes, and manifest in change-related behaviors, and these are situated in the dynamic link between behavioral intention and actual behavior.

Next on the right is the *proximal outcomes*, employee consequences of change, which include factors such as wellbeing and job satisfaction. The double-ended arrows on the left indicate that EChO is influenced by and influences employee consequences of change. For example, active participants in change can shift to a state of change fatigue when faced with ongoing rapid change, which then negatively affects their orientation to the change (Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023). A further double-ended arrow between the proximal antecedent employee characteristics and employee consequences of change, indicates interplay between these facets; for example, personality traits can influence wellbeing (Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022), and experiencing fatigue influences situational perceptions (Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023). There is also a direct arrow from distal antecedents to employee consequences representing change characteristics that can have direct effects on employees, such as restructuring (de Jong *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, we come to *distal outcomes* related to change or organizational outcomes. Past reviews provide surprisingly limited evidence of EChO change impact, leaving this linkage implied, but lacking empirical support. There is significant evidence that the change management approach does influence both change and organizational outcomes, although evidence does not include EChO (e.g., Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018).

### Pathway analysis

The EChO framework enables us to conduct a pathway analysis to quantify the focus of different reviews, yielding valuable information on where there is strong versus weak evidence for linkages across organizational change, from antecedents through to outcomes. This analysis is presented in [Figure 2](#), with the five elements of [Figure 1](#), comprising distal antecedents, proximal antecedents, EChO, proximal outcomes, and distal outcomes depicted in the EChO framework, with arrows between these to quantify the number of reviews covering each pathway.

This analysis surfaces three features of research to date. First, 37 of 50 organizational change reviews focused on linking antecedents to some form of EChO, particularly the relationship between both distal and proximal antecedents on EChO (pathway A,  $n = 21$ ), but also the distal antecedent

(pathway F,  $n = 10$ ) and proximal antecedent (pathway B,  $n = 6$ ) links to EChO (total of 37 reviews). This demonstrates the dominance of research and theorizing substantiating the relationship between an extensive range of antecedents and measures of employee change responses, reflecting a keen interest in what leads to diverse employee change responses.

Second, Figure 2 shows plentiful evidence linking the core elements of EChO, that is, employee change responses with change behaviors or testing psychological mechanisms (central component D,  $n = 15$ ), noting that most of these responses are linked to change-related behaviors. This reflects a strong focus on explaining behavioral responses to change. Scholars provide varied theoretical explanations of the psychological mechanisms linking change response, attitudes, and behaviors. We conclude there is no dominant theorizing to explain the relationship between organizational change thoughts, feelings, intentions, and behaviors.

Third, many fewer reviews investigate connections between EChO and distal outcomes (pathway G,  $n = 9$ ). Of these nine reviews, only four (Huo et al., 2023; Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop, & Dunlop, 2024; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Trenerry et al., 2021) discussed change-related outcomes of EChO, emphasizing the lack of evidence of the relationship between employee responses and change outcomes. Taking these four reviews in turn, they focus on EChO affecting change leadership (Oreg & Berson, 2019) or as a potential moderator in digital transformation (Trenerry et al., 2021). In health-care, EChO was viewed as less important than the availability of resources, time, and training in linking to positive change-related outcomes (Huo et al., 2023). Finally, Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop and Dunlop (2024) position the process of internalization of change over time by the individual as developing mastery, meaning, and belongingness, demonstrating the linkage between change practices to a continuum of behavioral responses, but did not analyze how EChO is linked to change-related outcomes. Together, these reviews indicate weak evidence of the relationship between EChO and change-related outcomes. This is particularly surprising given employee change responses are studied to identify ways to achieve successful change implementation (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018). There are various possible explanations for this lack of evidence, one being difficulty in conducting research that unambiguously links EChO to broader change-related outcomes, and another being potential publication bias obstructing studies with null results from achieving publication (Kepes, Banks, & Oh, 2014).

### *EChO taxonomy*

Using the EChO Framework (Fig. 1) as a guide, we have organized the factors extracted from reviews into the EChO taxonomy (see Fig. 3). This maps out the status quo in the literature, with the five key elements represented as columns. Next, we summarize the evidence that informs the EChO taxonomy in Figure 3, starting with EChO, then antecedents and outcomes.

### *EChO*

We categorized the EChO elements into four orientations: responses to change, attitudes to change, change-related behaviors, and psychological mechanisms.

*Responses to change* Responses to change are characterized by the multi-dimensional model of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses with valence and activation (Bouckenoghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021; Piderit, 2000; Smollan, 2011). The earliest review to consistently apply this model was Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011), who criticized the inconsistent usage of terminology and explosion of variables to explain different change reactions, most using only one valence and only one of the three modalities – affect, cognition, or behavior. Despite Oreg et al's (2011) critique, ten years later, Bouckenoghe, Schwarz, Kanar and Sanders (2021) found, in a bibliometric analysis, that only 66% of the empirical research contained measures of all three modalities, only 40% reported positive and negative valence, and even fewer (18%) reported the full activation range. Of particular concern is that omission of multi-dimensional perspectives prevents the identification of ambivalent

responses, that is, responses with mixed valence and activation across a modality (Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021; Mikel-Hong, Li, Yu, & Chen, 2023). We identified one integrative review focused on employee and change leaders' emotions related to change Santos de Souza and Chimenti (2024) who found that employees' emotions shaped change attitudes, emotional contagion in groups, and the change of emotion over the different stages of change. This research positions employees as passively coping with the change process. Meanwhile, identifying change leader research emphasizes agentic emotional responses, sensemaking, emotional regulation to achieve positive outcomes, mixed emotions, and sensitivity to the pace of change. We could not find a review that focused exclusively on ambivalent change responses, which show a mix of valence across the three dimensions of responses. Thus, despite Piderit (2000) highly cited article advocating the multi-dimensional perspective and inclusion of ambivalent change responses, there is little evidence of developments in the understanding and theorizing of ambivalent or mixed responses to change in the review literature.

*Attitudes to change* Six distinct attitudinal constructs dominate the review papers: readiness to change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Bouckennooghe, 2010; Caci et al., 2025; Choi, 2011; Derecho et al., 2024; Holt, Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 2007; Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013; Scott, Dawson, & Quach, 2025), openness to change (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Huo et al., 2023; Khaw et al., 2023), commitment to change (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, & Minbashian, 2015; Choi, 2011; Jaros, 2010; Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011), change engagement (Khaw et al., 2023), resistance to change (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Cheraghi, Ebrahimi, Kheibar, & Sahebihagh, 2023; Cieslak & Valor, 2025; Erwin & Garman, 2010; Huo et al., 2023; Khaw et al., 2023; Mikel-Hong, Li, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011), and cynicism about organizational change (Choi, 2011; Thundiylil, Chiaburu, Oh, Banks, & Peng, 2015). Most of these reviews describe employees as change recipients and imply a reactive response to top-down change (e.g., Bouckennooghe, 2010; Khaw et al., 2023; Mikel-Hong, Li, Yu, & Chen, 2023; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). This focus on attitude formation and the positioning of employees as passive recipients represents a core, known problem in the change responses literature (Oreg et al., 2018), yet such approaches endure. These employee attitude-focused reviews present frameworks to organize the field and make conceptual and definitional clarity recommendations, with meager evidence of the connection between employee attitudes and distal outcomes.

*Change-related behavior* Change-related employee behaviors were mentioned or included as outcomes in 21 reviews. Seven of these reviews focused on adaptive performance, which comprises flexible task performance behaviors that help employees adjust to change (Park & Park, 2020). Three meta-analytic reviews focused on the linkage between employee characteristics and adaptive performance (Huang, Ryan, Zabel, & Palmer, 2014; Stasielowicz, 2019, 2020). These show that trait ambition (a facet of extraversion and emotional stability), goal orientation traits (but not openness), and cognitive ability link to adaptive performance, indicating that employees who strive for higher achievements and can learn are able to adapt to change (Huang, Ryan, Zabel, & Palmer, 2014; Stasielowicz, 2019; Stasielowicz, 2020). We identified three further employee behavior-focused meta-analyses designed to build conceptual clarity for change-related organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB-CH) (Chiaburu, Lorinkova, & Van Dyne, 2013; Chiaburu et al., 2022; Marinova, Peng, Lorinkova, Van Dyne, & Chiaburu, 2015). Proactive personality is predictive of OCB-CH (Marinova, Peng, Lorinkova, Van Dyne, & Chiaburu, 2015). Yet, employees who feel part of a positive environment with social support and positive affect are more likely to enact OCB-CH, and this association is stronger than that due to personality traits (Chiaburu, Lorinkova, & Van Dyne, 2013; Chiaburu et al., 2022).

Across the other reviews, change-related employee behaviors comprised digital transformation acceptance, support, and adoption behaviors (Trenerry et al., 2021), compliance, cooperation, or championing (Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, & Minbashian, 2015; Kamarova et al., 2024), change support



(Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, & Minbashian, 2015; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013; Thundiyil, Chiaburu, Oh, Banks, & Peng, 2015), passive and active resistance (Kamarova et al. 2024), and change engagement (Jaros, 2010). One review suggested summarizing all possible behavioral responses using the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect framework to provide a more agentic representation of employees (Khaw et al., 2023).

The reviews from the change management literature indicate diverse approaches to classifying employees' change-related behavioral outcomes. Change-related behavioral responses are dichotomized as either positive, desirable behaviors of acceptance, adoption, proactivity, or support (e.g., Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, & Minbashian, 2015) versus the negative change-related behaviors of resistance or disengagement (e.g., Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez, & Hoegl, 2024). This dichotomization has been critiqued for discounting resistance behaviors as an irrational response to change by change recipients, whereas it may represent a logical and informed response to change (Ford, 1999; Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). Yet reviews continue to dichotomize employee change responses as favorable versus unfavorable (e.g., Hagel et al., 2024; Yin, Mueller, & Waksalak, 2024), making employees appear passive at best, and simplistic in their thinking and actions.

*Psychological mechanisms* There were mixed levels of evidence of the underlying psychological processes that bridge the gap between the antecedents and outcomes of employee change responses. Eleven reviews used psychological theories to explain responding and its relationship with antecedents and outcomes. Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez and Hoegl (2024) applied the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as an organizing framework for psychological mechanisms that result in valenced (favorable or unfavorable) employee responses to change. Gonzalez, Portocarrero and Ekema (2022) applied trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003), which describes the moderating relationship between trait resistance to change, specifically positive self-concept and risk tolerance, and reactions to change. Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar and Sanders (2021) applied behavioral agency in social cognition (Bandura, 1988) and social exchange theory (Cropanzano, 2005) to explain how employees felt an obligation to the organization or supervisors in exchange for benefits, influenced change responses. Oreg and Berson (2019) discussed sensemaking in response to leader sense-giving activities (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) as a change response mechanism. Santos de Souza and Chimenti (2024) build on cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop and Dunlop (2024) apply self-determination theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and identify three mechanisms – mastery, meaning, and belongingness – that can add, or if threatened hamper, the internalization of organizational change. They argue that these mechanisms could be the important link between the adoption and maintenance of change. Yin, Mueller and Waksalak (2024) argue that valence toward or against change is driven by the uncertainty domain and type. Knight and Parker (2021) focus on intrinsic motivation from job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) as a mechanism in work design change responses. Baard, Rench and Kozlowski (2013) identified a lack of – and need for – process theorizing and research at the individual-level in the change adaptation approach. Beaulieu, Seneviratne and Nowell (2023), who reviewed change fatigue research in nursing, identified that passive acceptance is contributing to feelings of powerlessness and exhaustion, leading to significant employee and organizational consequences. Finally, Elrod and Tippet (2002) provided a small narrative review of five qualitative studies focused on psychological process theories, identifying a typical emotional trajectory of change responses.

Together, this assortment of theories shows scholars' acknowledgment of both individual and contextual factors influencing change responses via psychological mechanisms, but also points to fragmentation, with theories adopted from a wide range of disciplines. This reflects a lack of any unified or comprehensive theoretical understanding of employees' psychological responses to change. This theoretical diversity indicates that boundary conditions are needed in change response research to enable theory development and consistent application (Busse, Kach, & Wagner, 2017). Moreover, theorization of the psychological mechanisms that work across time, as Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop

and Dunlop (2024) demonstrate, has the potential to build a more nuanced understanding of how EChO develops and influences outcomes.

### *Antecedents*

We extracted an extensive list of antecedents from the reviews, demonstrating a persistent focus on factors characterizing organizational change as a context and the employee as a target of change. Eight reviews focused solely on antecedents, and the remainder contributed antecedents as contextual variables. Distal antecedents are characteristics of the changing environment context, which could be discrete episodes of change, continuous change, or large-scale transformations in which the employee is acting, and proximal antecedents are directly associated with the employee characteristics. Distinguishing between proximal and distal antecedents in this way is useful as it positions employee characteristics (proximal antecedents) as providing pathways through which the distal antecedents activate EChO.

*Distal antecedent – Change context* Various contextual change factors were identified as influencing EChO across the reviews. Three reviews focus on leadership and management, and all identified that encouraging participation, communication, and sense-giving activity can increase positive employee responses to change (Fugate, 2012; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Peng, Li, Wang, & Lin, 2020). Peng, Li, Wang and Lin (2020) provide a meta-analysis of the linkages between transformational leadership and responses to change, finding that transformational leadership is associated with increased positive and reduced negative attitudes toward change. Further, these three reviews recognize the simplified representation of employee responses as problematic and argue the need for stronger theorizing (Fugate, 2012; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Peng, Li, Wang, & Lin, 2020), as well as highlighting the lack of research on whether a leader's strategic choices impact employee responses (Oreg & Berson, 2019).

Across the other reviews, contextual factors include the stage of a change program (Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022), organizational culture (Cheraghi, Ebrahimi, Kheibar, & Sahebihagh, 2023; Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022), support (Chiaburu, Lorinkova, & Van Dyne, 2013; Park & Park, 2019, 2020), job characteristics (Park & Park, 2019), uncertainty (Park & Park, 2019; Yin, Mueller, & Waksalak, 2024), external pressure, and internal enablers (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). Change context is an important consideration for understanding change responses. However, little evidence was experimental or demonstrated causal linkages. At the same time, this is not uncommon in management research, where researchers cannot randomly assign change conditions or manipulate change implementation in real-world settings. Thus, writing in the change literature often implies a causal link but does not adequately test this (Kamarova *et al.*, 2024).

*Distal antecedent – Change content and type* Change content refers to the aspect of the organization being changed, while type refers to the actual change. Two reviews focused on the change type of job design interventions (Knight & Parker, 2021) and digital transformation (Trenerry *et al.*, 2021). Knight and Parker's (2021) review focused on the relationship between work redesign interventions and performance outcomes. They ascertain that top-down work redesign interventions improve performance when organizations use participative initiatives involving employees. Trenerry *et al.* (2021) conclude that employee characteristics and EChO factors are important, but these need to be considered with multilevel factors such as leadership and communication, yet they do not explain the psychological mechanisms involved or how these link to the outcomes of digital transformation.

Change scholars have recognized the complexity of studying the impact of change content on change outcomes due to the lack of control group comparisons and the complexity of change in organizations (Holt, Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 2007; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Across the other 24 reviews, the type or content of change was an antecedent and the change types reviewed were workplace reorganization (Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2007; Egan, Bambra, Thomas, Petticrew, Whitehead, & Thomas, 2007), privatization (Egan, Petticrew, Ogilvie, Hamilton, & Drever, 2007), organizational change in general (Bamberger *et al.*, 2012;



Grønstad, 2017), restructuring (de Jong et al., 2016), technology change (Johnson et al., 2020), and rapid continuous change (Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023). Beaulieu, Seneviratne and Nowell (2023) find that multiple changes combined with work intensification contribute significantly to fatigue and burnout. Surprisingly, apart from this more recent review, few reviews recognized or investigated concurrent change events as a contextual factor despite evidence that this layering of change can contribute to change fatigue (McMillan & Perron, 2020) and can alter responses to change (Kiefer, Hartley, Conway, & Briner, 2015). Moreover, except for Beaulieu, Seneviratne and Nowell (2023), these reviews did not identify intermediate employee change response constructs, leaving the mechanism linking change type and employee consequences unspecified.

*Distal antecedent – Change process* Two reviews focused on the change process. Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez and Hoegl (2024) investigated change management interventions and their impact on employee receptivity and adoption of change, finding that the critical change management process factors were communication, involvement, participation, coercion, social influence, reinforcement, and support. Kamarova et al. (2024) distinguish five key change practices occurring sequentially – diagnosis, preparation, implementation, evaluation, and internalization, with each phase representing shifting employee responses. Across the other reviews, ten mentioned some aspects of the change process that have an impact on change responses, including involvement and participation in the process (Armenakis & Harris, 2009), the pace of change, training (Jundt, Shoss, & Huang, 2015), and available resources (Derecho et al., 2024). Overall, these reviews of the change process provide only weak evidence linking antecedents to outcomes for the employee, the organization, and the change, with more research needed (Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez, & Hoegl, 2024; Kamarova et al., 2024).

*Proximal antecedents – Employee characteristics* Employee characteristics include personality traits, cognitive ability, demographics, competencies, experience, goal orientation, coping, stress, motivation, and attitudes. Personality traits were most frequently included (26 of 50 reviews), especially dispositional resistance to change (Oreg, 2003). Other personality traits influencing change responses included risk tolerance, positive self-concept (Gonzalez, Portocarrero & Ekema, 2022), and dispositional tendency to uncertainty (Yin, Mueller & Wakslak, 2024). Park and Park (2020) identified cognitive ability as an essential factor in learning new skills as part of change. The competency-based antecedents of knowledge, skills, and abilities were identified as critical for technology change adaptive performance (Derecos et al., 2024; Jundt, Shoss & Huang, 2015; Park & Park, 2020). Wellbeing-associated factors, including resilience, coping, fatigue, and stress, were influential antecedents to change behaviors (Cheraghi, Ebrahimi, Kheibar & Sahebihagh, 2023; Trenerry et al., 2021; Vakola, Armenakis, & Oreg, 2013). Together, these reviews show strong evidence linking individual differences and EChO.

### Outcomes

Ten reviews from the field of occupational health focus on employee consequences of organizational change – proximal outcomes. No reviews were found that focused on distal outcomes for either the target change or organizational outcomes. Next, we summarize the literature that relates EChO to proximal and distal outcomes.

*Proximal outcomes – Employee consequences of change* These findings demonstrate that organizational change can both negatively and positively impact employee wellbeing and health. We found 12 reviews, predominantly from occupational health literature, emphasizing the harm or benefit to employee wellbeing stemming from organizational change. These systematic reviews consolidate wellbeing effects related to specific macro types of change on populations of employees or micro-changes to job characteristics or conditions (Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2007; Egan, 2007; Johnson et al., 2020). Specifically, five focused on the impact of macro-changes of downsizing and job insecurity (Quinlan & Bohle, 2009), privatization (Egan, Petticrew, Ogilvie, Hamilton, & Drever, 2007), organizational change (Bamberger et al., 2012; Grønstad, 2017), and

restructuring (de Jong *et al.*, 2016) on wellbeing. Together, these reviews present evidence that macro-level organizational change contributes to reduced employee wellbeing (de Jong *et al.*, 2016), an elevated risk of mental health problems (Bamberger *et al.*, 2012), and adverse occupational health and safety outcomes (Quinlan & Bohle, 2009).

At the micro-level, four reviews investigated the impact of changes to job characteristics or conditions (Bambra, Egan, Thomas, Petticrew, & Whitehead, 2007; Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023; Egan, Bambra, Thomas, Petticrew, Whitehead, & Thomas, 2007; Johnson *et al.*, 2020), rapid continuous change (Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023), and technology (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) on employee wellbeing. One review identified that organizational changes can positively affect employees, particularly interventions that improve employee participation and control or reduce job demands (Egan, Bambra, Thomas, Petticrew, Whitehead, & Thomas, 2007). Usefully, Johnson *et al.* (2020) highlighted the positive and negative benefits of technological change on employees and the importance of organizations implementing mitigating strategies to maximize employee benefits while reducing negative impacts and turnover. In contrast, changes that reduced control, such as intensified workloads and increased employee demands, had adverse wellbeing effects (Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell, 2023).

**Distal outcomes** While seven reviews covered distal outcomes, none were focal aspects of the review. Several reviews noted change effectiveness and failure outcomes stemming from change in resistance and recipient responses, although without direct evidence (Cheraghi, Ebrahimi, Kheibar, & Sahebiagh, 2023; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Distal outcomes included job performance (Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022; Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez, & Hoegl, 2024; Thundiyl, Chiaburu, Oh, Banks, & Peng, 2015).

Several reviews included organizational performance in frameworks linking change recipient responses to change, also including leadership (Oreg & Berson, 2019; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). In a review of change management interventions and change outcomes, Hagl, Kanitz, Gonzalez and Hoegl (2024) identified a lack of research linking employee responses and behaviors to implementation outcomes, particularly unintended consequences. Similarly, Trenerry *et al.* (2021) identified that organizational outcomes have not been well studied in digital transformation. It is notable that none of the reviews presented societal outcomes of EChO, indicating that this is not a focus in change research. Overall, even though achieving successful change outcomes provides the rationale for much organizational change, there is surprisingly little evidence of the distal outcomes of EChOs, and they are not well integrated into reviews' theoretical models and frameworks.

## Discussion

Our meta-review takes a broad and comprehensive look at what we can learn from over 70 years of change research, drawing on research from organizational change, occupational health, job design, and adaptive performance. This allows us to develop inclusive answers to our research questions and to develop programmatic theorizing (Cronin, Stouten, & van Knippenberg, 2021) around employees and organizational change. We bring coherence by classifying these through the development of the meta-construct EChO, which encapsulates employees' responses to change, change attitudes, psychological mechanisms, and change behaviors. The EChO framework situates the meta-construct EChO relative to the mechanisms through which distal antecedents (e.g., leadership and management practices) and proximal antecedents (e.g., employee characteristics) act on employees and contribute to employee consequences and distal outcomes (e.g., change effectiveness).

In response to research question one: In organizational change research, what constructs have been used to understand antecedents, employee change responses, and outcomes? Our primary contribution is synthesizing the salient factors from the extensive review literature into a theoretical framework of EChO (see Fig. 1) and the EChO taxonomy (see Fig. 3). Whetten (1989) argues that theory requires a clear description of the factors that should be considered in explaining individual

or social phenomena, trading off comprehensiveness and parsimony. As is typical for a meta-review, we err on the side of comprehensiveness, with the EChO framework drawing together a wide range of concepts used to describe and explain employee responses to change and structuring these into one overarching structure.

Relatedly, by arguing how the constructs are situated relative to each other, we answer research question two: In organizational change research, how do these constructs relate to each other? Thus, in our EChO framework depicted in [Figure 1](#), we position attitudinal constructs relative to the change responses and identify the myriad of psychological mechanisms that have been applied to explain the link to change-related behaviors for employees. This use of a meta-construct and development of a meta-framework represents an example of programmatic theorizing within a field, which pulls together the disparate unit theorizing to take a higher-level perspective, which, in turn, encourages future development of theory (Cronin, Stouten, & van Knippenberg, 2021).

Our second contribution, achieved through synthesizing diverse literature on employees and organizational change, is to highlight both areas of consensus and areas where evidence and theorizing are lacking. This answers research question three: Given the evidence to date, what are the pressing theoretical or empirical issues that can direct future organizational change responses research? Consensus shows stable findings, such as that personality traits influence attitudes to change, such as openness to experience and proactivity, predicting EChO change-related behavior of change support (e.g., Gonzalez, Portocarrero, & Ekema, 2022; Stasielowicz, 2019; Vakola, Armenakis, & Oreg, 2013). Areas of confusion reflect either an absence of or divergent evidence that requires further research. Moreover, while there is considerable evidence of what influences employee change responses, there exists scant evidence of how employee change responses influence change-related and organizational outcomes. The taxonomy ([Fig. 3](#)) demonstrates the factors that have received research attention, while the pathway mapping in [Figure 2](#) demonstrates the areas on which research has focused based on the evidence from 50 review articles that draw on over 1,606 primary studies. This is an extensive evidence base, and the links to this expanse of evidence make our framework evidence-based and comprehensive.

Our contribution and response to our third research question is to make eight recommendations for future EChO research, which we will develop in detail below. Specifically, looking across various disciplines and research designs allows us to identify trends and omissions and recommend research design improvements that could yield essential knowledge.

### *Research recommendations*

Broadening our research scope beyond change management and organizational change literature, we include occupational health, job design, and adaptive performance research reviews. We draw on the suggestions contained in the reviews underpinning this meta-review and leverage our own analyses, especially [Figure 2](#), to identify improvements that will yield important evidence to consolidate the knowledge base. First, we briefly discuss research saturation and then provide more detail on areas lacking evidence that provide ample opportunities for exploration.

### *Research saturation*

We have identified research saturation in the relationship between personality traits and attitudes to change. This literature is very mature with established associations. Research on trait-based moderators of change responses provides useful insights into why some employees resist change and others do not. However, their practical application is limited as trait-based constructs are stable and are beyond the control of organizations. Additionally, change is now recognized as a normal and commonplace part of work for employees (Brazzale, Cooper–Thomas, Haar, & Smollan, 2022); hence, it is not feasible to select out employees with a dispositional resistance to change. Hence, we recommend a moratorium on this type of research in favor of moving to research on variables that can be controlled or adapted in an environment of continual change.

### *Multidimensional research of employee responses to change*

Multi-dimensional research can elucidate the complex interactions at the heart of EChO, that is, between attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of employees experiencing change. This is particularly important for change ambivalence (Piderit, 2000), that is, employees holding both positive and negative views concurrently. Ambivalence could be a common employee experience, yet it is overlooked in reviews, perhaps because multi-dimensional change responses are complex to investigate. This call to adopt a multidimensional approach reiterates that of other review authors (Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021). Person-centered analysis (Woo, Hofmans, Wille, & Tay, 2024) could produce a more nuanced understanding of heterogeneous employee responses to change according to employee subpopulations. (Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, Kanar, & Sanders, 2021; Bouckennooghe, Schwarz, & Minbashian, 2015; Straatmann *et al.*, 2018).

### *Research methodology*

Many research methodology recommendations were provided through the reviews, including using experimental designs to provide evidence of causality, fuller reporting of interventions to allow accurate analysis, isolating interventions to avoid confounding effects, more longitudinal studies, and examining a more comprehensive range of outcome variables. This set of recommendations would be common in many fields in the management literature where evidence of causality is difficult to generate due to the practical reality of organizational research, and in particular, change. We also recommend research approaches that specifically investigate the psychological mechanisms of EChO, investigating how and why employees form change responses, adapt them, and translate these into behaviors. There is also a need for psychometric measures covering ambivalent responses to change and intentions to conduct specific change behaviors rather than reliance on unidimensional attitudes to change, such as commitment or resistance. We also recommend an increased focus on how these responses and behaviors influence outcomes both for employees and distal outcomes.

Additionally, quantitative findings dominate past reviews, particularly articles focusing on episodes of top-down planned change and utilizing variance-based research designs. Thus, we join organizational change scholars in arguing the need for qualitative change research to add richness to theorizing in this field (de Jong *et al.*, 2016; Derecos *et al.*, 2024; Trenerry *et al.*, 2021).

### *Include qualitative research in the review literature*

Most of the 1,606 primary studies included across the 50 reviews were quantitative. This neglects the valuable evidence from qualitative research, perhaps because its depth and nuance make synthesis more difficult. However, this extensive body of qualitative evidence could generate theory development. This issue is not unique to organizational change; blindness to the contribution of qualitative research has been acknowledged in health research and management more generally (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Howell Major & Savin-Baden, 2011). However, review methodologies that synthesize the results of qualitative research are now well developed and recognized (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006; Flemming & Noyes, 2021). We suggest it is time to thoroughly review and consolidate qualitative research evidence of EChO to improve organizational change theorizing.

### *Multidisciplinary research*

We recommend moving out of our research silos and conducting more multidisciplinary research. Our meta-review identified reviews from distinct, interrelated disciplines: change management, organizational change responses, occupational health, work design, leadership, and adaptive performance. Combining these produces a richer framework to guide EChO response research perspectives. For example, we identified minimal research on affective responses, which are fundamental to wellbeing (Russell & Daniels, 2018). We find this surprising given the solid evidence of the negative employee impact of changes in our meta-review, such as restructuring, which harms health and wellbeing (Bamberger *et al.*, 2012; de Jong *et al.*, 2016). We recommend further research on the relationship

between affective change responses and employee consequences, such as change fatigue. Similarly, the work design literature (Knight & Parker, 2021) provided detailed information about the antecedents and outcomes of improvements in work design; however, the researchers did not explain the EChO mechanisms linking these. For example, cross-pollinating occupational health and work design could move knowledge forward on how and when work design change hinders versus benefits employee wellbeing.

### *Research the association between echo and distal outcomes*

The relationship between EChO and change-related outcomes was rarely explored in the change reviews, with only a few examples related to change effectiveness (Oreg & Berson, 2019; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011) and firm performance (Oreg & Berson, 2019). We encourage more research investigating the association between EChO and both proximal and distal outcomes. Specifically, considering a broader set of distal outcome indicators, such as the effect of EChO on career advancement, organizational reputation, or organizational culture. There may also be important ramifications of organizational change at a societal level that could be investigated, such as changes leading to job insecurity could start a cascade of damaging impacts on employee wellbeing, linking to negative interpersonal outcomes, affecting families and communities (Jiang, 2025). Together, the current evidence of the outcomes of employee responses to change is difficult to reconcile: change can be both good and bad for employees, and employees can be both good and bad for change. Future research should tackle these complexities.

### *Draw on theorizing in affective and attitudinal research*

Improved measurement and understanding of EChO can advance theorizing that explains how EChO links to change outcomes. We leverage recent theorizing on workplace attitudes (Kammeyer-Mueller, Rubenstein, & Barnes, 2024) for inspiration. Kammeyer-Mueller, Rubenstein and Barnes (2024) explain that interventions aimed at attitudes toward a specific topic are more predictive of behavior change than general attitudes. For example, in the context of digital transformation, attitude to change in general will be less predictive of change-related behavior than attitude to attending required digital transformation training. Yet within EChO, research focuses on general attitudes about a change, for example, resistance to change or commitment to change, but not the actual behaviors required to complete the change. Theoretical models would benefit from detailing the reciprocal relationship between attitudes and behaviors, that is, with attitudes influencing behavior and vice versa (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2024). This adjustment in theorizing requires longitudinal repeated measures approaches to understand the unfolding process of change. Additionally, researchers have focused on individual attitudes, neglecting the role of social interactions in making meaning that can influence EChO (e.g., de Metz et al., 2024), which could also be a fruitful way to understand EChO.

### *Consider diverse change paradigms*

Finally, our meta-review reveals that planned, top-down change is the dominant paradigm across all 50 reviews, either explicitly or implicitly. This focus was evident in the language scholars used to describe employees as change recipients, and the fact that most primary empirical studies in the reviews investigated single episodic change events. This traditional top-down approach is consistent with the episodic change paradigm described by Weick and Quinn (1999), who also highlighted that an episodic change approach fails to capture the multiple and overlapping changes experienced by many employees. Given the ubiquity of change for employees (Brazzale, Cooper-Thomas, Haar, & Smollan, 2022), we recommend that researchers of employee change experiences adopt the premise that change is a normal part of working life, the continuous change paradigm Weick and Quinn (1999) recommend. Bouckennooghe (2010) discussed the importance of testing the validity of current change constructs and measures when adopting this continuous change approach to EChO research. Yet despite these recommendations, only one review focused on continual change: Beaulieu, Seneviratne



and Nowell (2023) identified that it negatively impacts across EChO, employees' health and wellbeing, and organizations. For future research, we recommend adopting the continuous change paradigm to explore EChO. Our EChO framework provides a good starting point for examining continuous change by providing a taxonomy of potential variables to consider and validate in continuous change research.

### *Practical implications*

While change researchers may be presumed to desire to benefit practice, the diversity and breadth of academic literature on organizational change make translation difficult for practitioners (Hamdali *et al.*, 2024). Reviews provide a particularly rich resource for practitioners by consolidating current evidence, acting as a signpost, and promoting reflective thinking (Rojon, Okupe, & McDowall, 2021). In developing this meta-review, we considered a practitioner audience of human resource professionals, organizational psychologists, consultants, and change managers. Figures 1 and 3 may be especially useful, with the EChO framework and taxonomy having the potential to help practitioners systematically consider relevant factors when implementing organizational change.

Beyond this, and based on our synthesis, we make the following key recommendations for practitioners. First, the current review literature presents a relatively passive perspective of employees experiencing change, and change practitioners should remain aware of the individual agency of employees. Thus, employees may hold complex and even ambivalent thoughts and feelings about change at work and act upon their unique motivations. Second, practitioners should be aware that the research evidence linking EChO to change-related and organizational outcomes is extremely limited, despite the intuitive appeal of the linkages that exist; more research is needed for definitive explanations of how employees' orientation to change influences change-related outcomes. Most promise is in process models that position EChO as malleable and developing over time (e.g., Kamarova, Gagné, Holtrop, & Dunlop, 2024). Third, rather than a negative stance of anticipating employee resistance to change, we encourage practitioners to consider the likely range of employee responses according to the type of change event, such as being required to learn a new skill, perceptions of job insecurity, or employee-initiated changes to improve a process. This will allow a broader approach that captures the diversity of employee reactions and can respond in more tailored ways. Fourth, while some organizational changes can positively affect employees, this meta-review also evidenced severe adverse health effects related to certain types and the duration of change. We recommend that practitioners be attentive to prepare for and act on any signs of adverse health impacts from organizational change. Ultimately, organizations often need to make changes to survive and thrive in a changing external environment, and practitioners play a crucial role in preventing harm to those who work in organizations.

### *Limitations*

A meta-review such as this has several limitations. First, we may have missed some review articles. We attempted to mitigate this by conducting additional manual reference and citation searches of identified reviews. However, given that the reviews in our sample have overlapping primary studies and, consequently, intersecting recommendations, it is unlikely that a small number of additional reviews would significantly change our findings. Second, the personal biases of the authorship team may affect our decisions and interpretations. Offsetting this possibility, we engaged in a team approach to developing search strings and the inclusion and exclusion of reviews to minimize the possibility of bias. We also used strict selection criteria for articles to ensure objectivity and minimize selection bias. Third, a broader limitation relevant to meta-reviews is they can report only on the state of evidence selected by the included reviews, and therefore, they are subject to those review authors' biases in selecting primary studies and topics. Thus, we may have identified problems in our review

that are artifacts of the literature sample selected by original review authors. For example, as we noted above, there is a substantial qualitative organizational change literature that past reviews largely overlook.

## Conclusion

Organizational change is frequent and disruptive, with approximately three in four employees experiencing change at any time (Brazzale, Cooper–Thomas, Haar, & Smollan, 2022). Rates of change are only likely to increase as societal, economic, technological, and political forces shape how we work and organize work (Fraccaroli, Zaniboni, & Truxillo, 2024; Kohnke, Nieland, Straatmann, & Mueller, 2024); therefore, research insights on organizational change can have substantial theoretical and practical benefits. Our meta-review shows a saturation of research exploring the link between personality and EChO. We have good evidence of the effects of certain types of change on employee health outcomes. Attitudinal constructs related to organizational change are maturing in definitional and construct clarity, yet there is inadequate evidence of how these responses influence change and organizational outcomes. Theoretical development of the psychological mechanisms contributing to these outcomes is dispersed and needs the development of a theory that considers the evolving nature of change, the impact of employee change-related consequences on EChO. Moreover, given that change is an ever-present part of working life, research should incorporate employees as active change participants, conceptually and empirically. Based on the meta-review findings, we recommend broadening the range of research designs used, including multi-dimensional approaches to investigating EChO, strengthening the organizational change knowledge base by utilizing qualitative research to build new theories starting with its inclusion in the review literature, adopting multidisciplinary research approaches, continue to research the association between EChO and distal outcomes, inclusion of theorizing in affective and attitudinal research and adopting a broader perspective on change that includes the impact of continuous change. Given the increasing velocity and position of organizational change as a standard part of working life, researchers can and should provide more accurate insights and impactful knowledge of how employees change orientation and their association with outcomes for employees, organizational change, and organizations.

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(\*denotes included review articles)

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