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Giving Sense to Change Leadership: Towards a Narrative-Based Process Model

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Giving Sense to Change Leadership: Towards a Narrative-Based Process Model

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Abstract

Introduction: Recent studies on change agency and organizational change failure have significantly broadened the organizational behavior perspective on individual change experiences, however, the underlying mechanism for change leaders' influential behavior remains a relatively underspecified area.

Objectives: Our central theoretical contribution focuses on the ways in which linking the findings from different research areas that deal with storytelling and persuasive communication can contribute to understanding the underlying mechanism of change leaders' influential behavior.

Methods: We examine the various strands of research in management concerned with change leadership and persuasive communication, and propose a multidisciplinary perspective from developmental psychology, linguistics, political science, consumer psychology, and religious studies.

Results: Our approach draws on the key theoretical perspectives from the social cognitive theory and commensurable interdisciplinary findings as the basis for a narrative-based process model of change leaders' influential behavior. Our model includes propositions about the change leader's interpretation of ideological change as well as the change leader's process of sensemaking and sensegiving.

Conclusion: We argue that the change leader's persuasive communication efforts are based on the leader's narrative intelligence and influence, which promote the change recipient's attachment formation.

Introduction

Organizational change is an ongoing human endeavor. It is a context-dependent, unpredictable, nonlinear process with unintended outcomes (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). This suggests that change as a verb instead of as a noun defines change as a never-ending cycle instead of being a static occurrence with an ending. The future of organizational development (e.g. digital transformation) heavily relies on the change leaders' efforts aimed at influencing and mobilizing networks of change recipients (Battilana et al., 2009, 2010; Škerlavaj et al., 2016), effectively changing the status quo. Some change

agents demonstrate champion behaviors (e.g. Baer, 2012; Howell & Higgins, 1990b), while others rely on power and leadership influence tactics (Battilana & Casciaro, 2021; Furst & Cable, 2008; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl et al., 1993). Regardless of the approach, the inevitable end goal is to engage and mobilize a critical mass, which is required to turn the planned organizational change into a broadly accepted reality. What remains to be understood is how and by what means successful change leaders persuade change recipients towards organizational change adoption using storytelling.

In general, leading change can be characterized as an extensive communication effort to give sense to

change through anticipating and addressing conflicts arising from recipients' diverging needs and perceptions (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Mento et al., 2002), effectively influencing how organizational realities are interpreted during the sensemaking process (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). These intensive persuasive communication efforts of change leaders focused on benefit perceptions and giving sense to a newly formed reality, can be identified in different research fields (e.g. Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). One of many research directions considers how stories give sense to organizational incidents and how powerful narratives are in creating perceived realities (e.g. Boje, 1991). Unlike much research that prioritizes the organizational change's sensemaking process (e.g. Liu & Perrewe, 2005; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010), this paper aims to contribute by theorizing about the change leader's utilization of stories to aid the sensegiving process during organizational change.

Our central theoretical contribution focuses on the ways in which linking the findings from different research areas that deal with persuasive communication and storytelling can help understand the role of storytelling in leading change. We thus observe the dyadic relationship between the change leader and the change recipients in an effort to provide some synthesized coherence and expand the understanding of organizational change. More specifically, by observing how the change leader's utilization of leadership influence tactics (Yukl & Tracey, 1992), champion behavior (Howell et al., 2005) and narrative intelligence (Randall, 1999) affects the sensemaking process of change recipients, we build upon the emotional-cognitive process suggested by Liu and Perrewe (2005) and enrich it with interdisciplinary perspectives. Our narrative-based process model proposes conceptual relationships, while acknowledging numerous suggestions from Cornelissen (2017). We suggest a commensurable theoretical perspective of organizational change that combines: (a) social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) as the overarching foundation for the triggers of organizational change; (b) adult attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013) as the foundation for the mediating mechanisms of organizational change; and (c) social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) as the desired outcome of organizational change. We propose that organizational change is an ongoing and dynamic state with tangible triggers but intangible endings that effectively manifest as minor or major changes in organizational ideology. We argue that change leaders can intervene meaningfully during the sensegiving process of organizational change, and thus affect the way change recipients make sense of the altered ideological framework within the organization. To provide remedies

that frequent trouble narrative-based theorizing, we explore a multidisciplinary range of research focusing on influential behavior, persuasive communication and storytelling. Additionally, we simultaneously offer further argumentation prior to starting a proposition, in addition to the available organizational behavior literature.

This paper is organized into four sections. First, we review current management studies concerned with organizational change and focus our attention to the most cited and therefore most influential articles centering on persuasive communication, storytelling and change in top-tier journals within the Web of Science. This includes perspectives from: developmental psychology (e.g. Richards & Schat, 2011), linguistics (e.g. Stromberg, 1990), political science (e.g. Reicher, 2004), consumer psychology (e.g. Woodside et al., 2008), and religious studies (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995). Second, we summarize theoretical perspectives with the social cognitive theory as the overarching theoretical foundation of our narrative-based process model. Third, we elaborate propositions about the change leader's sensemaking and sensegiving processes during organizational change. Finally, we conclude our narrative-based process model and highlight our theoretical and practical contribution with directions for future research.

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1 The theoretical insights on organizational change failure

Various streams of literature dealing with organizational change tackle the philosophical question of defining change, and linguistics debate if the word should be a verb or a noun. Overall, there is no uniform definition that could holistically account for the contextual richness of change. As the working environment continues to be disrupted digitally, work demands inevitably increase, which in turn increases the complexity and forms a negative feedback loop on future performance (Luscher et al., 2008). It comes as no surprise that a fairly novel stream of literature observes organizational change failure as a separate and interesting research field. Schwarz et al. (2021) observed organizational change failure through deterministic, voluntarist, and entrepreneurial perspectives.

On the other hand, Hay et al. (2021) observed organizational change failure through the lens of sensemaking and how such failure affected work–identity

formation. Heracleous and Bartunek (2021) observed organizational change failure through a multilevel lens and concluded that certain short-term failures were necessary for the major organizational change to be successful, because the organization learned to deal with change in the process. Change processes inevitably bring interdependency into the organization; numerous interpretations of newly formed circumstances furthermore drive ambiguity and equivocality (Luscher et al., 2008). In other words, organizations are faced with the continuous pressure to adapt to the rapidly changing environment, which in turn adds complexity, reduces clarity, and increases organizational change failure. Therefore, we turn our attention to change agency in an effort to gain a better understanding of how to reduce organizational change failure.

Change is a collective effort. Agency constructs the workplace, as different levels of information and interest flow throughout the organization, which is susceptible to interpretation (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Previous literature debates have observed the issue of agency in organizations, emphasizing the importance of embeddedness, which is closely linked to social engagement (Tasselli & Kilduff, 2021). The crucial reason for organizational change failure is the failure to engage employees in change-related activities, which are necessary for successfully completing change (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Implementation rates of such innovative endeavors are led by change leaders who influence change recipients' perceptions by utilizing persuasive behavior in hopes of influencing perception of ongoing change and tackling recipients' natural inclination to maintain homeostasis and resist change (Holt et al., 2007; Oreg, 2003, 2006). Humans are prone to homeostasis and fallible by nature. The change recipient usually perceives the change initiatives as a threat (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Ford et al., 2008), rather than as a benefit, thus further emphasizing how change leaders' efforts are crucial for successful change implementation. Different literature streams discuss why organizational change failure occurs so frequently and present numerous reasons for this. For example, Weick (1988) mentioned the importance of self-efficacy in terms of making sense of oneself as being capable of dealing with such change and minimizing change resistance. Heracleous and Bartunek (2021) emphasized that organizational change should be observed as discourse, where arguments are accepted or refuted among the targeted population. The sensemaking process is where change recipients assess potential benefits and threats of change and form their attitudes (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Thus, this is where meaningful interventions can be made. This also implies that the sensegiving process should enable easier sensemaking for affected employees (Bandura, 2001a). Such dynamics influence how a certain change is perceived, and ongoing organizational polarity towards such a change process heavily influences this perception (De Keyser et al., 2021).

Despite how influencing opinions about a proposed change are an inevitable part of change adoption, Tormala and Petty (2002) demonstrated how individuals are more certain about their attitudes and resist persuasion when exposed to higher levels of elaboration. On the other hand, Aronson (1999) suggested that individuals tend to naturally resist persuasion and respond best to self-persuasion, where they can internalize their own thoughts on the subject. Another reason for organizational change failure is the identity crisis and negative emotional reactions caused by perceived threats stemming from change, thus leading to individual resistance to change (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Repovš et al., 2019). In other words, despite the significant advances in understanding change agency, the underlying mechanism for successful influential behavior during organizational change is still quite unexplored and represents the main research subject of this paper.

2 The interdisciplinary perspective of influential behavior

Change leaders' influential behavior needs to affect positively the change recipients' sensemaking process. The sensemaking process is where change recipients assess potential benefits and threats of change and form their attitudes (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), and in the case of perceived threats overpowering perceived benefits build resistance to change (Oreg, 2003). Behavioral uncertainties can be resolved by learning acceptable behavior that others display (e.g. champion change leaders' behavior), as mentioned in the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989, 2001b; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Therefore, this sensemaking process is a prerequisite for the sensegiving process in which the change leader will be involved, aimed at managing change recipients' perception of the change initiative. As Hogg (2001) suggested, the leader requires some form of referential authority to be influential or perceived as a person whose advice is beneficial. Popper and Mayseless (2003) suggested an interesting relationship in which a leader's role is similar to that of a parent's in stressful and turbulent occurrences within the organization. Davidovitz et al. (2007) highlighted how leaders can be perceived as attachment figures, illustrating that different influences affect bond formation with recipients and vice versa

(e.g. Berson et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). The effectiveness of influential tactics depends on the relationship between the leader and the aimed target of influence (Sparrowe et al., 2006), thus leaders have to adapt their influential objectives and corresponding tactics depending on the desired direction of influence (Yukl et al., 1995). Such persuasive communication efforts tend to gravitate towards using antromorphic actors in stories (Woodside et al., 2008) and storytelling tends to make the message more memorable and stimulating (Boje, 1991).

Change leaders' influential behavior is an ongoing narrative. Liu and Perrewe (2005) argued how positive information about organizational change will induce excitement in employees, while a high level of specific information, regardless of its affect, will induce fear. Rhodes and Brown (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature covering organizational change storytelling and identified five key themes: sensemaking, communicating, change and learning, power, and identity and identification. This is in line with the aforementioned literature streams and suggests that the underlying mechanics of influencing could be understood by observing and meaningfully connecting the most common themes. Beigi et al. (2019) re-examined the underlying themes of organizational change almost 15 years later, and based on their analysis of 165 articles, they proposed five additional themes: subverting, manipulating, challenging, dissenting, and alienation. Obviously, newer research focuses more on the darker and undesired behavior during organizational change, connected with divergent interests and different levels of readiness to change.

To furthermore develop this theoretical paper, we have observed these emerging themes as actionable areas for change leaders and change recipients. During our initial Web of Science screening, keywords "persuasion", "narrative", "influence", "storytelling" and "sensemaking-sensegiving" were the most frequent keywords that were associated with research articles across disciplines, including organizational behavior mentioned earlier. The largest number of articles containing aforementioned keywords outside of organizational behavior and organizational change were from: developmental psychology (e.g. Richards & Schat, 2011), linguistics (e.g. Stromberg, 1990), political science (e.g. Reicher, 2004), consumer psychology (e.g. Woodside et al., 2008), and religious studies (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995). Relying on well-established theoretical perspectives from organizational psychology, we dared to pursue divergent thinking patterns and explore connected interdisciplinary perspectives, in an effort to meaningfully progress our understanding of how change leader's storytelling

operationalizes the sensegiving process. Similarly, it comes as no surprise that certain studies connected several disciplines together (e.g. Heracleous & Barrett, 2001) focusing on persuasive communication efforts, storytelling and sensegiving. Change leaders have power and aim to conduct change through learning and extensive communication. On the other hand, change recipients are expected to make sense of newly formed circumstances and go through the identification process. These emerging themes highlight major issues of organizational change and narrow down the key areas that could contribute towards the understanding of influencing during organizational change.

2.1 Selected insights on influential behavior from developmental psychology

Change leaders' influential behavior is interdisciplinary. The primary idea of any planned communication is behavioral change. Complementary research streams offer commensurable findings relevant to change leaders' influential behavior. These include developmental psychology, linguistics, political science, consumer psychology, and religious studies. Revolving around communication as the common denominator, these areas are relatively closely connected to change adoption as a general societal phenomenon and are concerned with similar research problems. Observing change leadership through the lens of developmental psychology brings forth several interesting perspectives. Harrell-Levy and Kerpelman (2010) mentioned the importance of teachers during identity formation, with teachers serving the role of safety attachment objects during the turbulence of growing up. While attachment theory (e.g. Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013) in its original form addresses early life experiences and their impact on adult behavior, it also highlights that individuals form specific bonds in "times of distress," i.e. the stress of change (Richards & Schat, 2011). Attachments to individuals differ in types and intensity (e.g. idolizing celebrities as Houran et al. (2005), mentioned), forming different attachment styles (Keller, 2003), and the chief function of attachments is construed as conferring emotional security to the attached party, although attachment during change is not a prevailing topic in the literature.

Individual's cognitive development makes a difference. Making sense of organizational change greatly depends on individual capacity of change recipients. Kegan (1982) perspective of meaning-making accounts for a lifelong activity, starting from infancy and evolving in more complex solutions through a series of so called "evolutionary truces", where very

truce is both an achievement of and a constraint on the meaning-making process. The more diverse set of experiences an individual encounter, the broader the understanding of self and what life is. Evolutionary truces affect how individuals are connected, included and attached to others in the world and how they are differentiated from others (Kegan, 1982). Generally speaking, level of adult development determines the cognitive complexity and the capacity of the individual to make sense from experienced life events, inevitably expanding different levels of consciousness (Kegan, 1994). More specifically, when considering the context of organizational change, individual's resistance to change can be observed through a three-system paradigm, reflecting aforementioned orders of consciousness: the change-preventing system, the feeling system, and the knowing system (Kegan et al., 2009). When considering personal development perspectives, Weick (1988) mentions the importance of self-efficacy as a significant predictor of one's capacity to deal with adversity and consequently the cognitive development an individual will experience from said adversity.

Hardship accelerates ontogenesis. Through interpreting environmental stimuli, individuals construct identity and define themselves or develop a self-theory (Berzonsky, 2011). Greenfield (2009) highlighted how environmental changes altered the way individuals learned and experienced society, thus affecting how naturally progressive cultural norms are further developed, which in turn affects how individuals adapt to new behavioral norms. People are inevitably the product of their environment, but are simultaneously the producers of such an environment as Wood and Bandura (1989) emphasized. In terms of developmental psychology and change leadership, Bandura (1989) highlighted the importance of addressing individuals' self-inefficacy to exercise control over ruminative thoughts, because such invasive thoughts further emphasized threat perception and stimulated the build-up of stress and anxiety. These emotional reactions depend on the interpretation of the revealed narratives and are equally human and relevant to change leaders and change recipients, considering both parties inevitably experience such emotions but deal with them differently.

2.2 Selected insights on influential behavior from linguistics

Phrasing differs how compelling a narrative is. Rosenbaum et al. (2018) fairly recent exploratory literature review focused on reviewing the 13 most popular planned organizational change models after Lewin's seminal "freeze-unfreeze-freeze" model

(e.g. Cummings et al., 2016). Their research findings suggested that major planned organizational change models related to Lewin's model and their common denominator was intensive communicational efforts change leaders conducted. Brown et al. (2009) summarized the most common topics in organizational change research and pointed out how organizational change created stories that could block change if they were not authentic or did not have a compelling narrative structure. As previously mentioned, these stories' topics cover power, identity construction and defense, plurivocality, sensemaking, and sense-destroying (Brown et al., 2009). Boje (1991) suggested there were healthy and unhealthy storytelling in organizations, where stories packed a lot more meaning because of their emotionally engaging component. Weick (2012) accentuated the importance of storytelling in sensemaking in terms of holding informational elements together, and visual learning, where organizational symbolism played an essential role in triggering emotional reactions and conveying behavioral cues. Stromberg (1990) mentioned the importance of myths and general stories about a certain societal surrounding in formulating an individual's identity and understanding their self-story and self-creation.

When observing these identification challenges after organizational change failure, Hay et al. (2021) concluded that experienced challenges during the sensemaking process created four narrative trajectories: identity loss, identity revision, identity affirmation, and identity resilience. When faced with context change and uncertainties about identity changes, people also seek proximity and comfort in familiar faces (e.g. Mawson, 2005) instead of purely relying on facts and rationalizing. This type of behavior opens up space for creating heroic and antagonistic archetypes (e.g. Fergnani & Song, 2020) in organizations expected to solve the problem or be the person to blame. However, similar to all other archetypes that occur in stories, organizational archetypes are subject to genre-specific limitations. In other words, individuals create stories about themselves based on the stories they process and are able to make sense of in the changed environment. Persuasive narratives transport individuals into a convergent state of mind within the narrative, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative, thus causing psychological distancing from the real world (Green & Brock, 2000). The narrative transportation process initiates narrative engagement, immersing an individual into a state of enjoying the narrative and influencing the narrative's subsequent story-related attitudes and beliefs (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). A fairly known method

of utilizing the strength of narrative identity transportation is bibliotherapy, frequently used in patients suffering from depression (Gregory et al., 2004) and alleviating some form of negative emotions. The power of language is used frequently in politics and political behavior, which is an inevitable element of the human experience.

2.3 Selected insights on influential behavior from political science

The holy grail of influential communication is changed behavior. One way of approaching the achievement of such desired outcomes is through the power perspective (e.g. Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989). On the other hand, power does not need to include coercive and totalitarian perspectives, but can represent the power of aligning values towards a pro-social goal, which benefits everyone and engages the critical masses (e.g. Battilana & Casciaro, 2021). With every ideological setup, a different set of interests fluctuates. Pfeffer (1992) argued the best way to overcome resistance was by acquiring more power than the resistors possess and being savvy with political skills. On the other hand, perception of strong organizational politics has numerous negative effects on desired organizational outcomes, such as: employees' lower overall satisfaction, challenging work and integrity, and no support for innovation (Parker et al., 1995). In other words, expecting individuals to embrace change where the organization is perceived as rigid and totalitarian may not be as effective as ideological differences that inevitably create opposing ideas and trigger a change resistance (e.g. Repovš et al., 2019) among groups of individuals. This threat perception leads towards a polarized "us versus them" perception (Goldman & Hogg, 2016) in the organization, creating meaningful space for creating "resistance leaders."

Leaders' political ideologies play an important role in decision-making processes (e.g. Chin et al., 2021) and belonging to an ideological stream plays an essential part in defining an individual's identity (Hogg & Reid, 2006). This consideration of social categorization and belonging to a group heavily relies on the context of social identity (Reicher, 2004) where domination and resistance depend on how powerful a certain ideological position is. Depending on an individual's interpretation, adopting organizational change also can be observed as a question of freedom of choice, because individuals may not have a choice in voicing opinions about change (e.g. Hope, 2010). The modality of various interpretative schemes mediates discourse between individuals, where discourse can be observed as an influential vehicle that affects an individual's interpretations and actions (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). When observing political discourse within the organizational change context, advocating for change may be as important as advocating against the existing status quo. Disassociation tactics and the antithesis approach shift attention towards the future (Cheney, 1983), ultimately leading towards individuals favoring future outlooks in favor of change (Chreim, 2002).

Communication drives connections between group members, and connections drive results (van Vuuren & Elving, 2008). Two-sided messages that allow space for voicing opinions and attitudes are more persuasive than one-sided messages similar to totalitarian perspectives (Allen, 1991), which suggests that more discourse builds the illusion of choice. When faced with unfavorable and turbulent circumstances, politicians rely on hope as a powerful tool for painting a more favorable and idealized future (Fenton, 2008). This ideal is easier to make sense of, thus, it comes as no surprise that Steigenberger (2015) mentioned hope as a powerful predictor of organizational change success. The aforementioned interdisciplinary perspective concludes that storytelling engages the audience, stimulates identification, and ensures the intended message is understood (e.g. Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Vaara et al., 2016). Understanding intended messages particularly is important in the consumer behavior literature, because accepting novel products depends on creating awareness of needs that do not exist yet.

2.4 Selected insights on influential behavior from consumer psychology

Benefit perception is one of the key research interests in consumer psychology literature. If change recipients are considered internal customers or recipients of change, insights from consumer psychology can illuminate additional perceptions of organizational change. Negative perceptions of new initiatives and change agents leading change can be compared to innovation diffusion in marketing literature (e.g. Strang & Soule, 1998). The notable innovation diffusion curve speaks volumes about the small percentages of innovators and early adopters who help spread positive impressions of a certain innovation before the broad audience accepted it. This especially true when employees are perceived as internal customers adopting a new product or service (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993), thus obtaining the role of strategy implementation vehicles (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Such an approach suggests that negativity and resistance towards the change initiative is present, because the need for a new product or service is enforced and not created meaningfully among employees (Ahmed

et al., 2003). Much has been said in terms of storytelling in marketing, from raising awareness about a certain product or service to generating a need for such consumption (e.g. Pulizzi, 2012). Woodside et al. (2008) additionally emphasized the importance of creating human elements and adding drama into stories to encourage emotional reactions from consumers, similar to Aaker (1997) efforts in creating brand personalities. Behaviors of leaders acting as influencers can be observed through different lenses, one of which is the position of a human brand, an umbrella term that refers to any well-known persona who is the subject of (internal) marketing communications efforts (Thomson, 2006).

Consumer behavior literature recognizes different human brands, including professional athletes and politicians who brand themselves (Scammell, 2015) to stimulate recipient attachment and influence critical masses through perceived trust and credibility (Sung & Kim, 2010). Carefully managed communication patterns and a prebuilt image of the human brand aid organizations in leveraging the recipient's attachment strength towards the human brand, effectively influencing their behavior (Thomson, 2006). The end result is word-of-mouth advocating and behavioral change, depending on the human brand's perceived values (Carlson & Donavan, 2013). Word of mouth can also be a form of influential communication, especially when structured in the form of a compelling narrative or story, as Delgadillo and Escalas (2004) suggested. Synthesizing the aforementioned insights, crafting a compelling story, and highlighting the benefits of organizational change could facilitate awareness building among organizational change recipients. This storytelling approach, focused on the perceptions of benefits, could promote identification with the ambiguous environment of the future by reducing uncertainty and perceptions of threat. A similar approach can be identified with religious and corporate cults, where followers embrace the rapidly changing environment without questioning leadership decisions.

2.5 Selected insights on influential behavior from religious studies

We take this a step further and explore how religious leaders exert influential behavior. Cults are constantly changing and create a turbulent environment, thus representing an interesting case study of change leadership. Cults represent religious innovation (Campbell, 1978; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980) and their nature is chaotic, characterized by constant change (Bainbridge & Stark, 1979). This is unlike

sects, which rely on mainstream religion for regulation and governance (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980), exposing individuals to a fairly stable surrounding dependent on dogmatic statements and sacralization (Harrison et al., 2009). In cults, individuals adhere to constant change the cult leader drives through an intricate mechanism of social control, colloquially called "brain control." Lalich (2004) demystified this process and highlighted how cultural forms and norms behind the central ideology steer individuals' behavior by limiting their thought process, because individuals who do not adhere to proposed behavior are ostracized by the remaining group members who are dedicated towards achieving the desired goal (e.g. Singer & Lalich, 1995). Cult members, similar to all other religious groups, perceive themselves through group membership. The main difference from other secular groups is in the epistemological approach towards understanding "the unseen," which is achieved by listening to the leader, i.e. believing (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Interestingly, some authors argue that corporate cults exist today (Tourish & Pinnington, 2002; Tourish & Vatcha, 2005) and demonstrate similar destructive behaviors as religious cults without the religious content (Kulik & Alarcon, 2016). These types of leadership efforts essentially can be perceived as a carefully engineered sensegiving process, aimed to limit the freedom of sensemaking directions that group members can experience. Effectively, this destructive leadership behavior is an extreme case of managing the ambiguity of change, connecting the aforementioned interdisciplinary insights. Elements of developmental psychology and attachment development can be seen in cults, as can the use of symbols and emotionally charged narratives, political behavior, and a general focus on members' sense of utility. Therefore, we argue that regardless of the archetypical role a change leader might embody, persuasive narratives will play a vital role in the actual mobilization of the aforementioned critical mass required to propel organizational change forward.

3 Theoretical congruence from divergent perspectives

Change leaders' persuasive communication is subjectively effective. Hogg (2001) deconstructs a leader's influence as the arisen appearance of being the most prototypical member within a specific group, because members of that group cognitively and behaviorally conform to that prototypical gradient. This is simply because individuals define themselves through group participation and are willing to embrace ideas that will increase the

appearance of belonging to that particular group (Hogg & Reid, 2006). In that sense, information easily becomes influence and begins gathering like-minded group members. The process of organizational change, regardless of its form, involves a movement in an organizational entity over time (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), which can be characterized as a change in circumstances that interrupts well-practiced patterns of acceptable and desired behavior (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Despite organizational change usually being triggered as an effort to improve competitiveness through efficiency or effectiveness goals (Birkinshaw et al., 2008), change is often compared to grief (e.g. Zell, 2003); therefore, it comes as no surprise that such strong emotional reactions are followed by strong resistance to change (Oreg, 2003).

Strong emotional reactions such as stress, fear, and anxiety naturally result from experiencing ambiguity change causes, triggering the human tendency to discover answers and thus relieve stress and anxiety levels (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Once such answers are not easily available or do not exist, individuals tend to create pluralistic ignorance, or their own sense of reality, which is sometimes completely opposite of the actual reality (Weick, 1988). After the initial change is triggered and both emotional and cognitive processing is complete, the individual seeks meaning of the changed surroundings. This desire to identify is predicated on the search for meaning, where meaning predicts the strength of how desirable identification is (Chreim, 2002). Epitropaki et al. (2017) reduced the process of self-construal into two questions, which are inseparable from the environmental focus: (a) "Who am I in this situation?" and (b) "What should I do now?" Negotiating identification during organizational change is dependent of social identification, where perceived roles within the desired group act as a truly integrative force for commonly understood communication (Hogg & Reid, 2006). In this context, influencing could be perceived as the act of clarifying change dynamics and emphasizing the benefits that arise from such activities, thus alleviating behavioral uncertainties that arise during organizational change. In essence, this could be considered as sensemaking, a process of social construction in which an individual tries to understand key elements of the new organizational reality (e.g. Gioia et al., 1994; Rouleau, 2005). Naturally, sensemaking is a result of the sensegiving process essentially defined as the act of influencing the way others make sense of, or interpret, a certain surrounding and understand desirable behavioral patterns (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

3.1 Social cognitive theory as the overarching perspective of influential behavior

We argue that change agents' influential behavior across disciplines can be explained with commensurable theories. We base our argument on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) as the overarching theory of our model, which aims to explain how people regulate their behavior in social settings, relying on control and reinforcement. More specific, social cognitive theory distinguishes three models of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency in an effort to control desired behavior (Bandura, 2001b). Change leaders' role in this sense is to help construct, filter, frame, and create facticity (Hogg & Turner, 1987). Organizational change inevitably changes the workplace reality, which is where change agents help during the sensemaking process or "meaning construction" (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012). Weick (1995) highlighted that sensemaking was enactive of sensible environments, ongoing, driven by plausibility, social, and grounded in identity construction, suggesting that an individual would reconstruct their identity upon making sense of the new environment. This issue of identity construction remains a key problem, because individuals exposed to organizational change have to adapt their identity, or redefine how they perceive themselves within the organization to accommodate this new and changed reality.

Identity transitions through life and changing contexts, where individuals seek identity salience independent from specific contexts (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). This quest for sensemaking and defining oneself is particularly difficult during turbulent times when contexts change unexpectedly, exposing an individual to different types of perceived threats (Bandura, 1989). Apart from physical threats, individuals may also perceive identity threats, thus questioning their own capability to deal with such change. Some authors argue that even when defined within a specific context, identity is not a constant but a narrative: an evolving and integrative self-story that explains an individual's role in the present and the future (e.g. Berzonsky, 2011). Ashforth et al. (2008) tackled conceptual diversity of identity and identification by observing identification as a fuzzy set starting with the core of identity (self-definition, importance, and affect) and expanding this logic to identity-based behaviors. Observing the issue of sensemaking and identification during organizational change leads towards group membership and self-categorization. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) predicts behavior within a group, based on perceived status differences,

legitimacy, and the ability to change group membership. More specific, a change leader's primary goal should be to influence enough supporters to create a referent group, which would further influence the rest of the organization via social identification mechanisms. Among others, social identification leads to support for institutions that embody the identity and reinforces the antecedents of identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

3.2 The importance of social identity theory in sensemaking

Within the specific organizational change context, socialization and identity can be conceptualized as the formation of relational identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), which integrates person and role-based identities and different levels of self. Individual, interpersonal, and collective levels of self-represent a polyphony of epistemological paradigms and perspectives through which individuals make sense of their environment (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Identities are constructed through interaction (Weick, 1995); therefore, subjectively perceived relevant figures play an important role in fostering sensemaking and adapting self-schemas for individuals (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Self-schemas are defined as active, working structures and specific knowledge about the self within a context-specific domain (Epitropaki et al., 2017), which inevitably changes as that specific context changes. In turbulent and ambiguous circumstances, people have a natural tendency to seek proximity and comfort with other people, typically an authority figure (e.g. Mayseless, 2010). This sense-seeking behavior is similar to the parent–child relationship, where parents obtain the role of attachment figures responsible for alleviating stress and anxiety ambiguity causes (e.g. Berzonsky, 2011). The aforementioned suggests that change leaders serve a similar role as attachment figures during the emotionally intensive process of sensemaking during organizational change. Thus, change recipients turn to change leaders for additional resources during sensemaking and reinventing their self-schemas in an effort to gain a better understanding of newly desired behaviors and how their relational identity has changed.

Affective processes of sensemaking have been long studied and linked to organizational change (Bandura, 1989), and emotional reactions could be perceived as an input to an outcome of the sensemaking process (Steigenberger, 2015). Perceiving threats triggers emotional reactions. When these emotions are not processed and adequately dealt with, they can derail the sensemaking process (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Identity formation is a narrative and depends on personal perceptions combined with external perceptions, implying that the identity-forming cycle of enaction-selection-retention is constant just like change is (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). It is influenced with social expectations (Ashforth et al., 2007), which inevitably place additional emotional strains, where individuals with lower group positions experience higher levels of pressure to adapt their identity (Thoits, 1991).

3.3 Adult attachment formation during social identification triggered by sensegiving

Bowlby and Ainsworth (2013) attachment theory addresses early life experiences in developing functional attachment relationships with at least one functioning parent and how they impact relationships in adulthood. Proximity-seeking is a natural response to threat perception and the survival instinct (Mayseless & Popper, 2007), and depending on how certain threats are perceived, individuals experience different emotional stress levels and seek out different levels of proximity (Mayseless, 2010). Interestingly, attachment to parental figures is inherently flawed, because parents do not satisfy infants' every affective requirement in an effort to build their self-sufficiency (Mayseless & Popper, 2007). As a result of this flawed relationships, certain affective needs remain unmet and a desire for an ideal attachment figure is created, which in turn sets the foundation for an individual's attachment style (Coan, 2008). Parents as attachment figures and ultimate influencers affect how individuals confront identity-constructing dilemmas (Berzonsky, 2011), which also impacts the way a leader–follower relationship will be constructed (Yip et al., 2018). Similar to the parent–child relationship, intensive communication and daily interactions develop the leader–follower relationship (Harrell-Levy & Kerpelman, 2010). As interdependency increases during organizational change, interpersonal attraction develops, making an individual be perceived as a more valuable resource (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Seeking proximity in times of distress is a natural reaction (Mawson, 2005), because the calming effect of being close to attachment figures stimulates dopamine and reduces negative emotions and anxiety that panic or uncertainty causes (Coan, 2008). Individuals seek relatedness in their interpersonal relationships; therefore, leaders perceived as attachment figures can become idealized, depending on the combination of attachment styles (Davidovitz et al., 2007). For example, the leader's avoidant attachment

style leads to different issues in interactions regardless of the recipients' attachment style, while the leader's secure attachment style opens up space for a broad relationship-building cycle, regardless of the recipients' attachment style (Davidovitz et al., 2007; Yip et al., 2018). In general, anxiously attached individuals tend to be engaged in fewer functions and have lower needs for affiliation and support, which interferes with everyday relationships at work (Richards & Schat, 2011).

A stronger attachment to an individual suggests higher susceptibleness towards accepting novel information. Such intense attachments can occur when an individual is responsive to a person's needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (La Guardia et al., 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). During organizational change, an individual's need for affection closely resembles the parent–child relationship and determines to what extent the change leader as an attachment figure will be able to influence the change recipients' attitudes (Grady & Grady, 2013). Therefore, change leaders, as attachment figures, should leverage attachment and use ideological messages during the sensegiving process to address the change recipients' psychological needs and influence their identification process. Susceptibleness towards an attachment figure's attitudes and behaviors encourages identity modifications (Fransen et al., 2015; Harms, 2011) and identification with the narrative is one of the most efficient methods of persuasion (De Graaf, 2014), along with symbols and metaphors (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Kolar, 2012; Pondy et al., 1983).

4 Towards a narrative-based process model of change leaders' influential behavior

Organizational change is an emotionally intensive human experience. As change unfolds within the organization, it shifts the organization's existing ideology and working environment, and both individuals and groups have to adapt to this change. We aim to address the ultimate dilemma: Is it the chicken or the egg in terms of organizational change? In other words, are change leaders' efforts a reaction to the external pressure, or a proactive internal effort to affect the external environment? Regardless of the scenario, we argue that a change leader inevitably has to experience personally this change as a recipient, before influencing others. In fact, we argue that the change leader and the change recipient will experience the full emotional range of organizational change with primary and secondary appraisal as Liu and Perrewe (2005) suggested, but at different stages and with different intensities.

In terms of individual change, both the change leader and future change recipients go through a similar process of sensemaking. On the other hand, in terms of group change, change leaders are responsible for the sensegiving process. This linked process consists of envisioning, signaling, revisioning, and energizing (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). We argue that individual sensemaking of organizational change acts as a prerequisite for meaningful group sensemaking of organizational change, where the role of being a change leader is fluid and changes as change adoption increases. Sensemaking is an emotional process, triggered by some form disrupting the status quo or stable flow of activities within a certain environment, which in turn arouses the autonomic nervous system (Weick, 1995). Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) highlighted that shared meaning and emotion facilitate a helpful and adaptive sensemaking process. Furthermore, Maitlis et al. (2013) argued that emotions signal the need and provide the energy that fuels sensemaking, and that emotions make sensemaking a more solitary or interpersonal process. Therefore, we build on Liu and Perrewe (2005) emotional and cognitive model by following the idea of reciprocity and sequential nature of sensegiving and sensemaking mechanics (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), while expanding our propositions with interdisciplinary insights on influential behavior.

4.1 Leader as an individual making sense of organizational change

As organizational change unfolds, ideological settings change either partially or completely and an individual can belong to a prochange group or a member of the change-resistant group. Generally speaking, an ideology represents a highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system that seeks to offer a unique answer to the problems of social action and is an initial stage in developing a system of cultural meanings (Swidler, 1986). This aligns ideas, beliefs, and a commonly shared sense of purpose within a certain organization or social structure (e.g. Chin et al., 2021). A new ideological setting may imply a different set of values, which in turn impact how the new organizational culture will shape expected behaviors through cultural norms. Gehman et al. (2013) depicted this "values work" mechanism in four separate phases, from resolving cases of concern to explaining how future behavioral uncertainties will be resolved. Such embodying aims to make the recipients' sensemaking process as easy as possible, minimizing room for errors. As a result, change recipients are exposed to certain types of ideological messages, which may or may not necessarily inspire
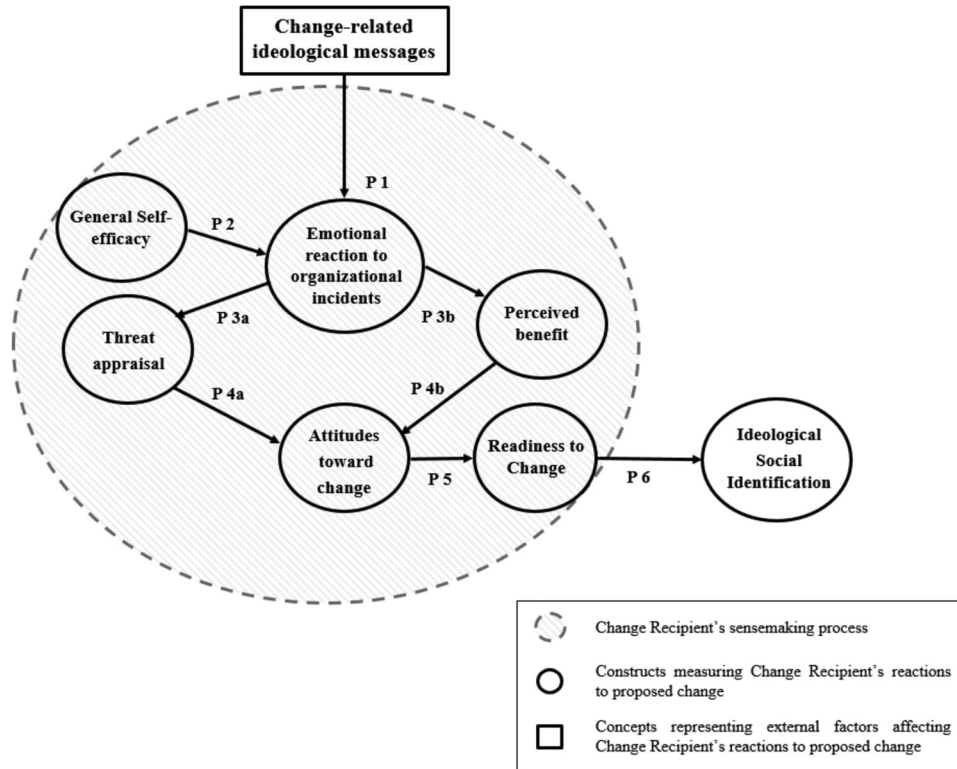
Fig. 1. A process view of a change leader's sensemaking mechanics (Change Internalization).

change adoption (e.g. Grant & Hofmann, 2011). In the case of the initial change leader's sensemaking, the sensegiving process results from ideological changes and respective cultural norms. The initial change recipient becomes the future change leader, by interpreting and making sense from contextual cues, instead of receiving direct ideological messages from the respective change leader, as is the case in Fig. 2. This perspective furthermore highlights the importance of change leadership in organizational change, despite the fairly recent emergence of followership literature directions. A process view of a change leader's sensemaking (change internalization) is displayed in Fig. 1.

Ideologies require formalization. New ideological settings alter the existing ideology. Therefore, behavioral expectations alter accordingly in order to complement the ongoing change. Among others, the sensemaking process relies on manifestations of organizational culture to convey such behavioral expectations. Additionally, the change leader will be exposed to ideological messages aimed at conveying the importance of change and arising benefits for the organization. To make sense of contextual changes and how to behave in the newly formed environment, the change leader seeks cues on behavioral expectations from available information sources, considering forms and norms of organizational culture.

Proposition 1: The initial change recipient (future change leader) relies on social learning in making sense of organizational change without being exposed to the sensegiving process from a respective change leader. Specifically, the change leader's own sensemaking process is essential for the construction of reality which will be the foundation for future sensegiving during organizational change.

4.1.1 Change recipient's self-efficacy affects emotional reactions to organizational change

Individual differences affect change perception. In terms of predicting individuals' readiness to change, general self-efficacy is mentioned as a relevant dimension (e.g. Bandura, 2001a). Self-efficacy is defined as belief in one's capability to mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to address newly formed demands within a specific context (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Depending on how an individual perceives their own capabilities to deal with the aforementioned demands affects how emotionally intensive a certain environmental event will be interpreted. The lower an individual's self-efficacy is, the more stress and anxiety will be experienced during change (Bandura, 1989). Individuals' identities change through different experiences, particularly negative ones believed to build resilience (Weick, 1988), where individuals

with higher self-efficacy expose themselves to more challenging situations. More challenging situations create a stronger stimulus, which triggers the need to revise existing self-schemes (Epitropaki et al., 2017) and internalize identity-related modifications (Weick, 2020). More specifically, individuals feel confident about themselves when enacting particular roles, and generally feel that they are "real" or authentic when their person identities are verified, where self-efficacy is associated more closely with the behavioral enactment of said identities (Stets & Burke, 2000). Chen et al. (2001) constructed a trait-like general self-efficacy scale covering Bandura's original conceptualization primarily focusing on the level of magnitude (how difficult an assignment will be) and strength (the certainty of successfully dealing with the task). This perspective is particularly interesting given how certain studies highlight gender and age irrelevance when predicting individual readiness to change (e.g. Kunze et al., 2013). Interestingly, lower levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of self-esteem, which is connected with the intention to leave a certain social group or perceive oneself as not being good enough to be a group member (Ethier & Deaux, 1994).

Proposition 2: Individuals with lower general self-efficacy are more likely than individuals with higher general self-efficacy to perceive organizational change as a negative experience.

4.1.2 Emotional reactions affect the threat-benefit perception of organizational change

Organizational change is an emotional experience that triggers the revised conception of the organization (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). This subjective sensemaking involves interpretation in conjunction with action—not just "pure" cognitive interpretation processes (Gioia et al., 1994). Internalizing available information triggers emotional reactions and is an essential part of sensemaking, before conscious cognition (Bandura, 2001b). New information absorption depends on existing knowledge, creating both intended and unintended meanings (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), which further highlights the importance of persuasive narratives in organizational change. Emotions influence how events are perceived (Maitlis et al., 2013), and Weick (1988) highlighted how intensive emotions affect the sensemaking process during turbulent and crisis situations. Zell (2003) mentioned how organizational change resembled the Kubler–Ross five-stage model of grief, implying change recipients' strong negative emotional reactions. One way to measure emotional reactions to organizational incidents is to link them to organizational goals or expectations, suggesting potential experienced reactions in a positive or negative sentiment (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998).

Proposition 3: Individuals who perceive organizational incidents as a negative experience are more likely to perceive lower benefits and higher threat levels of proposed change than individuals who perceive organizational incidents as a positive experience.

4.1.3 Change recipients form customer-alike attitudes on organizational change benefits

Emotional reactions precede cognitive reactions, and therefore affect how a certain occurrence will be perceived (e.g. Hay et al., 2021; Liu & Perrewe, 2005). This antecedent relationship suggests that expectations are a key element in creating meaning (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). In terms of sensemaking, there is a significant ambivalence between belief and doubt, effectively impacting how benefits and threats are perceived (Weick, 2020). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that utilizing hope is a powerful predictor of organizational change success (Steigenberger, 2015). An idealized future promises greater benefits than risks from threats, motivating individuals to pursue action. Drzensky et al. (2012) reported that benefit perception played an important role in predicting readiness to change, and some studies suggest that creating mutual benefits (the win–win perception of organizational change) is essential in ensuring successful implementation. McMillen and Fisher (1998) observed the perceived benefits through eight subscales, including lifestyle changes, material gain, community closeness, and increases in self-efficacy. On the other hand, humans have a natural tendency to resist change and perceive it as threat (e.g. Oreg, 2003). These threats may not necessarily be perceived as physical danger, but as a threat to an individual's identity or self-esteem (e.g. Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Cognitively interpreting these emotional reactions results in certain regularities of an individual's interpretation of the environment (Wicker, 1969), forming attitudes towards change, which cover a wide array of positive and negative statements about change (Vakola et al., 2013; Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Depending on how these attitudes are formed, an individual will more, or less, likely embrace change.

Proposition 4: Employees who perceive higher threat and lower benefit from change are more likely to form positive attitudes towards change than those employees who perceive lower threat and higher benefit.

4.1.4 Individual's readiness to change relies on attitudes and encourages social identification

Attitudes about change affect individual readiness to change. More precisely, readiness to change measures to what extent individuals feel ready to accept the new reality resulting from change (Repovš et al., 2019). Organizational change requires support from various organizational characteristics (Eby et al., 2000) as well as depends on established trust levels between employees and change leaders (Vakola et al., 2013), where trust and attachment to the change leader facilitate the sensemaking process (Harms, 2011). Similarly, the other side of the change adoption spectrum involves individual resistance to change resulting from cognitive rigidity, lack of psychological resilience, reluctance to give up old habits, etc. (Oreg, 2003). Overall, individual readiness to change affects employees' self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, which are essential parts of change agency and the subjective interpretation of change (Bandura, 2001a), effectively impacting the sensemaking process.

Proposition 5: Employees who form positive attitudes towards change are more likely to perceive higher levels of individual readiness to change than those employees who form negative attitudes towards change.

Ideologies depend on like-minded people to succeed. Different levels of individual readiness to change among employees inevitably cause workplace logic conflicts, causing irreconcilability, ambiguity, and contradictions among employees both individually and interpersonally (Malhotra et al., 2021). As different perceptions of threats and benefits affect attitudes towards organizational change, different narratives affect individuals' sensemaking process and the general outcomes. Dealing with threats also can be perceived as an identity-forming event connected with self-efficacy, crucial for personal development and a part of the cognitive process individuals experience during sensemaking (Bandura, 1989). Identity-relevant experiences are events that threaten or enhance an identity the individual values highly (Thoits, 1991). Further, an essential part in negotiating social identity in changing contexts is responding to different threats (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). During self-categorization and social identity renegotiation within the newly formed contextual surrounding, an individual adapts self-schemas in an effort to create a new self-story (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Contextual changes alter an organizational ideology and individuals tend to self-place themselves as members or opponents of ideological streams (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Devine (2015) proposed a measure of ideological social identity as a combination of Mael

and Tetrick (1992) identification with a psychological group or organization (IDPG) scale and ideological self-placement approaches, suggesting that the presence of opposing ideological streams can be observed outside national politics. An individual's willingness to identify ideologically as a member of the mainstream or an opposing group effectively marks the end of the sensemaking process and determines whether an individual will embrace or reject change stemming from this newly formed meaning. This process is constant, subjective, and ever-changing because the environment changes and triggers organizational change.

Proposition 6: Individuals with higher readiness to change are more likely than those with lower readiness to change to ideologically identify with the prochange social group within the organization.

4.2 The leader as an individual giving sense to organizational change for change recipients

Change leaders are the initial change recipients. Following the change leader's initial sensemaking process, organizational change requires mobilizing change recipients to sustain change momentum and ensure change adoption. On the other hand, sustaining change adoption is also about understanding how multiple resistance manifestations affect change adoption (Alcadipani et al., 2018) and how to address cynicism fueling resistance to change (van Vuuren & Elving, 2008). In its essence, change leadership is more about future-making than it is about making sense of the past (Boje, 2012), where the change leader introduces revised interpretative schemes or systems of meaning through the sensegiving process (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Systems of meaning include using symbols as emotionally triggering segments of visual learning (Bandura, 2001a), which energizes myths and other forms of organizational culture aimed at improving an individual's understanding of shared experiences towards a shared meaning (Boyce, 1996). These symbolic actions include storytelling (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) as well as emphasize the importance of maintaining a follower focus aimed at effectively managing the symbolic interactionism involved in the sensemaking process (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Closely connected to the interpretation of available cultural forms and norms, contextual framing gains force from cultural resonance (Werner & Cornelissen, 2014), while on the other hand, narratives draw on the power of sequencing resulting from managerial efforts to structure, compress, and plot a change process into a storyline (Logemann et al., 2019). The aforementioned perspectives suggest that
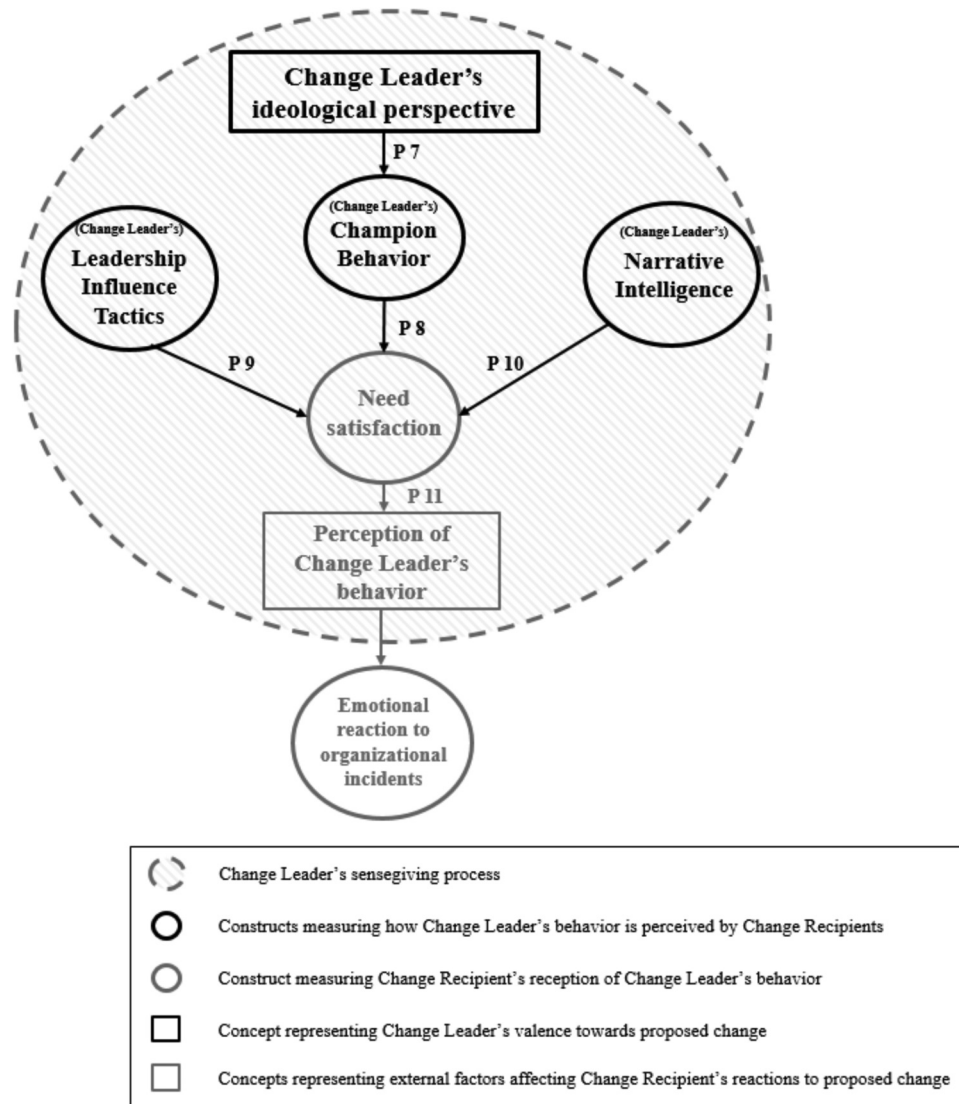
Fig. 2. A process view of a change leader's sensegiving mechanics (Change Externalization).

the sensegiving process involves a skilled creation of a narrative that aims to influence change recipients' sensemaking process of the newly changed ideology through utilizing emotionally engaging symbols. We argue that a change leader represents the embodiment of this ideological adjustments and initiates the sensegiving process after making sense of the ongoing organizational change (similar to Nishii & Paluch, 2018). More precisely, this process depicted in Fig. 2 is initiated after the change leader adjusts their own ideological social identification.

Proposition 7: Change leaders who socially identify with the changed organizational ideology are more likely to exhibit higher levels of champion behavior than change leaders who do not socially identify with the changed organizational ideology.

4.2.1 Champion behavior affects the change leader's perception as an attachment figure

Successful change leaders demonstrate champion behavior. They are expected to inspire and mobilize change adoption across different organizational levels by utilizing available resources and intensively advocating for change in a meaningful way. Championing also involves participating in the goal-formation process, explaining, teaching, and motivating others to become involved, as well as dealing with opposing forces that encourage change resistance (Howell & Higgins, 1990a). Although generally speaking, champions informally emerge in an organization (e.g. Roberts, 1988; Škerlavaj et al., 2016) and decisively contribute with enthusiasm and advocating for change, formally assigned change leaders can also manifest champion behavior. Interestingly,

team-level innovation was weaker when high levels of supportive supervision were present, suggesting that champion behavior needs to be balanced in application (Krapež Trošt et al., 2016). Champion behavior includes: (a) creating a clear vision that emphasizes benefits, (b) displaying enthusiasm about change, (c) demonstrating commitment towards utilizing change, and (d) involving others in supporting change adoption (Howell et al., 2005). Acting as a true champion relates perceived competence to perceived personality traits (Zhang et al., 2020) and positions the change leader as an attachment figure, providing comfort and anxiety relief in times of turbulence or distress that change caused (Mawson, 2005).

Proposition 8: Change leaders who exhibit higher levels of champion behavior are more likely to encourage higher levels of psychological need satisfaction among change recipients than change leaders who exhibit lower levels of champion behavior.

4.2.2 Leadership influence tactics affect the change leader's perception as an attachment figure

Successful change leaders utilize different influence tactics. Although change leaders represent the embodiment of proposed change, successful influential efforts require adaptability. Sensegiving is a process of influencing contextual interpretations during the sensemaking process (Luscher et al., 2008), thus naturally the change leader's effort plays an important role in forming attitudes about change and fostering social identification. Yukl and Tracey (1992) conceptualized leadership influence tactics as attempts to influence the target person to comply with an unspecified request, to carry out a task, to provide assistance, to support or implement a proposed change, or to do a personal favor for the agent, essentially providing an extension of demonstrated champion behavior. Such influential attempts can affect how an individual perceives the change leader, or forms attachment with a perceived and sometimes idealized human brand (Thomson, 2006). Leadership influence tactics among others include (a) rational persuasion, (b) inspirational appeal, (c) apprising, (d) ingratiation, and (e) consultation, where negative influential behaviors are excluded (Yukl et al., 2008). Champion behavior represents a prosocial effort to improve or provide a benefit for the organization, which is why typical dark triadic behaviors are not relevant for our understanding of the underlying mechanism of influence (e.g. lying, distortion of evidence, bribes, blackmail).

Proposition 9: Change leaders who exhibit higher levels of leadership influence tactics are more likely to encourage higher levels of psychological need satisfaction among change recipients than change leaders who exhibit lower levels of leadership influence tactics.

4.2.3 Narrative intelligence affects the change leader's perception as an attachment figure

Successful change leaders are storytellers. Regardless of utilized leadership influence tactics, change leaders intensively communicate with change recipients. Communications drive connections, and connections drive results (van Vuuren & Elving, 2008), while at the same time, connections may cause emotional fatigue when underutilized. Emotions play an essential role in triggering, shaping, and concluding sensemaking (Maitlis et al., 2013), where the use of language in creating compelling narratives allows creating organizational realities that will be subjected to interpretation (Chreim, 2002). In developmental psychology, a narrative is considered as a way in which humans make sense of the world (Bruner, 1991) and narrative intelligence is the ability to tell the story of an individual's life and the surrounding environment (e.g. Randall, 1999). Linking the emotional power of narratives with sensemaking, Bers (2002) argued that identity-forming questions are answered by using different types of narratives: personal stories, popular tales, and cultural myths. The same can be applied to organizational realities as previously elaborated. Conceptualizing narrative intelligence, Pishghadam et al. (2011) proposed: (a) emplotment, (b) characterization, (c) narration, (d) generation, and (e) thematization, thus suggesting that effective storytellers create emotionally engaging stories utilizing said skills. Change leaders' compelling narratives can engage change recipients through the mechanism of narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000), which may help alleviate anxiety and negative emotions as demonstrated in bibliotherapy (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010).

Proposition 10: Change leaders who exhibit higher levels of narrative intelligence are more likely to encourage higher levels of psychological need satisfaction among change recipients than change leaders who exhibit lower levels of narrative intelligence.

4.2.4 Change leaders embody organizational change as human brands

Change recipients conclude organizational change. Although change leaders can be perceived as initial triggers of organizational change, the interdependency of the dyadic relationship of change agency remains the key unit of observation. Agency should be about shifting possibilities of change entailed in

reconfiguring boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in enacting a causal structure (Barad, 2007), where change leaders suggest intervention points. This interdependency also affects identification during organizational change, where the change leaders' role tends to shift when a change recipient starts to demonstrate champion behaviors and advocate for change (e.g. Epitropaki et al., 2017). Leaders' calming effect during organizational change and change recipients' natural inclination to seek proximity in times of distress (Maitlis et al., 2013; Mawson, 2005) forms a dyadic attachment. Regardless of how different attachment styles form more or less productive and effective relationships with secure attachment styles being the ideal (Davidovitz et al., 2007), satisfying psychological needs positively relates to attachment (e.g. La Guardia et al., 2000). Attachment styles depend on early life experiences that are inherently flawed (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013; Davidovitz et al., 2007), making the principle of satisfying psychological needs helpful in understanding why change leaders tend to become idealized or antagonized as role models (Popper & Amit, 2009). This also clarifies how human brands influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions (Thomson, 2006). Deci and Ryan (1995) measured autonomy, relatedness, and competence as fundamental psychological needs that affect individuals' self-determination, i.e. their motivation behind pursuing certain actions. More precisely, (a) autonomy concerns people's feelings of volition, agency, and initiative (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1995); (b) relatedness concerns feelings connected with and cared for by another (e.g. Ryan, 1993); and (c) competence concerns people's feelings of curiosity, challenge, and efficacy (e.g. Deci et al., 1975). Sensible change leaders form dyadic relationships where they respond in ways that promote a change recipient's experienced satisfaction of these basic psychological needs, thus alleviating some of the anxiety and stress organizational change causes.

Proposition 11: Change recipients who exhibit higher levels of psychological need satisfaction are more likely to positively relate to a change leader's behavior and experience positive emotional reactions to organizational incidents than change recipients who exhibit lower levels of psychological need satisfaction.

We argue the only difference between a change leader's and change recipient's sensemaking process is in the sensegiving phase. Thus, we conclude that the change recipient's sensemaking process, which starts with emotional reactions to organizational change, remains identical to the previously elaborated process for the initial change leader.

5 Discussion

Our interdisciplinary findings suggest important theoretical implications for future organizational change research, in the hope of broadening and advancing the discussion with new insights. First, we propose that organizational change is an ongoing and dynamic state with tangible triggers but intangible endings that effectively manifest as minor or major changes in organizational ideology. Regardless of scale, organizational change naturally creates a polarized perspective, where either benefit perception or threat perception prevails within a certain group of employees. This results in the formation of a prochange group and a change resistant group that advocate for their ideological settings through carefully drafted narratives. Depending on how these groups are perceived within the organization, change recipients will decide which social group represents their perception of benefits and threats stemming from proposed change. By introducing this perspective on organizational change, we open additional space for interdisciplinary insights related to ideological settings, ideological messages, and overall ideological identification.

Second, we build on the idea of the storytelling organization (e.g. Boje, 2012) by enriching this narrative with ideas from internal and external consumer behavior and identity adaptation (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2003; Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Thomson, 2006). We argue that change leaders become human brands and thus grow into a larger organizational change narrative, both as narrators responsible for sensegiving and as characters who experience sensemaking. This suggests a change leader's role follows the sensegiving and sensemaking cycles in the organization (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), is fluid, and changes as organizational change unfolds among change recipients. The general outcome of narratively intelligent change leadership is the facilitation of social identification through emotional engagement, where change recipients can make sense of organizational change with minimum negative emotions.

While our narrative-based process model suggests a prosocial orientation of change leadership where change leaders aim to create a positive change without coercion and destructive leadership influence tactics, there are potentially negative aspects worth mentioning. Change leaders scoring high on narrative intelligence should be able to craft compelling stories that encourage identity transportation, which could in turn affect how individuals adapt

their self-schemas and identity. Overusing this skill could encourage change adoption at the expense of change recipients' personal identity and induce negative emotions that effectively affect their wellbeing. Change leaders scoring high on champion behavior could be pursuing change adoption by any means necessary, closely resembling machiavellianistic behavior. While it is easy to exclude destructive leadership influence tactics such as blackmail, coercion, pressure and legitimizing, overutilization of desired leadership influence tactics can also turn destructive. For example, prioritizing change adoption over change recipients' wellbeing could turn a positive influence tactic of "inspirational appeal" into a manipulative tactic. And observing how religious cults operate illustrates how these narratively intelligent change leaders excessively utilize prosocial influence tactics disregarding their followers' wellbeing. Expanding this insight with the phenomenon of limiting rationality through the corrective mechanism of social norms within a cultist group depicts a specifically abusive context although portrayed through socially desirable behaviors instead of being directly destructive to followers. Interestingly, similar behaviors have been identified in corporate cults, such as Enron, as mentioned in the chapter focused on interdisciplinary perspectives. This furthermore highlights the importance of incorporating ethical guidelines into organizational change programs, as excessive utilization of desired aspects of change leadership, storytelling and persuasive communication can easily result in undesired outcomes.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

Our conceptual paper aimed to provide interdisciplinary perspectives of storytelling as an operationalization of the sensegiving process, in an effort to enrich the existing understanding of organizational change. Predominantly, we corroborate the importance of social-cognitive theory (Weick, 2020), more precisely the importance of the sensemaking-sensegiving mechanism during organizational change in an effort to minimize organizational change failure. We suggest a commensurable theoretical perspective of organizational change that combines: (a) social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) as the overarching foundation for the triggers of organizational change; (b) adult attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013) as the foundation for the mediating mechanisms of organizational change; and (c) social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) as the desired outcome of organizational change.

This theoretical framework suggests that change recipients utilize social learning in order to make sense of ongoing change, and rely on change leaders to provide cues of desired behavior. During this sensegiving-sensemaking exchange between the change leader and change recipients, change leaders serve the role of being attachment figures during turbulent times, where different attachment style combinations condition different relationship quality. The end result of change leaders is to encourage the formation of a prochange social identity, where change recipients want to identify with the prochange group that emphasizes perceived benefits over perceived threats from proposed change.

Additionally, our narrative-based process model advances core ideas suggested by Battilana and Casciaro (2012), further explored through the paradigm of power in their latest work (Battilana & Casciaro, 2021), as we connect aforementioned commensurable theoretical perspectives. We propose that the utilization of storytelling and perception of change leaders as attachment figures are one of many influential mechanisms that enable influencing to occur. We observe the dyad of change leader and change recipient and argue that the change leader's influence depends on the extent to which the change leader is perceived as an attachment figure. To meaningfully influence this interpersonal perception, a change leader who exhibits a certain level of champion behavior (e.g. Howell et al., 2005) can use leadership influence tactics (e.g. Yukl & Tracey, 1992) and narrative intelligence (e.g. Pishghadam et al., 2011) to influence the extent to which champion behavior is perceived as beneficial.

Our paper shifts the well-established perspective of sensemaking within the field of organizational behavior, emphasizing the importance of sensegiving during organizational change. More specifically, we highlight the role of storytelling in creating compelling narratives about change for change recipients, but also the importance of positioning the change leader within the narrative. Change leaders can intervene meaningfully during the sensegiving process of organizational change, and thus affect the way change recipients make sense of the altered ideological framework within the organization.

5.2 Practical implications

Our propositions suggest interdisciplinary perspectives on the underlying mechanism of influence, with a greater focus on the process, unlike the majority of the available literature focused on the sensemaking process of organizational change. In the modern era of social media influencers and the rapidly growing democratization of power, perception becomes reality. Therefore, we argue that organizations could use

some of these interdisciplinary insights to empower their leaders and thereby reduce the failure rate of organizational change.

First, the benefits arising from organizational change need to be clearly presented to all change recipients in an emotionally engaging manner of internal marketing, rather than presenting change as an urgent activity with no choice but to comply (e.g. Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). This approach is consistent with Liu and Perrewe (2005) suggestions of primary and secondary appraisal with associated emotional responses as well as suggestions of compelling narratives (e.g. Woodside et al., 2008) and persuasive argumentation (e.g. Tormala & Petty, 2002). Second, change leaders are the face of organizational change. They act as human brands that influence attitudes by leveraging attachment (Thomson, 2006) and leading by example (e.g. Howell & Higgins, 1990b). By building this metanarrative of organizational change and the change leader before actual change management efforts take place, change recipients will begin evaluating the change leader's personal competence with a positive example.

Finally, storytelling plays an important role in the emotional engagement of change recipients during the sensegiving process and therefore should be used in a meaningful and contextualized manner (e.g. Brown et al., 2009). Organizations that tell stories are more successful in conveying meaning and encourage individuals to negotiate their social identity, ensuring a more enjoyable and less stressful sensemaking process.

5.3 Directions for future research

This conceptual paper introduces interdisciplinary perspectives. Therefore, a variety of directions for future research emerge with the goal of achieving parsimonious conclusions. First, our narrative-based process model considers the most cited research articles within the Web of Science, covering developmental psychology, linguistics, political science, consumer psychology, and even religious studies as examples of extremely turbulent environment adopting change. As an outcome of this research, we have identified the social cognitive theory as the overarching and foundation for our narrative-based model. Additionally, we have identified the social identity theory and adult attachment theory as commensurable theories.

Future research may include different articles within identical research fields or event different research fields altogether, thus introducing varying theoretical perspectives into the conversation, e.g. our propositions are a result of the aforementioned literature research covering systematic literature reviews and empirical papers. Surely, our propositions should be tested empirically to validate how emotional valence affects threat and benefit perception with individuals. One research venue could be to explore how suggested constructs are perceived by change leaders and change recipients, thus empirically testing stated propositions. Analytic approach such as PROCESS could help identify psychological need satisfaction as the mediator or narrative intelligence as the moderator of proposed relationships. Another research venue could be to explore a multilevel approach and test emerging effects on individual, group and organizational levels with sufficiently wide samples on observed levels. When it comes to researching narratives during organizational change, qualitative research immediately comes to mind. By interviewing change leaders or change recipients, certain specific elements of stories could be identified as important or emerging archetypes addressing roles and challenges during thematic analysis of organizational change. Mixing these perspectives could be particularly interesting and informing, as testing conceptual relationships and enriching them with qualitative insights in various mixed method research designs could open up novel theoretical insights.

Second, additional change leader's effect on organizational change perception could be investigated by focusing more on coercion and change leaders' dark triadic personality traits. More specifically, whether the presence of dark triadic personality traits makes an impact on what leadership influence tactics are utilized and how such change leaders are perceived by change recipients in different organizational contexts. For example, narcissistic personality types may be perceived as more compelling change leaders, whereas psychopathic personality types may be perceived as less successful storytellers due to their lack of empathy which is considered as an important element of narratives. Altogether, the presence of specific dimensions of the dark triad could be helpful for practitioners in terms of planning their change agent networks for future projects.

Additionally, our model is not primarily focused on planned organizational change and allows for emergent organizational change that change leaders drive without formal authority. Future research surely will identify additional space for meaningful change interventions and bring us closer towards a holistic understanding of influential behavior.

6 Conclusion

Organizational change is a complex and emotionally intense human endeavor. The human factor

plays an essential role in the results of organizational change. Therefore, it is not surprising that a variety of approaches have been explored to date, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary findings. Our narrative-based process model synthesizes these findings and highlights the ways in which interconnected findings from different research areas advance the understanding of the mechanisms of change agents' influence. We have identified a common theoretical foundation in the interdisciplinary literature from which we derived our conclusions, with the social cognitive theory as the overarching theoretical foundation, and the social identity theory and adult attachment theory as the auxiliary ones.

First, interdisciplinary perspectives view organizational change as an ongoing and dynamic process of sensegiving and sensemaking, which changes the organizational ideology. Ideological change relies on ideological messages that often lack emotional appeal, and it often draws on social norms to ensure ideological compliance. Second, change recipients act as consumers, but the expected benefits of using the advocated product or service are not presented. When benefits are not perceived, threat perceptions increase, further complicating the already emotionally intense sensemaking experience. Third, change leaders are attachment figures during the ambiguity of organizational change; change leaders serve as attachment figures, as change recipients seek proximity to mitigate negative emotional reactions that social identity adjustment causes. Finally, change leaders influence change adoption through prosocial methods rather than formal power by assuming the role of a human brand and telling stories to emotionally engage audiences during the sensegiving process.

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