Anticipatory Preparation: The Impact of Pre-Change Informal Information on Employee Resistance to Change Intentions (Postprint)

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Abstract

Prior to organizational change, informal information dissemination such as grapevine rumors invariably occurs, constituting a critical source of advance information for employees. This study examines the impact of pre-change informal information on employees' pre-change resistance intention, as well as the temporal dynamics of employees' change resistance intention. Based on structural equation modeling and multilevel linear growth model analyses of data from 255 participants, findings reveal that: (1) The negativity and incompleteness of pre-change informal information significantly negatively influence employees' change cognition, thereby increasing their change resistance intention. (2) Over time, employees' change resistance intention significantly attenuates; that is, resistance intention markedly declines from the pre-change period to the point of change implementation. The study uncovers that pre-change informal information serves a "warm-up preparation" function for employees, facilitating advance adaptation and enabling more effective coping with change. The research findings contribute to the smooth implementation of organizational change.

Full Text

Preamble

Take Precautions: The Impact of Pre-Change Informal Information on Employee Resistance to Change

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Abstract

Informal information inevitably circulates before organizational change, serving as a crucial source for employees to learn about upcoming changes. This study examines how pre-change informal information influences employees' pre-change resistance intentions and how these intentions evolve over time. Based on data from 255 employees analyzed through structural equation modeling and hierarchical linear growth modeling, the findings reveal: (1) The negativity and incompleteness of pre-change informal information significantly impair employees' change cognition, thereby increasing their resistance to change; and (2) Over time, employees' resistance to change significantly attenuates—that is, resistance intentions decrease markedly from the pre-change phase to the actual implementation of change. The study demonstrates that pre-change informal information serves a "warm-up" function, helping employees adapt in advance and better cope with change. These findings contribute to the successful implementation of organizational change.

Keywords: pre-change informal information; change cognition; resistance to change; attenuation
Classification Code: B849:C93

Organizational change has become the main theme of our era. Only through continuous change can enterprises maintain competitive advantages and establish themselves in the market (Chung, Du, & Choi, 2014). Change information serves as a critical resource for employees to recognize and understand change, playing a key role in facilitating smooth implementation. For instance, Wanberg and Banas (2000) found in their longitudinal study of organizational change that clear change information can enhance employee enthusiasm for change, while Oreg (2006) discovered that detailed information transmission can reduce resistance to change.

Research on change information typically focuses on the implementation phase. However, in reality, informal information about organizational change often begins to emerge and circulate before formal implementation (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). Pre-change informal information refers to unconfirmed information disseminated through informal channels regarding the content and objectives of organizational change (Luo & Du, 2016). This information represents an important resource for employees to learn about unknown changes before they occur (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011). Through their investigation of change in a large Australian public hospital, Bordia et al. identified various types of informal information about organizational change and found that negative informal information creates greater psychological pressure for employees (Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan, & DiFonzo, 2006).

Although scholars have recognized the existence of informal information during change and its potential effects on employee reactions, no research has yet uncovered the mechanisms through which informal information influences employees. To explore this process, this study draws on adaptation level theory to

examine the impact of informal information on employees' pre-change resistance intentions and the underlying mediation mechanisms. We further investigate how employees' resistance to change evolves over time and the moderating role of information frequency. The research model is illustrated in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]. The study surveyed 255 employees from different enterprises and employed structural equation modeling and hierarchical linear growth modeling to empirically examine the relationship between negative pre-change informal information and employee resistance, the temporal changes in resistance, and the moderating effect of information frequency.

1.1 Distinctions and Connections Among Informal Information, Gossip, and Rumors

Formal information generally refers to information transmitted and exchanged according to explicitly stipulated principles within an organization, such as announcements from superiors. Leaders exercise considerable caution in releasing formal information to maintain order and, once issued, strive to implement it consistently. This limitation of formal channels prompts employees to seek information in advance through informal channels (Luo & Du, 2016). Scholars hold divergent views on informal information—some consider it useless and harmful and argue it should not be encouraged (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004), while others believe it serves positive functions such as strengthening team cohesion (Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014).

One reason for these disagreements is that researchers have failed to distinguish among different types of informal information such as gossip and rumors. According to DiFonzo and Bordia (2007), rumors often lack evidentiary basis and can be harmful to organizations. Recent research on gossip defines it as informal evaluative discussions about an absent organizational member (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017). This study explores informal information that possesses authenticity and reference value, evaluates objective change events, and primarily circulates before change occurs. Johlke and Duhan (2001) note that informal information transmission can effectively reduce role ambiguity among subordinates and increase job satisfaction. Moreover, informal information transmission is flexible and diverse, compensating for deficiencies in formal channels (Zhang, Lin, & Chi, 2012). The similarities and differences among formal information, pre-change informal information, gossip, and rumors are summarized in Table 1 .

1.2 Negativity and Completeness of Pre-Change Informal Information and Their Interaction

Informal information in change contexts often circulates before formal announcements, helping employees anticipate change trends and learn change details (Gholipour, Kozekanan, & Zehtabi, 2011). Regarding the nature of informal information, Bordia et al. (2006) classified it into positive/beneficial and nega-

tive/harmful categories, finding that negative informal information appears significantly more frequently during change and generates higher change-related anxiety. Brady et al. (2017) similarly argue that informal information should be categorized as positive or negative, with negative information typically causing greater psychological fluctuations and creating more substantial resistance to change. Therefore, we focus primarily on the impact of negative pre-change informal information on employee psychology.

The completeness of informal information refers to whether employees can understand change-related details based on the information content. When received information is incomplete, employees may experience uncertainty about the specific impacts of change and how they should respond (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Thus, the completeness of pre-change informal information also affects employees' overall understanding of change. We argue that informal information serves as an important resource for employees to understand future changes, and its completeness indirectly influences employees' initial reactions to change news and subsequent change-related psychology, moderating the negative effects of information negativity. Based on this reasoning, this study examines the mechanisms through which the negativity, completeness, and their interaction of pre-change informal information affect employee psychology.

1.3 Pre-Change Informal Information and Employee Pre-Change Resistance Intention

Bouckenooghe et al. propose that change cognition represents employees' understanding of the necessity and importance of change, manifested as organizational-level comprehension, support, or resistance to change (Bouckenooghe, Devos, & van Den Broeck, 2009). In organizational change contexts, only when employees develop high change cognition—recognizing that change can bring high benefits and enhance organizational competitiveness—will negative psychology toward change decrease, thereby facilitating smooth implementation. Resistance intention refers to the willingness to engage in specific actions or inactions regarding something, demonstrating tendencies toward opposition or neglect (Oreg, 2003). Pre-change resistance intention here refers to the negative behavioral tendencies employees initially develop toward change before formal change occurs. Compared to positive reactions, negative resistance behaviors have more detrimental effects on change and seriously hinder goal achievement.

Organizational change typically represents significant alterations to existing organizational systems and models, with resulting uncertainty becoming employees' primary psychological perception. Consequently, change triggers individual resistance more quickly than general organizational events. Since change concerns every employee and pre-change informal information is virtually the only channel for learning about change before formal announcements, employees are particularly susceptible to informal information influence (Luo & Du, 2016). When employees first encounter negative pre-change informal information, they

assign subjective cognitive evaluations to it, and the stimulation from the information combined with shifts in their psychological comfort zones may immediately trigger latent resistance to change. In other words, negative pre-change informal information influences employees' pre-change resistance intention by affecting their change cognition.

Through the negative content conveyed by information, employees form low initial change cognition, reducing their understanding of and cooperation with change, thereby increasing pre-change resistance intention. The completeness of informal information also exerts potential influence. When informal information conveys relatively complete content about change—for example, a pre-change informal message about performance reform that includes objectives, significance, timing, and specific measures—employees can develop an initial, holistic grasp of the change based on complete information. They gain understanding of the background and rationale, recognize that the change is initiated for organizational benefit, form higher change cognition, and consequently experience relatively lower resistance intention (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Sheng & Ni, 2010). Even when the informal information is negative, if its content is relatively complete and provides comprehensive understanding of the change, employees can develop correct understanding of organizational change and reduce the negative impact of negative information. Therefore, we propose that information completeness can weaken the negative effect of information negativity on change cognition. Based on these arguments, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: The negativity and incompleteness of pre-change informal information significantly influence pre-change resistance intention through the mediating role of change cognition. More negative and less complete information leads to lower change cognition and higher pre-change resistance intention.

H1b: The completeness of pre-change informal information negatively moderates the relationship between information negativity and change cognition. Higher information completeness reduces the negative effect of negative informal information on change cognition.

1.4 Changes in Resistance to Change

According to adaptation level theory (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), after experiencing negative (or positive) stimuli, individuals' emotions rapidly decrease (or increase), but over time they gradually adapt to the stimulus and their emotions return to baseline levels. Cheng et al. also note that when facing negative and unfavorable information, people do not merely wait passively but engage in self-adjustment (Cheng, Lau, & Chan, 2014). Research on adaptation level theory indicates that when employees experience negative role conflict, their job satisfaction immediately declines, but over time they gradually adapt to role conflict and return to a relatively positive level of job satisfaction (Ritter, Matthews, Ford, & Henderson, 2016).

Upon receiving informal information about impending change, employees de-

velop a certain degree of pre-change resistance intention due to the sudden stimulation of negative information and lack of clear understanding about required behaviors during change (Xiao, Yan, & Zhao, 2018). However, as time passes, employees may not remain in a state of negative resistance; they have time to adjust before change implementation. During the adaptation process, employees begin to rethink and reevaluate, potentially gradually accepting the unchangeable reality of change and its possible outcomes, thereby buffering pre-change resistance emotions and preparing psychologically when change actually arrives (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Through spontaneous psychological adjustment, employees' resistance to change gradually decreases, allowing them to prepare in advance for change, avoiding the psychological shock that might occur when change is formally implemented, and reducing resistance to change implementation (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2013). Based on these arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Resistance to change at the time of implementation is significantly lower than pre-change resistance intention, indicating that resistance to change significantly attenuates over time.

1.5 The Moderating Role of Information Frequency

The frequency of pre-change informal information refers to how often employees hear about change-related informal information during the period before change. The impact of change implementation varies across different enterprises or departments within the same enterprise, as do the interests involved, resulting in differences in informal information dissemination patterns. High-frequency information serves a "reminder" function for employees, prompting them to continuously process information from their initial cognition. Research indicates that because audiences experience uncertainty about unfamiliar information, appropriate repetition helps them gradually adapt to and accept new information, reducing resistance to it (Shapiro & Nielsen, 2013). The more frequently informal information is transmitted, the more employees are stimulated and reinforced by it. Under repeated "reminders," they develop deeper understanding of change. When employees realize that change is unchangeable, they tend not to persist in negative resistance but instead adjust themselves and seek coping strategies (Cheng et al., 2014). In this process, high-frequency informal information more strongly activates employees' thinking about self-adjustment, gradually helping them adapt to and accept the reality of change. The result may be that employees' resistance to change declines more rapidly over time (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). In low-frequency informal information situations, the "reminder" effect is relatively weak, so employees may remain resistant to change without faster psychological preparation to adapt, resulting in slower attenuation of resistance intention. Based on these arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: The frequency of pre-change informal information positively moderates the change from pre-change to during-change resistance intention: Compared to low

information frequency, higher pre-change informal information frequency leads to faster attenuation of employee resistance to change over time.

2.1 Data Collection Procedure

Although this study innovatively explores pre-change informal information, data collection presents a significant challenge. Brady et al. (2017) note that research on informal information faces considerable methodological challenges due to the lack of appropriate measurement methods and tools, and the difficulty of obtaining reliable data because participants may distrust researchers. Ideally, this study would employ a multi-timepoint longitudinal design collecting data from enterprise employees during the pre-change preparation phase, immediately before formal change announcement, and during change implementation. However, this approach could not be implemented due to potential negative impacts on enterprise change execution.

To avoid adverse effects on organizations, this study adopted retrospective self-reports from MBA students (Brady et al., 2017). Retrospective self-report refers to individuals recalling and reporting emotions experienced during past events (Robinson & Clore, 2002). For example, Aaker, Drolet, and Griffin (2008) studied dialectical emotions by asking participants to recall a past dialectical emotion event and rate their happiness and sadness at that time. This method ensures that the informal information reported by participants corresponds to changes that have occurred or are occurring—that is, the pre-change informal information indeed materialized rather than being false information spread with ulterior motives.

The survey population consisted of 319 MBA students from different enterprises in central China, working in sales, R&D, human resources management, and other functions. To reduce common method variance, the study collected questionnaires at two different time points. At Time 1, employees retrospectively reported the dissemination of pre-change informal information and their own feelings. At Time 2, two weeks later, employees retrospectively reported their feelings when change was formally implemented.

The questionnaire first invited participants to identify a recent organizational change that affected their work and write the event name at the beginning. All collected samples included descriptions of recently experienced change events, confirming that these enterprises had undergone organizational change. After identifying each participant' s change event, the questionnaire then asked whether they had heard any informal information such as rumors before the change. Through subsequent statistical analysis, only 7 of the 319 respondents reported hearing no informal information before change; these 7 individuals were removed from the first questionnaire and did not complete the second questionnaire.

To ensure authenticity and reliability and prevent participants from experiencing multiple changes simultaneously and forgetting the change event described in

the first survey, we recorded each participant's described change event and redistributed it with the second questionnaire two weeks later, ensuring participants responded about the same change event at both time points. Before questionnaire distribution, the researchers communicated with participants, describing the survey purpose and emphasizing data confidentiality to avoid participant concerns that might affect measurement authenticity and accuracy, thereby providing safeguards against survey misunderstandings. To ensure rigorous survey administration, participants had ample time on-site to complete questionnaires, which were then directly collected by the researchers.

2.2 Sample

All participants self-reported demographic variables. The first questionnaire was distributed to 319 participants, with 300 returned (94% response rate). After excluding 6 incomplete questionnaires and 7 from participants who had not heard pre-change informal information, 287 valid questionnaires remained (96% validity rate). The second questionnaire was distributed to these 287 participants, with 262 returned (91.3% response rate). After excluding 7 incomplete questionnaires, 255 valid questionnaires remained (97.3% validity rate).

Among the 255 valid participants, 56.1% were male and 43.9% were female, with an average age of 31.11 years (SD = 7.87) and average tenure in their current position of 5.5 years (SD = 6.18). Participants held various positions: 24.8% in marketing, 22% in general office, 18.9% in human resources, 13.5% in production, 12.5% in finance, and 8.3% in other departments. All participants held graduate degrees. Regarding change types, 36% were experiencing strategic and management system changes (e.g., business contraction/expansion, organizational restructuring), 40% were experiencing personnel, departmental, and compensation changes (e.g., departmental reorganization, personnel transfers causing salary changes), and 24% were experiencing work method and environmental changes (e.g., overtime policy changes, workplace relocation).

2.3 Measures

All variables except demographic variables and pre-change informal information nature were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Pre-change informal information nature. This variable measured the overall nature of informal information heard by participants before change. Drawing on Miller, Johnson, and Grau (1994) and using a 5-point semantic differential scale based on opposite adjectives (1 = negative, 5 = positive), scores were reverse-coded so that higher values indicated more negative information. Three work-context items measured pre-change informal information nature (= 0.95): "Before the change, most rumors and informal information I heard were negative vs. positive," "Before the change, most rumors and informal information I

heard were unfavorable vs. favorable," and "Before the change, most rumors and informal information I heard were negative energy vs. positive energy."

Pre-change informal information completeness. This measured whether informal information heard before change enabled employees to understand change content. Based on Miller et al. (1994), three items assessed this construct (= 0.88): "Before the change, based on various rumors and informal information, I could anticipate the change content," "Before the change, there was sufficient informal information for me to understand the change in advance," and "Before the change, various rumors and informal information basically described the change content."

Change cognition. Participants reported their cognition about how the change would affect the company when they first heard informal information. Based on Bouckenooghe et al. (2009), four items evaluated this construct (= 0.91): "Rumors and informal information conveyed that this change would enable the company to provide better products or services," "Rumors and informal information conveyed that this change would optimize internal processes and management," "Rumors and informal information conveyed that this change would improve company performance," and "Rumors and informal information conveyed that this change would be helpful to the company."

Pre-change resistance intention. This was measured using Oreg' s (2003) scale adapted for the pre-change context. Three items assessed pre-change resistance intention (= 0.86): "In the initial stage after hearing about this change before it occurred, if possible I would prefer not to implement this change," "In the initial stage after hearing about this change before it occurred, if possible I would prefer to circumvent this change," and "In the initial stage after hearing about this change before it occurred, if possible I would prefer to continue using previous methods or processes."

During-change resistance intention. Oreg' s (2003) scale was also used for during-change resistance intention. Three items measured this construct (= 0.76): "During actual change implementation, if possible I would not implement this change," "During actual change implementation, if possible I would circumvent this change," and "During actual change implementation, if possible I would prefer to continue using previous methods or processes."

Pre-change informal information frequency. This measured how often participants heard informal information about change before its occurrence. Based on DiFonzo et al. (2007), three items assessed frequency (= 0.88): "Before the change, I often heard rumors and informal information about the change," "Before the change, I frequently received various rumors and informal information about the change,"and "Before the change, I received much informal information about the change."

Control variables. To control for individual characteristics affecting resistance to change, we controlled for employee age, gender (0 = male, 1 = female), work tenure, current position tenure, and change event type. Additionally, to im-

prove measurement accuracy, we controlled for consistency between pre-change informal information and actual change. Based on DiFonzo and Bordia (2002), three items assessed change information consistency (= 0.77): "Compared with previous rumors and informal information, the actual change was basically consistent," "Compared with previous rumors and informal information, the actual change did not change much," and "Most previous rumors and informal information eventually became facts."

2.4 Analytical Strategy

For Hypothesis 1 regarding the mediating effect of change cognition in the relationship between pre-change informal information negativity/completeness and pre-change resistance intention, we used Amos 21.0 to establish a structural equation model. We employed Hayes' (2013) Process plugin (Model 4, 5,000 bootstrap samples) to test mediation effects, estimating 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects.

For Hypotheses 2 and 3 concerning the attenuation of resistance over time and the moderating effect of information frequency, we used hierarchical linear growth modeling in HLM software (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This method analyzes individual change patterns over time within persons, accounting for both between-person differences and within-person changes across measurement points. Time was specified as a Level 1 predictor, with changes in resistance intention from Time 1 (pre-change) to Time 2 (during-change) as the outcome. Level 2 included control and moderating variables: demographic variables, change event type, change information consistency, and information frequency. Following Enders and Tofighi (2007), time was not centered at Level 1 (with 1 and 2 representing Time 1 and Time 2, respectively), and all Level 2 variables were grand-mean centered. For nested data analysis, traditional least squares regression produces substantial errors, whereas hierarchical linear growth modeling minimizes such errors, yielding more reliable results. The model diagram and formulas are shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper] and below:

Level 1 Model (Within individual-level):
Resistance to change = + (time) + e

Level 2 Model (Individual-level):
= + (gender group mean) + (age group mean) + (work tenure group mean) + (current position tenure group mean) + (strategic system change group mean) + (personnel compensation change group mean) + (change information consistency group mean) + (information frequency group mean) + r

= + (information frequency group-mean centered)

3.1 Common Method Bias, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and Descriptive Statistics

To test for common method bias, we first conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results in Table 2 show that the five-factor model fit well and was significantly superior to alternative models. We also used Harman's single-factor test, which assumes that if substantial method variance exists, factor analysis will either extract a single factor or one common factor will explain most variable variance (Malhotra, Kim, & Patil, 2006; Zhou & Long, 2004). CFA of Time 1 measures extracted five component factors, with the largest factor explaining less than one-third of variance, indicating acceptable common method bias levels. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are presented in Table 3 .

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

To test Hypothesis 1 regarding the mechanism through which pre-change informal information affects pre-change resistance intention, we used Amos 21.0 to establish a structural equation model. The model demonstrated good fit: ^{2}(df = 62) = 79.57, p < 0.01; CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03. Although the model fit well, we tested alternative models by adding direct paths from pre-change informal information negativity and completeness to pre-change resistance intention to examine partial mediation. This alternative model also fit adequately (^{2}(df = 60) = 75.74, p < 0.01; CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.03) but did not significantly improve fit (Δ ^{2}(df = 2) = 3.83, ns), and direct effects were non-significant, confirming the full mediation model as optimal.

The optimal structural equation model revealed that pre-change informal information negativity negatively affected change cognition (= −0.41, p < 0.001), while completeness positively affected change cognition (= 0.20, p < 0.05). Change cognition significantly negatively influenced pre-change resistance intention (= −0.44, p < 0.001). Thus, negativity and completeness of pre-change informal information influenced pre-change resistance intention through change cognition. Bootstrapping interval estimates showed that the indirect effect of change cognition between information negativity and pre-change resistance intention was significant at the 95% confidence level [0.05, 0.17], with an indirect effect of 0.07. Similarly, the indirect effect between information completeness and pre-change resistance intention was significant [−0.10, −0.01], with an indirect effect of 0.03. Hypothesis 1a was supported. However, the interaction between negativity and completeness did not significantly moderate change cognition (= 0.01, ns), so Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3 regarding temporal changes in resistance and the moderating effect of information frequency, we used hierarchical linear growth modeling. Table 4 presents the results. Model 2 shows that at the within-individual level, after controlling for personal demographics, organizational change events, and change information consistency, employee resistance to

change significantly attenuated over time (Time 1 to Time 2) (= −0.60, p < 0.001). Hypothesis 2 was supported, indicating that employee resistance to change significantly decreased over time. Model 3 shows that at the between-individual level, after controlling for the same variables, the cross-level moderating effect of information frequency on the temporal change in resistance was not significant (= 0.19, ns). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper] illustrates these results.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined the mechanisms through which pre-change informal information affects employee pre-change resistance intention and how resistance changes over time, as well as the moderating role of information frequency. Key findings include: (1) The negativity and incompleteness of pre-change informal information positively affect pre-change resistance intention, with change cognition mediating the relationships between information negativity, incompleteness, and pre-change resistance intention; and (2) During-change resistance intention is significantly lower than pre-change resistance intention, indicating that resistance to change significantly attenuates over time.

Theoretical Implications

First, negative pre-change informal information negatively affects change cognition and increases pre-change resistance intention. Existing change communication research primarily focuses on information communication and employee reactions during change implementation (Oreg, 2006). In reality, various opportunities exist for people to hear pre-change informal information, which serves a pre-announcement function that influences employee cognition and expectations about organizational change. However, limited research has explored the mechanisms through which pre-change informal information affects employee change psychology. This study reveals the influence mechanism of pre-change informal information on employee pre-change resistance psychology and demonstrates the mediating role of change cognition.

Second, the findings show that during-change resistance intention is significantly lower than pre-change resistance intention, indicating significant attenuation over time. Previous research often considered informal information such as rumors detrimental to organizational development. Drawing on adaptation level theory, this study finds that resistance to change attenuates over time, demonstrating that pre-change informal information, after being processed by employees, can serve a precautionary function—helping employees warm up in advance and prepare psychologically for change (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). This buffers the shock when change actually occurs, mitigates resistance during formal implementation, and helps employees adapt more quickly.

We hypothesized that complete informal information would weaken the positive effect of negative informal information on resistance intention, but found no such

moderating effect. We speculate this may be because information completeness does not necessarily fully alleviate resistance. Even when employees hear more details and have comprehensive understanding, the information remains fundamentally negative, so its completeness cannot effectively moderate the relationship between negative information and resistance intention. Although negativity and completeness showed no interactive effect, they had significant independent effects, indicating that more negative and more ambiguous information reduces change cognition and increases resistance intention.

We also hypothesized that higher pre-change informal information frequency would accelerate resistance attenuation, but found no moderating effect. After interviewing experts and participants, we suspect this may be due to varying sensitivity intervals for distinguishing frequency levels. Employees can easily differentiate large frequency gaps (e.g., six to seven times vs. one to two times) but struggle with similar frequencies (e.g., six to seven times vs. four to five times). Using a 5-point scale to subjectively assess frequency may be inadequate. To test this speculation, we recoded the original 5-point scale: responses of 1 and 2 (ind disagreement with frequent information) were recoded as 0 (representing low frequency, such as one to two times), and responses of 4 and 5 (indicating agreement with frequent information) were recoded as 1 (representing high frequency). This recoding resembled high-low grouping (information frequency M = 3.2, SD = 1.01). Reanalysis using hierarchical linear growth modeling showed a significant moderating effect (= 0.28, $p < 0.05$). Following Aiken and West' s (1991) procedure, separate regressions for low- and high-frequency groups revealed that under high-frequency informal information, resistance attenuated faster than under low-frequency conditions. While converting continuous variables to dichotomous variables is not rigorous, these results suggest that high-frequency informal information potentially promotes faster resistance decline. This analysis also reveals limitations in our frequency measurement; future research should use interval scales measuring specific frequency ranges for more accurate responses.

Practical Implications

The findings show that pre-change informal information negativity and completeness affect pre-change resistance intention through change cognition, but that resistance significantly attenuates over time. This demonstrates that pre-change informal information transmission serves a buffering function, helping employees make psychological adjustments. For employees, "preparation leads to success, while unpreparedness leads to failure." After learning about change through informal information, employees benefit more from taking precautionary actions to enhance their change coping abilities than from continuously resisting change. For managers, facilitating communication to accelerate resistance attenuation and help employees move through the adaptation period more quickly has greater practical significance for promoting smooth change implementation—for example, by communicating more with employees about the

urgency of change and potential positive outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

First, sample representativeness is limited. All participants were MBA students from central China provinces, restricting generalizability. For instance, regional economic development may affect how quickly employees accept change. Future research should sample more broadly across China to enhance 说服力.

Second, despite efforts to minimize error, the retrospective self-report method has limitations. Employees' recall of change events may omit details, and recollection of pre-change emotions may be inaccurate. Although we collected data at two time points, all variables involved self-perception or self-evaluation, inevitably introducing common method bias. Future research should explore more accurate and appropriate measurement methods for informal information.

Third, the outcome variable focused only on resistance intention. While resistance is the most common employee reaction to change, employees may adopt different attitudes. For example, Farrell' s (1983) EVLN model describes different response types: Exit (active, destructive), Voice (active, constructive), Loyalty (passive, constructive), and Neglect (passive, destructive). Future research could examine these different employee reactions as outcome variables, providing important applied value for organizational management practice.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to organizational change management research. Existing change research primarily focuses on ongoing change; this study applies adaptation level theory to explore the effects and temporal dynamics of pre-change informal information on employee change intentions. The findings help facilitate smoother organizational change implementation. Pre-change informal information dissemination involves varied motivations, complex content, and different individual perspectives that may affect content comprehension. In practice, employees find it difficult to accurately distinguish information authenticity and differentiate it from rumors and gossip. Future research could further explore distinctions between pre-change informal information, rumors, and gossip, as well as their dissemination mechanisms and characteristics, to better leverage informal information for change preparation.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.