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THE IMPACT OF HIGH INVOLVEMENT HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES ON
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE MEDIATOR EFFECT OF COMMITMENT TO
CHANGE AND THE INFLUENCE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Due to today's economic situation, organizational change is becoming frequent and inevitable. Even though there are a lot of studies about the topic, few tested the influence of organizational functioning on employees' reactions to change. In this study we tested the relationship between high involvement HR practices and resistance to change through commitment to change, and the influence of ethical leadership in this relationship. Two questionnaires in two different times were applicable to 131 employees from 14 organizations that had recently faced major change interventions. The results showed a negative relation between all HIHR and resistance to change, as between HIHR and intention to resist future changes, through enhancing affective commitment to change. These relationships were stronger in the presence of high ethical leadership.

Keywords: Resistance to change, High Involvement HR practices, Commitment to change, Ethical Leadership

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1. Introduction

“Change is one of the features of organizational life that employees increasingly experience” (Conway and Monks, 2008:1), therefore organizations rely more and more on their employees to adapt to changes (Stanley et al, 2005). Organizational change is becoming more important since this century is related to a time of tremendous, complex and frequent changes in the world of work (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002). It can be defined as *“alterations of existing work routines and strategies that affect a whole organization”* (Herold and Fedor, 2008 cited in Shin et al, 2012:1) or *“an empirical observation of difference in form, quality or long term state of an organizational entity, coming out of the deliberate introduction of new styles of thinking, acting or operating, looking for the adaptation to the environment or for a performance improvement”* (Pardo-del-Val et al, 2012:2).

Due to today’s economic situation, organizational change is becoming frequent (Shin et al, 2012; Nordin, 2012; Ning and Jing, 2012; Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Kogetsidis, 2012) inevitable and unanticipated (Boga and Ensari, 2009). The global financial crisis, the increasingly competitive markets, the funding reductions, the need to improve cost-efficiency (Kogetsidis, 2012; Cunningham et al, 2002), the evolution of technology, the globalization, the mergers and acquisitions, the constant change of supply and demand, and the social and political factors (Halkos and Bousinakis, 2012) are some of the reasons that might explain the need for organizational change. Consequently if companies intend to remain competitive they should effectively and efficiently manage organizational change and adapt to the changes in the market (Boga and Ensari, 2009; Halkos and Bousinakis, 2012; Nordin, 2012). In this sense, change management includes getting all those involved and affected to accept change and its consequences while effectively managing resistance to change (Coetsee, 1999).

Organizational change literature shows that *“change failure is the norm rather than the exception, with change outcomes often failing to meet anticipated objectives”* (Kogetsidis,

2012:3). Research estimates that about two thirds of change projects fail (Choi, 2011; Shin et al, 2012) and for some authors this number is even higher (Kogetsidis, 2012). *“There are undoubtedly a variety of contributing explanations for the high percentage of failure”* (Shin et al, 2012:1); although several factors can contribute for the unsuccessful change processes, including pressures from the business environment and inadequate organizational infrastructure, employees’ resistance has been identified as a primary source of change failure worldwide (McKay et al, 2013). According to Jermier et al. (1994) resistance in general can be considered a *“reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives by other agents”* (cited in Piderit, 2000:3). Pardo-del-Val and Fuentes define it as *“a phenomenon that affects the change process, delaying or slowing down its beginning, obstructing or hindering its implementation, and increasing its costs”* (2003:1) on one side and on the other side they state that it is equivalent to persistence in avoiding change.

Moreover organizational change involves uncertainty and therefore most employees generally do not support it unless they are convinced of the reasons to do so (Nordin, 2012). According to Choi (2011), many times the change project fails because the central role played by individuals in this process is underestimated by its leaders. Besides, since organizations can only change if its employees change their behaviors, the idea that the employee is at the center of the change process and influence its success is defended by several authors (Choi 2011; Shin et al, 2012). So it is important to manage employees’ reactions taking into consideration that change actions are likely to cause anxiety, tension, and negative perceptions about the organization, eventually eliminating any advantage intended with the change (Boga and Ensari, 2009).

Accordingly, employees’ commitment to change appears as behavioral intentions to support a change (Choi, 2011). Therefore it is reasonable to agree on the premise *“no change can occur without willing and committed followers”* (Bennis, 2000 cited in Ning and Jing,

2012:2). It is “*one of the most important factors involved in employees’ support for change initiatives*”(Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002:1). Commitment to change is described by Conner (1992) as “*the glue that provides the vital bond between people and change goals*” (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002:1). According to Choi (2011) the most accepted definition is the one from Herscovitch and Meyer who define it as “*a mindset that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative*” (2002:2). Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) argue that there are three types of commitment an individual can experience toward change: affective commitment to change (the desire to support the change because the individual believes in its benefits); continuance commitment to change (a recognition of the costs the individual would suffer if failing to provide support for the change;) and normative commitment to change (an obligation feeling to support the change). Accordingly, without managing resistance and stimulating commitment, change initiatives can run the risk of failure, as emphasized by Judson (1991) “*any management's ability to achieve maximum benefits from change depends in part on how effectively they create and maintain a climate that minimizes resistant behavior and encourages acceptance and support*” (cited in Coetsee, 1999:2).

So far, a lot has been said about how to manage organizational change when it occurs and about the reactions toward change but few have discussed how the organization can prepare to deal with change before it happens. There are few studies (Conway and Monks, 2008) that focus on the way organizational functioning (its past), can influence employees’ reactions to change or that focus on how this can be affected by the direct supervision. A possible solution may be to implement certain human resources practices in order to build “*resources in advance of change*” (Shin et al, 2012:15) as a way to develop commitment to change and consequently reduce resistance, since “*the way an organization manages its HR sets the tone and conditions of the employee-employer relationship*”(Paré and Tremblay, 2007:7). Not

much is known about the way HR practices can affect employees' attitudes toward change (Conway and Monks, 2008); however there are some evidences regarding the positive effect HR practices can have on commitment and other employees' attitudes toward the organization. Moreover the direct supervision role is seen as crucial in managing change processes but research concerning the way the leader can influence commitment to change is scarce (Neves, 2011).

Building on this, this study intends to test firstly how high involvement HR practices can influence reactions to change, namely if they help reducing resistance through the development of commitment to change and secondly to test the role of the direct supervisor in the process, namely if ethical leadership contributes to reduce uncertainty.

1.1 High Involvement Human Resources Practices and Organizational Change

High-involvement or commitment-based human resources practices (HIHR) are an important approach to transmit the idea that the organization is concerned about its employees. This model has some key characteristics: it includes performance-based compensation systems at an organization and group-level, provides opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making (Wright and Kehoe, 2008), relies on conditions that promote employees' identification with the organization's goals and hard work to accomplish those goals (Wood and de Menezes, 1998; Whitener, 2001), motivates employees to act on the best interests of the organization, focus on mutual, long-term exchange relationships (Collins and Smith 2006) and is designed to "*improve communication flow, foster empowerment and encourage employees to invest both tangible and emotionally in their employer*" (Searle et al, 2011:4).

Despite this consensus regarding the definition, the opinions concerning the specific practices to be included in this type of HR system diverge among the authors (Searle et al, 2011; Wright and Kehoe, 2008; Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Collins and Smith, 2006; Gould-Williams, 2003). However the most mentioned, considered the key HIHR, are performance

management, training and development, recruitment and selection and compensation practices (Conway and Monks, 2008; Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Collins and Smith, 2006; Whitener, 2001).

Even knowing the benefits of using different HR practices in the organization “*very little is known about the role that HR practices may play in influencing the commitment of employees to change initiatives*” (Conway and Monks, 2008:1). However, high involvement HR practices have been identified as significant in building a climate of trust (Searle et al, 2011; Gould-Williams, 2003; Wood and de Menezes, 1998; Collins and Smith, 2006; Whitener, 1997; Paré and Tremblay, 2007), enhancing organizational performance (Searle et al, 2011; Gould-Williams, 2003; Whitener, 2001; Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Collins and Smith, 2006), eliciting employees’ commitment or attachment to the organization (Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Gould-Williams, 2003; Paré and Tremblay, 2007) and extra role behaviors, since they normally transmit the message that the organization cares about, supports and invests on its employees (Paré and Tremblay, 2007; Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Whitener, 1997). According to the social exchange theory and based on the norm of reciprocity, employees reciprocate the investment made by the organization by exerting higher levels of discretionary behaviors and increasing the willingness to do more for the organization (Paré and Tremblay, 2007; Mcclean and Collins, 2011; Collins and Smith, 2006). Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) even suggest that, in a change process, strategies such as training, participation, and empowerment are likely to increase involvement and identification and consequently affective commitment to change. On the other hand continuance commitment to change is more likely to be developed when strategies such as rewards and punishments for compliance with the change are used in isolation. Normative commitment to change appears when employees feel they can reciprocate the benefits given by their organization by cooperating with the change. Other studies have also found diverse effects for different types of

commitment to change, in which affective and normative commitments to change tend to have positive effects and continuous commitment to change tends to have a non-significant or negative effect (e.g. Neves, 2011). Despite the lack of evidence concerning the relationship between HIHR and the attitudes and behaviors toward change, there is a lot of evidence regarding the benefits of their presence and more specifically regarding its relationship with organizational commitment. Moreover, as social exchange theory predicts, with these practices the organization shows concern, and thereby it is expectable that employees would reciprocate by collaborating with the change process. Considering all, it is reasonable to propose that when employees perceive the existence of HIHR their affective and normative commitments to change should be higher and their continuance commitment to change should decrease.

H1a – High involvement recruitment and selection practices are positively related to affective and normative commitments to change and negatively related to continuance commitment to change.

H1b – High involvement training and development practices are positively related to affective and normative commitments to change and negatively related to continuance commitment to change.

H1c – High involvement incentives practices are positively related to affective and normative commitments to change and negatively related to continuance commitment to change.

1.2 The moderator effect of Ethical Leadership

As previously mentioned, according to the literature, few have tested the direct connection between HIHR and change management variables. Even assuming that HIHR can influence resistance to change through commitment to change because of the reasons pointed out, this relationship may only exist or may be stronger in the presence of other variables that can act as moderators. The strategic HR management is important but the role of the direct supervision cannot be underestimated, since the role of the leader is considered one of the

critical factors of success in organizational change processes (Nordin 2012; Conway and Monks 2008; Boga and Ensari, 2009), as they have the capacity to influence employees' perceptions of the change (Boga and Ensari, 2009), and it is recognized as a crucial factor in managing the way HR practices are implemented and endorsed within an organization (Conway and Monks 2008). Moreover supervisors can be considered agents of change and *“when employees feel supported by their supervisors, they should be more willing to embrace situations that are important to the organization and that, at the same time, include a certain level of risk, such as major organizational changes”* (Neves, 2011:5).

Among the existing types of leadership recent research has suggested that a component that used to be included in transformational, spiritual or authentic leaderships – the ethics – can be seen as a different type of leadership (Brown et al, 2005; Brown and Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership appears as *“the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making”* (Brown et al, 2005:4). According to the authors, the key features of this definition are: leader's honesty, trustworthiness, fairness and care; leader's attention to ethics through explicitly talking about it, while providing voice to the followers; leader's attitude toward ethics, setting ethical standards, rewarding ethical conduct, disciplining those who do not respect the standards, and making visible, principled and fair decisions.

All the aforesaid types of leadership overlap the ethical domain since they all address the moral potential of leadership in some way, so they are related to ethical leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Eisenbeiss, 2012); however ethical leadership presents some differences. According to Brown and Treviño *“None of these approaches focuses on leaders' proactive influence on the ethical/unethical conduct of followers in the context of work organizations”* (2006:6); the key differentiator is that ethical leadership focuses in communicating ethical

standards and using accountability processes, a more “transactional” aspect. On the other hand, these other constructs include features that are not part of the ethical leadership construct (e.g. visionary orientation, religious orientation, self-awareness). Neubert et al. reinforce this idea of distinctiveness, while adding that ethical leadership has “*the potential to influence a range of important work outcomes*” and “*only a small but growing number of empirical studies have examined the outcomes of ethical leadership*” (2013:5).

Being a broader concept, this type of leadership when perceived by subordinates can be associated with trust in the leader, job satisfaction and employees’ positive outcomes, namely extra job effort and dedication, willingness to report problems and voice suggestions for improvement and engage in other proactive helpful behaviors, such as develop cooperative relationships (Brown et al, 2005; Brown and Treviño, 2006; Neubert et al, 2013). “*All of these effects were found to operate beyond the effect of the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership, arguably the existing leadership construct that is conceptually closest to ethical leadership*” (Brown and Treviño, 2006:3). Neubert et al (2013) suggest that the components of ethical leadership are also associated with higher levels of commitment. Some authors point that ethical leadership has a positive relationship with affective commitment (e.g. Palomino et al, 2011). Moreover ethical leaders are likely “*sources of guidance*” (Brown and Treviño, 2006:3) or “*influential role models who shape attitudes and behaviors*” (Neubert et al, 2013:7) and therefore this type of leaders influences employees’ ethical conduct at work and employees view their relationships with these leaders in terms of social exchange (Brown and Treviño, 2006).

Taking all of this into consideration, it is reasonable to assume that in a situation of change an ethical leader influences positively employees’ commitment to change. Ethical leaders reduce uncertainty through higher confidence and enhanced trust since they are expected to act in employees’ best interests. Moreover, they reduce ambiguity by highlighting moral boundaries

and norms. Therefore ethical leadership should play a role in moderating the relationship between HIHR and commitment to change, by enhancing its positive effects.

H2a – Ethical leadership moderates the relation between high involvement recruitment and selection practices and affective, normative and continuance commitments to change.

H2b – Ethical leadership moderates the relation between high involvement training and development practices and affective, normative and continuance commitments to change.

H2c – Ethical leadership moderates the relation between high involvement incentives practices and affective, normative and continuance commitments to change.

1.3 Commitment and Resistance to change

Resistance to change is seen as a key topic in change management that should be considered in order to successfully achieve the benefits of the change and it is one of the reasons for failure of many change initiatives (Pardo-del-Val and Fuentes, 2003; Pardo-del-Val et al, 2012). Independently of the definition, resistance is normally seen as a negative behavior toward change (Coetsee, 1999) and therefore “*many authors offer empirical research confirming that change success is only possible if the main sources of resistance are anticipated*” (Pardo-del-Val et al, 2012:3). Employees may resist change for several reasons; for instance anxiety that results from the uncertainty that a change process carries, perceived pressure from supervisors or fear of failure are some of them. Consequently resistance is an essential factor in managing change processes since the way it is managed is the key for change success or failure (Pardo-del-Val and Fuentes, 2003). One way of reducing resistance is through increasing commitment to change, since “*when a person affected by change is committed to the change and how it should be implemented, he/she will not resist it*” (Judson, 1991 cited in Pardo-del-Val et al 2012:4). The lack of commitment can be seen as a precursor of resistance. Moreover Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) empirically showed that all three

forms of commitment correlated positively with compliance with change, even though affective and normative commitments were found to be associated with higher levels of support. Considering all these ideas it is expected that commitment to change acts as a mediator in the relation between HIHR and resistance to change, decreasing resistance.

H3a – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement recruitment and selection practices moderated by ethical leadership and resistance to change.

H3b – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement training and development practices moderated by ethical leadership and resistance to change.

H3c – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement incentives practices moderated by ethical leadership and resistance to change.

On the other hand commitment to change probably also affects the intention to resist future changes, since past experiences affect resistance to change (Pardo-del-Val and Fuentes, 2003). Moreover, in a dynamic organizational environment, changes are frequent and continuous and stimulating commitment to change in the present may influence future behaviors toward change.

H4a – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement recruitment and selection practices moderated by ethical leadership and intention to resist future changes.

H4b – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement training and development practices moderated by ethical leadership and intention to resist future changes.

H4c – Affective, normative and continuance commitments to change mediate the relationship between high involvement incentives practices moderated by ethical leadership and intention to resist future changes.

Summarizing, all the defined hypotheses imply a conceptual framework (Figure 1).

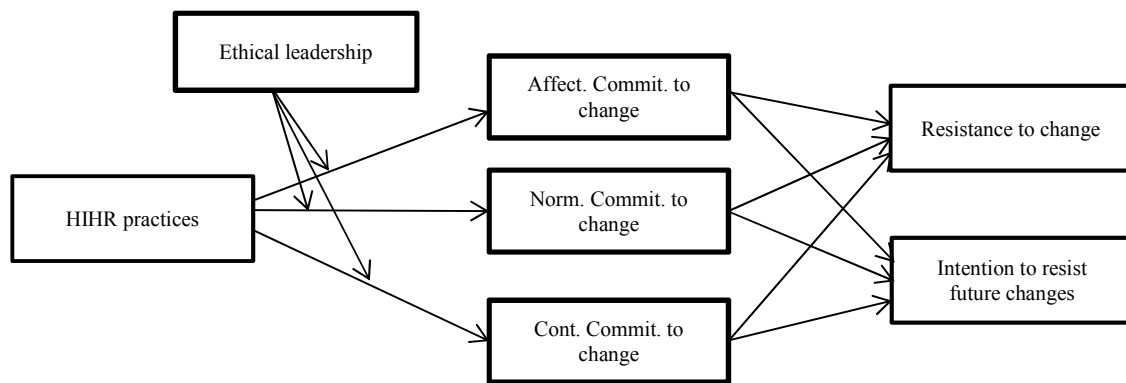


Figure 1 – Conceptual framework

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample and procedures

We handed out personally two different questionnaires to a convenience sample from companies located in the Lisbon area who had recently (last 2 years) faced a change process. The questionnaires were delivered in two distinct times: in time one, we measured resistance to change, commitment to change (affective, continuance and normative), HIHR practices (recruitment and selection, training and incentives) and ethical leadership; in time two (four weeks later) we measured intention to resist future changes. At the end in the first questionnaire 131 observations were considered valid and in the second questionnaire 119 observations. Participants were mostly from private organizations (80%), and from health (22%), insurance (22%), banking (13%), construction (8%), transports (17%), retailing (6%), pharmaceuticals (4%), and household appliances (8%) sectors. Each company contributed with 4 to 25 questionnaires. The majority of participants were women (72%) between 25 and 45 years old (79%) and most of them had at least a bachelor degree (60%). Most of the participants were in the organization at least for 3 years (80%) and worked with their supervisor for at least 1 year (75%). Approximately half of the participants have administrative functions and half have superior technician or managerial jobs. The subsample for time 2 (119 participants) was not significantly different.

In the first questionnaire, to analyze employees' commitment to change, HIHR and ethical leadership, we used a retrospective method. Employees were asked to recall and briefly describe a relevant organizational change (with direct implications on their work) they had undergone in their workplace within the past two years. Then the participants were asked to remember the organization functioning before the change happened when answering the questions related to HIHR and leadership. These strategies have been used to study employees' reactions to organizational change (e.g. Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Neves & Caetano, 2009). In the second questionnaire, to analyze intention to resist future changes, participants were asked to imagine that their organization will initiate a change process and to respond according to what they expected their reactions would be.

2.2 Measures

To measure the nine variables each employee was asked to rate the extent to which he/she agreed with different sentences. All measures used a five-point Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree". After testing for reliability the items within each scale were averaged to create a composite measure for each variable. To measure the **three types of commitment to change** we used 17-items from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) scale. An example item from affective commitment to change is "I believe in the value of this change" (Cronbach's $\alpha=.92$); from continuance commitment to change is "I have too much at stake to resist this change"(Cronbach's $\alpha=.72$); from normative commitment to change is "I feel a sense of duty to work toward this change" (Cronbach's $\alpha=.70$; one item removed). To measure **resistance to change** we used the 4-item from Oreg's (2006) change attitude scale behavioral dimension. The behavioral dimension addresses employees' intention to act against the change. An example item is: "I protested against the change" (Cronbach's $\alpha=.74$; one item removed). To measure **high involvement HR practices** we used the 15item scale representing the three sub dimensions of HR practices

developed by Collins and Smith (2006). The theoretical ideas behind the final items are: *“internal labor markets and selection based on fit to the company; group-and organization-based incentives; training programs and performance appraisals based on long-term growth, team building, and development of firm-specific knowledge”* (Collins and Smith, 2006:7). An example item from training is “My company provides training focused on team-building and teamwork skills training” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.85$); from recruitment and selection “My company selects employees based on an overall fit to the company” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.79$); from incentives “Salaries are higher than those of our competitors” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.74$; one item removed). To measure **ethical leadership** we used the 10-item ethical leadership scale from Brown et al (2005). An example item is “My supervisor disciplines employees who violate ethical standards” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.93$). To measure **intention to resist future changes** we used the 4item behavioral dimension of the change attitude scale from Oreg (2006) adapted to the intention to resist future changes. An example item is “I would protest against the change” (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.79$).

3. Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations for all variables. To test the established hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was performed using the bootstrapping approach developed by Preacher et al. (2007). Each practice was analyzed separately (1000 resamples). Bootstrapping is a robust and straightforward method in analyzing indirect effects in a mediation process, especially mediated-moderation effects and a more powerful technique than the traditional mediation approach (Preacher et al, 2007). It generates bias-corrected confidence intervals around the path coefficient estimates. If these paths vary across different levels of a moderator there is evidence for moderation (Neubert et al, 2013).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviation, Reliabilities and Correlations ^a

	Mean _b	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Selection & Recruitment	3.33	.89	(.79)								
2. Training & Development	3.09	.85	.72**	(.85)							
3. Incentives	3.23	.98	.67**	.68**	(.74)						
4. Ethical Leadership	3.66	.86	.50**	.55**	.35**	(.93)					
5. Affective commit. to change	3.92	.97	.29**	.32**	.23**	.07	(.92)				
6. Continuance commit. to change	3.42	.82	-.17	-.14	-.14	-.05	-.26**	(.72)			
7. Normative commit. to change	3.74	.81	.22*	.27**	.24**	.22*	.59**	.24**	(.70)		
8. Resistance to change	2.23	.95	-.00	-.09	.01	-.07	-.65**	.30**	-.43**	(.74)	
9. Intention to resist future changes	2.48	1.01	-.17	-.20*	-.19*	.03	-.40**	.14	-.31**	.33**	(.79)

^a Cronbach's alpha reported on diagonal.

^b 5-point scales

** p < .01

* p < .05

3.1 First independent variable: Recruitment and Selection practices

Table 2
Results of the Bootstrapping analysis for Recruitment and Selection

Predictors	Mediators									Outcomes						
	ACC			CCC			NCC			Resistance to change			IRFC			
	B	t	R ²	B	T	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²	
<u>Main effects</u>																
Recruitment & Selection (RS)	.38	3.58**		-.19	-2.07*		.14	1.59		.26	3.75**		-.05	-4.6		
Ethical Leadership (EL)	-.00	-.03		-.04	-.42		.18	1.76								
<u>Interaction</u>																
RS x EL	.20	2.34*	.13	-.18	-2.33*	.07	.08	1.08	.07							
<u>Mediator</u>																
ACC										-.49	-5.56**		-.27	-2.18*		
CCC										.32	3.67**	0.52	.12	.95	0.18	
NCC										-.31	-2.93**		-.19	-1.26		

Note: ACC – affective commit. to change; CCC – Continuance commit. to change; NCC – Normative commit. to change; IRFC – Intention to resist future changes

** p < .01

* p < .05

The main results for Recruitment and Selection are presented in table 2. Together RS, ethical leadership and the interaction effect (RS x EL) explain a significant amount of variance (13%) in affective commitment to change, in continuance commitment to change (7%) and in normative commitment to change (7%). High involvement recruitment and selection practices (HIRS) presented a significant and positive relationship with affective commitment (B=0.38, p < 0.01) and negative with continuance commitment (B=-0.19, p < 0.05), thus partially supporting H1a. Moreover, when analyzing the interaction effect, this is significant in affective (B=0.20, p < 0.05) and continuance (B=-0.18, p < 0.05) commitment to change;

therefore ethical leadership is considered a moderator in the relationship between high involvement recruitment and selection practices and these two commitments, thus partially supporting H2a. The interactions were plotted and the slopes were computed following the procedures developed by West and Aiken (1991) (Figures 2 and 3).

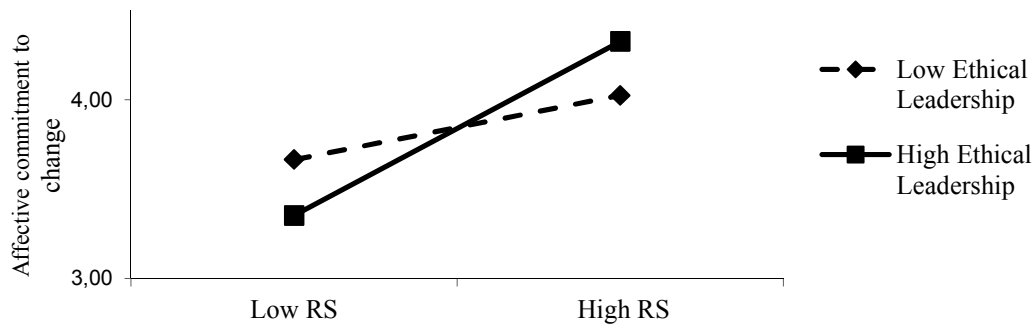


Figure 2 – Interaction of RS (recruitment and selection) and Ethical leadership on affective commitment to change.

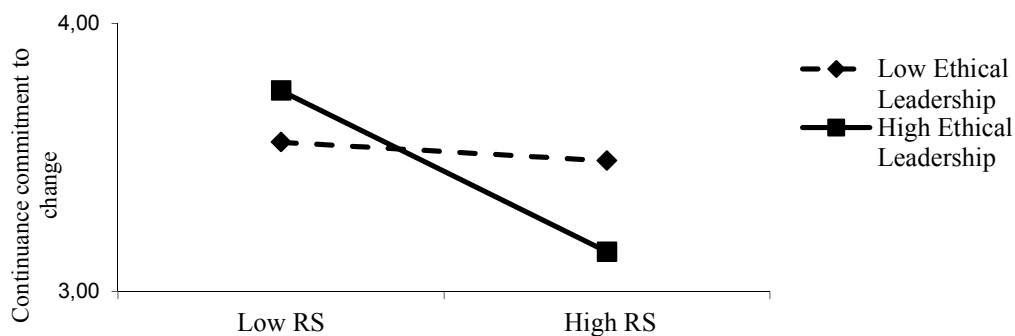


Figure 3 – Interaction of RS (recruitment and selection) and Ethical leadership on continuance commitment to change.

When ethical leadership is high the existence of these recruitment and selection practices are significantly and positively related to affective commitment ($t = 4.228, p < 0.05$) and negatively to continuance commitment to change ($t = -2.982, p < 0.05$). When ethical leadership is low the existence of these recruitment and selection practices does not affect affective commitment ($t = 1.629, p > 0.05$) or continuance commitment ($t = -0.356, p > 0.05$) significantly. Moreover the difference between slopes is significant in both cases ($t = 2.414, p < 0.05$; $t = -2.262, p < 0.05$, respectively), confirming that the relationship recruitment and selection-affective/continuance commitment is influenced by ethical leadership.

We tested a mediated-moderation model in order to understand if the interaction effects extended to resistance to change and intention to resist future changes (in time 2), through the relationship with the different commitments to change. First the condition that the mediators were significantly related to resistance to change was verified: affective and normative commitments to change were significantly and negatively related to resistance to change ($B = -0.49, p < 0.01$; $B = -0.31, p < 0.01$, respectively); continuance commitment to change was significantly and positively related to resistance ($B = 0.32, p < 0.01$). Secondly the conditional indirect effect of HIRS practices on resistance to change through affective and continuance commitments to change at specific values of the moderator (ethical leadership) was analyzed (HIRS practices had no significant relation with normative commitment not fulfilling one of the requirements for mediation). The indirect effects of recruitment and selection on resistance through affective and continuance commitments were significant only for high levels of ethical leadership. Therefore when ethical leadership is high, HIRS practices reduce resistance through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B = -0.27, p < 0.05$) and decreasing continuance commitment to change ($B = -0.11, p < 0.05$). This partially supports H3a.

Finally we also tested the intention to resist future changes in time 2. Only affective commitment to change presented a negative significant relationship with intention to resist future changes ($B = -0.27; p < 0.05$). The conditional indirect effect of HIRS practices on intention to resist future changes through affective commitment to change was significant and stronger in the presence of high ethical leadership. When ethical leadership is high, these practices influence intention to resist future changes through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B = -0.16, p < 0.05$), thus partially supporting H4a.

3.2 Second independent variable: Training and Development practices

Table 3
Results of the Bootstrapping analysis for Training and Development

Predictors	Mediators									Outcomes					
	ACC			CCC			NCC			Resistance to change			IRFC		
	B	t	R ²	B	T	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²
<u>Main effects</u>															
Training & Development (TD)	.44	3.96**		-.16	-1.52		.19	1.91		.20	2.57*		-.06	-.52	
Ethical Leadership (EL)	.01	.07		-.00	-.03		.18	1.67							
<u>Interaction</u>															
TD x EL	.34	3.44**	.19	-.09	-.94	.03	.15	1.69	.10						
<u>Mediator</u>															
ACC										-.48	-5.37**		-.27	-2.13*	
CCC										.30	3.34**	0.49	.12	.98	0.18
NCC										-.30	-2.72**		-.19	-1.27	

Note: ACC – affective commit. to change; CCC – Continuance commit. to change; NCC – Normative commit. to change; IRFC – Intention to resist future changes.

** p < .01

* p < .05

The main results for Training and Development are presented in table 3. Together TD, ethical leadership and the interaction effect (TD x EL) explain a significant amount of variance (19%) in affective commitment to change and in normative commitment to change (10%). The variance in continuance commitment to change is not significantly explained by these variables (3%). High involvement training and development practices (HITD) presented a positive and significant relationship only with affective commitment (B = 0.44, p < 0.01) thus partially supporting H1b. The interaction effect is significant in affective commitment to change (B = 0.34, p < 0.01); therefore ethical leadership is considered a moderator in the relationship between HITD practices and affective commitment, thus partially supporting H2b. The interaction was again plotted and the slopes computed (Figure 4). When ethical leadership is high these practices are significantly and positively related to affective commitment to change (t = 5.465, p < 0.05). When ethical leadership is low the existence of these practices does not affect affective commitment to change significantly (t = 1.012, p > 0.05). Moreover the difference between slopes is significant (t = 3.376, p < 0.05), confirming

that the relationship training-affective commitment to change is influenced by ethical leadership.

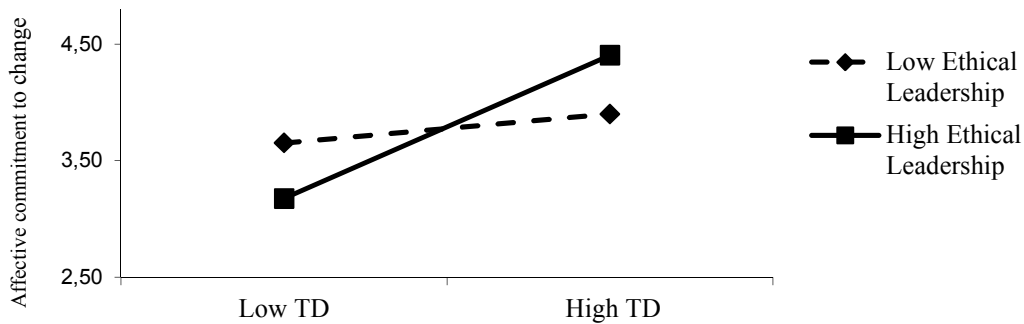


Figure 4 – Interaction of TD (training and development) and Ethical leadership on affective commitment to change.

As previously mentioned, we tested a mediated-moderation model. Again the condition that the mediators were significantly related to resistance to change was verified: affective and normative commitments to change were significantly and negatively related to resistance to change ($B = -0.48, p < 0.01$; $B = -0.30, p < 0.01$, respectively); continuance commitment to change was significantly and positively related to resistance ($B = 0.30, p < 0.01$). Secondly the conditional indirect effect of HITD practices on resistance to change through affective commitment to change at specific values of the moderator was analyzed (HITD practices had no significant relation with continuance and normative commitments not fulfilling one of the requirements for mediation). The indirect effect of HITD on resistance through affective commitment to change was only significant for high levels of ethical leadership. Therefore when ethical leadership is high, these practices reduce resistance through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B = -0.35, p < 0.05$), thus partially supporting H3b.

Finally the hypothesis that the mediators were significantly related to intention to resist future changes was verified: again only affective commitment to change presented a negative significant relation with intention to resist future changes ($B = -0.27; p < 0.05$). The conditional indirect effect of HITD on intention to resist to future changes through affective commitment to change was only significant in the presence of high ethical leadership. When

ethical leadership is high, these practices reduce intention to resist future changes through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B = -0.21, p < 0.05$), partially supporting H4b.

3.3 Third independent variable: Incentive practices

Table 4
Results of the Bootstrapping analysis for Incentives

Predictors	Mediators									Outcomes								
	ACC			CCC			NCC			Resistance to change			IRFC					
	B	t	R ²	B	T	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²	B	t	R ²			
<u>Main effects</u>																		
Incentives (Inc)	.19	2.10*		-.10	-1.29		.14	1.82		.22	3.45**		-.07	-.81				
Ethical Leadership (EL)	.11	1.01		-.05	-.46		.20	2.11*										
<u>Interaction</u>																		
Inc x EL	.24	2.62**	.10	-.09	-1.10	.03	.10	1.35	.09									
<u>Mediator</u>																		
ACC													-.46	-5.23**	-.28	-2.22*		
CCC													.32	3.65**	.51	.11	.90	.18
NCC													-.33	-3.07**	-.18	-1.15		

Note:; ACC – Affective commit. to change; CCC – Continuance commit. to change; NCC – Normative commit. to change; IRFC – Intention to resist future changes

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

The main results for Incentives are presented in table 4. Together Incentives, ethical leadership and the interaction effect (Inc. x EL) explain a significant amount of variance (10%) in affective commitment to change and in normative commitment to change (9%). The variance in continuance commitment to change is not significantly explained by these variables (3%). High involvement incentives practices (HI incentives) presented a positive and significant relationship only with affective commitment ($B = 0.19, p < 0.05$), thus partially supporting H1c. The interaction effect is significant in affective commitment to change ($B = 0.24, p < 0.01$); therefore ethical leadership is considered a moderator in the relationship between HI incentives and affective commitment to change, partially supporting H2c. The interaction was plotted and the slopes computed (Figure 5). When ethical leadership is high these incentive practices are significantly and positively related to affective commitment to change ($t = 3.85, p < 0.05$); when ethical leadership is low the existence of HI incentives does not affect affective commitment to change significantly ($t = -0.088, p > 0.05$).

Moreover the difference between slopes is significant ($t = 2.642, p < 0.05$), confirming that the relationship incentives-affective commitment is influenced by ethical leadership.

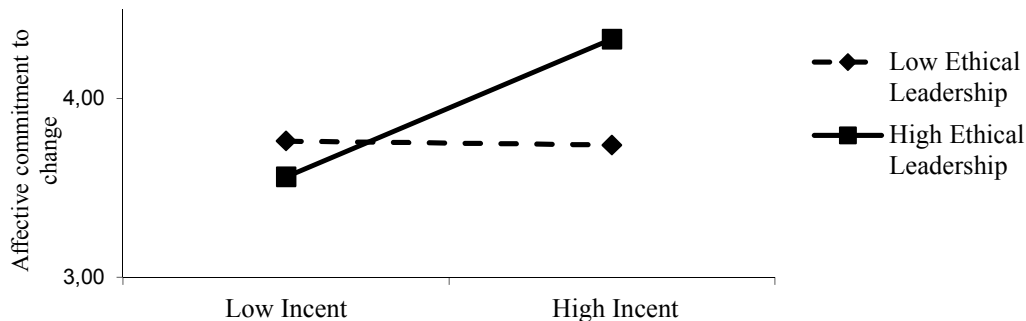


Figure 5 – Interaction of Incentives and Ethical leadership on affective commitment to change.

The condition that the mediators were significantly related to resistance to change was verified: affective and normative commitments to change were significantly and negatively related to resistance to change ($B=-0.46, p < 0.01$; $B=-0.33, p < 0.01$, respectively); continuance commitment to change was significantly and positively related to resistance ($B=0.32, p < 0.01$). Secondly the conditional indirect effect of HI incentives on resistance to change through affective commitment to change was analyzed (HI incentives had no significant relation with continuance and normative commitments, not fulfilling one of the requirements for mediation). The indirect effect of incentives on resistance through affective commitment to change was only significant for high levels of ethical leadership. Therefore when ethical leadership is high, these practices reduce resistance through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B = -0.18, p < 0.05$), partially supporting H3c.

Finally the hypothesis that the mediators were significantly related to intention to resist to change was verified and again only affective commitment to change presented a negative significant relationship with intention to resist future changes ($B=-0.28; p < 0.05$). The indirect effect of incentives practices on intention to resist future changes through affective commitment to change was only significant in the presence of high ethical leadership. When ethical leadership is high, HI incentives reduce intention to resist future changes through enhancing affective commitment to change ($B=-0.11, p < 0.05$), partially supporting H4c.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to test a framework of how high involvement HR practices can affect attitudes and behaviors toward change. The relevance of the present study relies on the scarcity of prior studies related to this topic. In the specific case, our aim was to understand if HIHR practices can help to prepare the organization to deal with change processes, through stimulating commitment to change and consequently reducing current and future resistance to change. The study provides several contributions to the literature.

First we found that the existence of high involvement human resources practices reduces resistance to change. This happens via commitment to change; more precisely we found that in the presence of high involvement recruitment and selection, training and incentives practices resistance to change decreases mainly through the enhancement of affective commitment to change. Consistent with previous research, these practices help to develop feelings of trust and long-term, mutual relationships between employees and employers (Collins and Smith, 2006). Employees will understand better the benefits of change since they believe the organization is concerned, supports and invests on them (Paré and Tremblay, 2007; McClean and Collins, 2011) as assumed in our hypotheses. Following social exchange theory it was expected that commitment to change would be influenced by HIHR practices, especially affective commitment. As predicted, employees reciprocated the investment made by the organization by increasing the willingness to do more for the organization, through supporting change, in part because they believe in change's benefits.

Second we found that HIHR not only reduce current resistance to change but also the intention to resist in the future. Affective commitment to change has an important role in this relationship, which means that if employees believe in the benefits of a current change and had a good experience with it they will also believe in the benefits of future changes (Pardo-del-Val and Fuentes, 2003). This finding is important due to today's dynamic organizational

environment where organizations have to adapt to changes constantly. If the development of HIHR practices helps the enhancement of affective commitment to change and consequently decreases the intention to resist in the future, it means that these practices, by helping managing the current change process, transmit confidence and prepare the organization to deal with future change events.

Third we also found that this process is affected by direct supervision, particularly by the ethical dimension of leadership. As discussed before one of the leader's roles in a change process is to reduce uncertainty (Neves, 2011). We found ethical leadership to be mainly associated with higher levels of affective commitment to change when combined with HIHR. When ethical leadership was perceived as high the relationship between HIHR and resistance to change, through affective commitment to change, was stronger. These findings are supported in part by Neubert et al (2013) that found ethical leadership to be a significant influence on employees' behaviors and commitment in the workplace and Palomino et al (2011) who find it significant with affective commitment. It is also consistent with the theoretical research developed by Brown and Treviño (2006) and Brown et al. (2005) about the benefits of ethical leadership and its ability to reduce uncertainty through promoting a moral conduct that differentiates this type of leadership from others.

Overall this study showed that it is important to guarantee the organization's strategic and operational alignment in a change process. By stimulating HIHR practices and leadership support (Conway and Monks 2008), the organization creates the conditions for a long-term, healthy employee-employer relationship (Paré and Tremblay, 2007) that stimulates confidence and trustworthiness, with the leader appearing as a role model assuring ethics.

4.1 Practical implications

There are some practical implications from this research. This study contributes to the understanding of the influence of HR practices on change acceptance and resistance.

Moreover, it helps validate the value of ethical leadership in organizational context. Our findings suggest that HR practices should be carefully chosen since these practices can affect the ability to cope with change and therefore reduce the percentage of change processes failure. Besides, our research also shows that leaders should be ethical in their approach in order for HR practices to develop a higher level of affective commitment to change among employees. Moreover, since affective commitment to change was the stronger predictor of resistance to change, this type of commitment should be given priority through the development of these high involvement recruitment and selection, training and incentives practices. Accordingly managers should guarantee that these practices are perceived by employees, as emphasized by Chew and Chan (2007) that suggest that for positive work experiences to increase organizational commitment employees have to believe that such experiences result from effective management policies and practices. And since the essence of commitment should be the same regardless of the target (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002) this idea is applicable to commitment to change.

4.2 Limitations and future research

The present study has some limitations that should be acknowledged in order to be considered in future research. First, the data was collected from a limited range of industries; the sample was composed by fourteen companies from eight different sectors, although it is representative of a variety of industries, some sectors were not covered, and each company contributed with a small number of people. Furthermore, the convenience sample method has the disadvantage of not being able to evaluate the goodness of the sample in terms of representativeness of the population, since it is a nonprobability sampling technique (Anderson, Sweeney and Williams, 2011). However since the selected sample is composed by a variety of companies from different sectors and different organizations' size, the results

should be generalizable. Future research should investigate other organizational contexts and explore differences between public and private sectors.

Second, data was collected from a single source - the employees – therefore some important information may be not considered. Future research should attempt to collect data from multiple sources, not only employees perceptions of HR practices but also for instance supervisors perceptions, namely from the ones responsible to implement such practices in the organization. It would be important to understand if these opinions diverge, since a gap between what is implemented and what is perceived may exist. Nonetheless employees' perceptions is still a valid measure to analyze since if employees do not perceive the existence of these practices they would unlikely be effective (Paré and Tremblay, 2007). And the fact that we used two distinct times to collect information reduces biases.

Third, unmeasured variables may affect the relationship between HIHR practices and commitment to change or HIHR and resistance to change besides the ones studied. Namely other types of leadership, trust in the leader, leaders' support, communication and participative decision-making are some of the examples that also appear in the change literature and may influence these practices. Moreover, since commitment to change only partially mediates this relationship, other mediators may explain the relationship between HR practices and resistance to change. Future research should analyze other variables that can act as moderators or mediators, and other consequences, such as turnover intentions.

Fourth, the practices included in the high involvement HR model are the most mentioned and accepted, but they are not an exhaustive set. Future research should include a broader set of HR practices and could also examine the relationship between HR practices not considered high involvement and commitment and resistance to change. This could be interesting to validate the importance of such high involvement practices, to see if there is any other

practice excluded that might explain this relationship and to verify if there are any differences between the uses of both.

5. Conclusion

Due to all the relations established, this study offers guidance for future empirical research on the topic of HIHR practices and organizational change.

Concluding managers can gain competitive advantage by keeping employees' skills and experience within the organization (Paré and Tremblay, 2007), and for that to happen they should carefully manage change processes in order to keep employees committed and motivated to accept changes, otherwise they may resist to it and develop other types of deviant behaviors or even leave the organization. This research constitutes an important start for future research on how organizations can prepare in advance to deal with change, using HR practices that stimulate positive outcomes and showing high ethical leadership.

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