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Change agent's contribution to recipients' resistance to change: A two-sided story

Janita F.J. Vos [a, *], Joyce Rupert [b]

[a] University of Groningen, Faculty of Economics and Business, Nettelbosje 2, 9747 AE Groningen, The Netherlands
[b] Nyenrode Business University, Straatweg 25, 3621 BG Breukelen, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

In the change management literature, most studies on recipients' resistance to change include only the views of agents or of recipients, thereby ignoring that these parties may have different perceptions. In this quantitative study, we include the perceptions of both parties in studying the recipients' resistance and the impact of the agent's leadership behavior. In a sample of 117 agent-recipients groupings, covering 110 different change projects in 90 organizations, we found that agents perceive higher levels of recipients' resistance than do the recipients themselves. Additionally, we found that agents who create space to enable recipients to think and act differently (by employing creating behavior) report higher levels of recipients' resistance, whereas recipients perceive their resistance to be lowered when agents facilitate an emotional connection to the change (framing behavior). The depth of the change appeared to moderate the relationship between agent's leadership behavior and recipients' resistance, indicating that agents and recipients differ in which change leadership behaviors they perceive as increasing or decreasing resistance at different levels of change depth. These findings imply to reconsider the relationship between agent and recipients and we propose some promising avenues for future studies in resistance research.

1. Introduction

Despite the growing need for organizations to implement changes in order to adapt to a changing environment, it is assumed that up to 70% of change initiatives fail with one of the root causes to be leadership behavior (e.g., Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Kotter, 1990). Indeed, one of the key challenges that change agents face, which has shown to significantly influence the progress of change, is recipients' resistance to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). In the dominant view of the change management literature, the agent suffers from this resisting behavior of the recipient (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). Recipients are assumed to resist change because of their personal characteristics (Oreg, 2006) or due to reasons such as lack of motivation, uncertainties, and the increased anxiety that change brings (Dym, 1999, pp. 6–19; Maurer, 1998; Reger, Mullane, Gustafson, & DeMarie, 1994). Other studies address what agents can, or should do to lower recipients' resistance, assuming that recipients will automatically resist change and that this resistance will disrupt a change process (Del Val & Fuentes, 2003; Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015).

In their conceptual study, Ford et al. (2008) criticize this agent-centric view where recipients create unreasonable obstacles or barriers intended to disrupt the change, and agents struggle to overcome these barriers. These authors argue that resistance studies tend to overlook the contribution that the change agents themselves could make to the resistance. In practice, change agents can contribute to the creation of recipient resistance directly, for example, by violating existing agreements, breaking trust, and overselling the change (Cobb, Wooten, & Folger, 1995; Folger & Skarlicki, 1999; Huy, Corley, & Kraatz, 2014; Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004).

The fact that most studies on resistance adopt a one-sided approach in their conceptualization and include the perceptions of one of the actors, thus neglecting the role of the other one in their empirical examination (Bartunek, Balogun, & Do, 2011; Bouckenooghe, Devos, & Van den Broeck, 2009), further nourishes this dominant perspective. This is remarkable because other research suggests that, essentially, there is no reason to assume that agents and recipients share the same understandings (Bartunek,

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: j.f.j.vos@rug.nl (J.F.J. Vos).

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Rousseau, Rudolph, & De Palma, 2006, p. 183). For instance, past conflict research has shown that asymmetrical perceptions of a relationship can damage the quality and outcomes of relationships (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010; Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006).

Building on this past work, we extend the change management literature by including both agent's and recipients' perceptions of their relationship. Through the investigation of 117 agent-recipients groupings, we offer a two-sided perspective on the relationship between leadership behavior and recipients resistance. We thus reconsider the dominant view on recipients' resistance and include the agent's possible role in creating recipients' resistance. Given the explorative nature of this study, we propose research questions to theoretically develop this area. In doing so, we contribute to the change leadership and resistance literature in three ways.

Guided by the first research question, we provide an empirical investigation of whether agents and recipients have different views of the recipients' level of resistance to change. Second, we explore the possibility that has been theoretically suggested, but not yet empirically tested, that agents may contribute with their behavior to the emergence of recipients' resistance (Ford et al., 2008). In our examination of this research question, we also extend the qualitative work on change leadership behavior by Higgs and Rowland (2005; 2011) by introducing quantitative measures of these behaviors. Finally, we examine how change depth (Woodman & Dewett, 2004), as a contextual variable, influences the relationship between the agent's leadership behavior and the recipients' resistance. Given the wide variety of organizational changes (Michel, By, & Burnes, 2013), we provide a needed and more nuanced comparison of the two actors' perceptions of how agent's leadership behavior impacts recipients' resistance across changes.

In this paper, the review of the literature on change leadership and resistance leads to our three research questions. We then describe how we investigated the agent-recipient combinations and present the results. Finally, after a brief summary of our results, we discuss implications for theory and practice, and provide directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Change leadership behavior

Leadership is seen as the ability to influence a group toward fulfilling a vision or a set of goals. In change situations, agents develop a change vision, which they communicate in order to align people, to inspire them to overcome hurdles in order to establish a positive direction (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Kotter, 1990). There is growing evidence that an agent's leadership behavior in the change process has a significant effect on the success of the change initiative (Colville & Murphy, 2006; Higgs, 2003; Higgs & Rowland, 2011). For instance, results have shown that transformational leadership, where the "leader is moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration" (Bass, 1999, p. 11), is effective in situations of change (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008; Van der Voet, 2014). However, little research exists on what specific behaviors change agents display and how such behaviors influence recipients' behavior in change situations.

In this study, we build on the work of Higgs and Rowland (2005; 2011), who have identified leadership behaviors of change agents associated with certain activities that agents undertake in the implementation of specific changes (differing in complexity and linearity of the process). In their qualitative studies, they found change agents to exert three different kinds of leadership behaviors to influence their recipients, some of which they are likely to combine and exert simultaneously (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). First, *shaping behavior* can be described as "the communication and actions of leaders related directly to the change" (2011; p. 312), with associated behaviors such as controlling what gets done, expressing their own views (as an agent) on the change, and holding others accountable for the delivery of allocated tasks. This leadership behavior can be characterized as agent-centric, which entails "the leader driving the change through personal involvement, persuasion, and influence" (2005; p. 133). Second, *framing behavior* is directed toward establishing starting points for change, an emotional connection to the change, and by challenging others to deliver the change, for example, by stretching the goals and limits of what is possible. Framing behavior refers to leadership behavior that is aimed at designing and managing the journey for the change and can be characterized as change-centric. Typically, the third type, *creating behavior*, is seen in the provision of "emotional, temporal and physical space to enable people to think and act differently" (Higgs & Rowland, 2011, p. 316). Here, the agent focuses on creating individual and organizational capabilities to induce the change, and the agent's focus is the recipient of the change. In contrast to the agent-centric-shaping style, the framing and creating style are more group- and systemic-focused behaviors, which tend to be associated with each other (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).

In this study, we adopt these three broad sets of change leader behaviors and quantitatively assess their relationship with recipients' resistance. Higgs and Rowland (2011) found that framing and creating behavior positively influenced implementation success in more complex and emergent change situations, whereas shaping behavior had a negative influence on implementation success in all change situations, unless this behavior was exerted together with framing or creating. Where they studied these behaviors from the agent's perspective, we extend their work by including also the recipients' perspective in how they experience the change agent in different change contexts. By doing this, we contribute to the recent research that has considered resistance as a two-sided story, in which leadership traits and behaviors are associated with resistance (Oreg & Berson, 2011).

2.2. A two-sided view of recipients' resistance

To achieve organizational change, the cooperation of recipients is needed (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). However, recipients do not respond to change in similar ways and not all of them embrace the change. Resistance to change can be seen as recipients' responses not in line with the change attempts of the agent (Bartunek, 1993). Recipients can have various reasons to resist a change, such as a dislike of the change, discomfort with uncertainty, or a lack of conviction that the change is needed (Oreg, 2006; Palmer, Dunford, & Akin, 2009). At the individual level, resistance can be expressed in frustration and motivational problems, and may even lead to existential fear (Blomme & Bornebroek-Te Lintelo, 2012). Within the traditional perspective on resistance, change agents are characterized as victims of the change-resistant behaviors of recipients (Ford et al., 2008). This agent-centric view assumes that the change agent is an unbiased observer of an objective reality, namely resistance by recipients (Ford et al., 2008). Resistance is portrayed as arising spontaneously and seen as the recipients' reactions to change, and independent of the relationship and the interactions between the change agent and the recipient (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; King & Anderson, 1995).

However, displayed resistance to change does not only come from the feelings and behaviors of recipients toward the "change"

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object. It could also be a consequence of the way in which the agent interprets the conduct of change recipients and the agent's subsequent behavior (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Recipients' resistance might originate in a self-fulfilling and possibly self-serving label presented by change agents (Ford & Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2008). The self-fulfilling identification of resistance occurs because change agents who expect resistance may unconsciously activate and consequently observe this behavior. The self-serving aspect relates to agents needing explanations that lay beyond their control when something goes wrong or when something unexpected happens in the change, and recipients' resistance offers such an explanation.

Given this argument, we empirically examine the possibility that change agents are biased in their interpretation of the behavior of recipients, in the sense that they expect or even unconsciously want recipients to resist change, while recipients, depending on the circumstances, perhaps take a more neutral position regarding their own behavior. In other words, and in line with previous research on asymmetry (Jehn et al., 2006; 2010), agents and recipients might have different perceptions of the level of recipients' resistance. *Therefore, our first research question is whether there is a difference in how agents and recipients perceive the level of recipients' resistance to change.*

The idea of self-serving accounting (Ford et al., 2008) suggests that change agents might not only be biased in interpreting recipients' resistance but might also contribute to its occurrence through their own behavior. For instance, when a change does not progress as expected, the change agent may blame the situation on others (i.e., blame recipient resistance) to make themselves look better. Here, recipients' resistance serves as an account for what went wrong: it is the recipients to blame, not the agent (Ford & Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2008). In a longitudinal case study, Huy et al. (2014, p. 1672). found support for the idea that this would boost resistance, finding that recipients who expressed resistance were blamed, and viewed as unsuitable for certain management positions, which subsequently led to increased resistance. That their own behavior can increase recipient resistance might be underestimated by change agents.

Similarly, agents seem also to underestimate their capacity to lower recipients' resistance. Agents tend to view resistance as a given in a change situation, and as something about which they can do little (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Ford et al., 2002; King & Anderson, 1995). However, recipients do believe that leadership matters and can influence them in gaining a positive attitude toward change (García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández, 2014; Oreg & Berson, 2011). Oreg and Berson (2011), for instance, found that inspirational leadership had a particularly strong effect (by lowering resistance intentions).

In their study, Oreg and Berson only addressed the recipients' views of the agent's leadership behavior, and we go further by including the views of both agents and recipients in exploring whether they have different perceptions regarding the impact of leadership behavior on recipient resistance. *As such, our second research question is whether and how agents and recipients differ in their perceptions of the agent's contribution to recipients' resistance to change.*

2.3. Change depth and recipients' resistance

Since organizational change comes in a wide variety of forms (By, 2005; Michel et al., 2013) with different impacts on the recipients, we also examine how the depth of a change influences the relationship between the agent's leadership behavior and recipients' resistance. The depth of a change concerns the extent of changes, that is, how far the new changed characteristic differs from its original value (Woodman & Dewett, 2004). Research has shown that deeper changes have greater impacts on their recipients as they cause fundamental shifts in the organization and require the change recipients involved to operate in entirely new ways (Balogun, Hope Hailey, & Gustafsson, 2016; Burnes, 2015; Plowman Baker, Back, Kulkarni, Solansky, & Travis, 2007; Woodman & Dewett, 2004).

Herold et al. (2008) argued that highly impacted individuals will be more responsive to leadership effects. In a similar vein, agents see more reason for resistance and expect it to occur when a change is deep (Ford et al., 2008). In these situations, they may also adopt a more outspoken leadership style. Deep change situations, in the literature often characterized as radical change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Plowman et al., 2007; Street & Gallupe, 2009), disturb the roles and assumptions of various groups and thus will affect the relationships between agents and recipients (Bartunek et al., 2011; Huy et al., 2014). The depth of a change may influence not only how change agents try to implement the change and interact with the recipients (Burnes, 2004; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) but also how the recipients respond to these interactions. In a longitudinal case study, Sonenshein (2010) found that recipients, in making sense of an agent's change narrative, not only have varying understandings of the significance of a change but also, as a group, show both positive and negative responses related to the perceived significance of the change.

To further extend this understanding, our third research question is how the depth of a change influences the relationship between an agent's leadership behavior and recipients' resistance, for both agents and recipients.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and procedure

To answer our research questions, we conducted a field study involving 117 agents and 366 corresponding recipients. In three waves, over a period of 2.5 years (spring 2013–autumn 2015), we collected survey data on 117 distinct agent-recipient combinations covering 110 different change projects in 90 organizations. Representative changes in our sample concern restructuring projects (of unit, organization, or process), integration processes after a merger or an acquisition, changing relationships with customers or suppliers, and implementation projects of various information systems. To investigate the unique role of agents in specific changes (Hill, Seo, Kang, & Taylor, 2012), each combination had to include an agent plus directly related recipients who together had recently been involved in a change project (the change had to have started within the previous three years). This sample of connected agent-recipients combinations was achieved by removing cases including only an agent or only recipients from a larger dataset (18 cases, involving 49 respondents, were removed). The majority of the agent-recipients groupings consisted of 3–4 members (59% of the sample), with the number of recipients ranging from 1 to 10.

Of the 117 agents, 71% were male and 29% female, with a mean age of 43 ($SD = 10$). All the agents had Dutch nationality. Most had completed higher vocational training or held a university degree (81%), with another 17% having received lower vocational training. Agents had been in their current position for an average of 7 years ($SD = 6.6$) with an average work experience of 18 years ($SD = 10.8$). Of the recipient group ($N = 366$), 54% were male and 46% female, with a mean age of 39 ($SD = 12$). Apart from one with German nationality, all the recipients were Dutch. As with the agents, most had higher vocational training or attended university (56%), with most of the others having undergone lower vocational training (42%). On average, recipients had been 7.5 years in their current

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position ($SD = 7.1$) and had 17 years of work experience ($SD = 11.3$).

Potential participants were identified through a combination of convenience sampling and snowballing. Relevant agent-recipients groupings were identified and contacted to see if they would participate in this study. In the majority of these combinations, the contact was established through the agents first; they subsequently suggested the recipients. If they all agreed, the participants received a link to the online survey and a unique code that would enable us to match agents and recipients involved in the same change project. To ensure that agents and recipients answered their questions based on the same change project, we asked the agents to provide a name and a short description for their chosen project and, in the email with the survey link to the corresponding recipients, we included this short description and asked them to complete the survey with this project in mind.

3.2. Measures

We developed two similar surveys to measure the relevant constructs from the two actor perspectives. We partly used existing scales and to an extent developed scales ourselves, with items to be answered on a 1–7 Likert scale. The factor analysis of all the survey items is displayed in Table 1. The total variance explained by the five factors that were distinguished in the analysis was 66.85%. All the constructs were loaded onto different factors, indicating that the constructs are distinct.

3.2.1. Change leader behavior

Higgs and Rowland (2005) distinguished three change leader behaviors that every agent can have in a certain combination or extent: shaping, framing, and creating. In a later study, they further refined these components, combining the framing and creating behaviors into a single "framcap" behavior consisting of four sub-dimensions: attractor, edge and tension, container, and transforming space (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Based on these refined components, we iteratively developed a quantitative instrument to measure the change leader behaviors. We first developed items for each sub-dimension based on their coding frame (see Higgs & Rowland, 2011: Table 1). This resulted in a total of 40 items. After a careful review by two independent change management experts, we pre-tested the items in a pilot round involving MScBA students ($N = 55$). We analyzed the collected data using factor and reliability analysis and slightly adjusted some items after reviewing the results. In a second round, we tested the items on a different group of 74 respondents (professional agents and recipients) and used the same procedure to make item adjustments. The data from these two rounds are not part of the sample used in the final analysis reported here (pre-tests in spring and autumn 2012).

The factor analysis of the final scale can be found in Table 1. We performed an exploratory factor analysis using the Oblimin with Kaizer normalization rotation method. Three criteria were set to assess the validity of the scales: factor loadings were >0.40 (Lindeman, Merenda, & Gold, 1980); the difference between factor loadings was >0.20; item-rest correlations were >0.20 (Kline, 1986). The factor analysis identified a structure consisting of the main shaping, framing, and creating behaviors, but failed to identify the sub-dimensions of the "framcap" behaviors (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). For each of the main behaviors, five items were found that satisfied the set criteria, resulting in an instrument comprising 15 items in total. The variances explained by the shaping, framing, and creating behaviors were 5.2, 6.1, and 35.6%, respectively. Based on Cronbach's alphas, the internal consistencies of these scales were good ($\alpha = 0.86$ for shaping, $\alpha = 0.89$ for creating, and $\alpha = 0.87$ for framing). The aggregation indices were ICC[1] = 0.24, ICC[2] = 0.54

Table 1
Factor loadings between the constructs.

Agent version/Recipient version		1	2	3	4	5
Shaping behavior						
During the change, the change agent/*I* …						
SB1	… implemented the change based on *his/her*/my experience with other changes.	**-0.78**	0.09	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01
SB2	… regularly tried to bring up *his/her*/my views about the change.	**-0.76**	-0.06	0.15	0.05	-0.00
SB3	… pointed the employees at their responsibilities regarding their role in the change.	**-0.75**	0.14	-0.06	0.04	-0.02
SB4	… put in a lot of energy to convince people to go along with the change.	**-0.73**	-0.08	0.18	0.03	0.09
SB5	… regularly used *his/her*/my experience to shape the implementation of change.	**-0.65**	0.17	0.05	0.04	-0.03
Framing behavior						
During the change, the *change agent*/I …						
FB1	… did not make things look better than they were; *he/she*/I stuck to the reality.	0.11	**0.81**	0.08	0.05	-0.01
FB2	… showed confidence that *(s)he*/I would bring this change to a successful conclusion.	-0.08	**0.78**	0.02	0.00	0.00
FB3	… did not shy away from difficulties	0.00	**0.76**	0.13	0.06	0.01
FB4	… set clear rules and boundaries so that the employees knew where they stood.	-0.21	**0.71**	-0.10	-0.06	0.05
FB5	… knew how to create confidence and trust in difficult times.	-0.14	**0.65**	0.14	-0.06	-0.11
Creating behavior						
During the change, the *change agent*/I …						
CB1	… organized discussions with the employees to come up with different solutions.	-0.01	-0.10	**0.91**	-0.02	0.00
CB2	… spent time with the employees to come up with creative solutions.	-0.03	0.10	**0.81**	-0.04	-0.03
CB3	… ensured that there was room for the employees to think differently	0.02	0.30	**0.67**	0.08	0.03
CB4	… broadened the way employees think by making *him/herself*/myself vulnerable.	-0.16	0.14	**0.64**	-0.01	0.01
CB5	… took the employees out of their daily routine to allow them to think differently.	-0.15	0.07	**0.64**	0.05	0.00
Change depth (same items for agent and recipients)						
CD1	This change greatly affected the responsibilities of employees.	0.13	0.05	-0.03	**0.85**	0.04
CD2	This change greatly affected the work of employees.	0.03	0.10	-0.15	**0.84**	0.02
CD3	This change greatly affected the relationships between employees.	-0.08	-0.12	0.14	**0.70**	0.05
CD4	The change is pioneering.	-0.16	-0.03	0.04	**0.64**	-0.09
Recipients' resistance behavior						
During the change …						
Res1	… the employees mutually (*I*) complained (*with others*) about the change.	-0.00	0.02	-0.05	0.04	**0.87**
Res2	… the employees (*I*) expressed their (*my*) complaints regarding the change to management.	0.12	0.03	0.13	0.03	**0.83**
Res3	… the employees (*I*) sought ways to obstruct the change.	-0.13	-0.04	-0.08	-0.05	**0.78**

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
The bold shows that all the constructs loaded onto different factors.

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and $r_{wg} = 0.75$ ($F = 2.17$, $p < 0.001$) for shaping; ICC[1] = 0.25; ICC [2] = 0.56 and $r_{wg} = 0.75$ ($F = 1.69$, $p < 0.001$) for framing; and, for creating, ICC[1] = 0.17; ICC[2] = 0.44 and $r_{wg} = 0.76$ ($F = 2.30$ $p < 0.001$). These indicate that it was appropriate to aggregate the individual results to the recipient group level (Bliese, 2000).

3.2.2. Resistance to change

We asked recipients to rate their own resistance to the introduced change, and agents to rate the resistance of their group of recipients, using the behavioral dimension of resistance based on Oreg (2006). Resistance researchers commonly distinguish cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of resistance (Bouckenooghe, 2010; Piderit, 2000). However, since the focus of our study was on agent's and recipients' behaviors during change and, moreover, since we were asking them to assess each other's behavior, we did not include the affective and cognitive dimensions. We slightly modified the items to make them appropriate for the agent survey (see Table 1). The reliability of this scale was good ($\alpha = 0.78$), and with ICC[1] = 0.16, ICC[2] = 0.42, and $r_{wg} = 0.60$ ($F = 2.77$, $p <. 001$) aggregation was again appropriate (Bliese, 2000). The variance explained by this factor was 8.4%.

3.2.3. Change depth

Given our second research question, we controlled for the depth of the change in our analyses and examined its moderating impact to answer the third research question. We used four items to measure this variable (Table 1). The internal consistency of this scale was good with $\alpha = 0.76$, and with ICC[1] = 0.27, ICC[2] = 0.58, and $r_{wg} = 0.71$ ($F = 2.79$, $p = <0.001$) aggregation was again appropriate (Bliese, 2000). The variance explained by this factor was 11.6%.

3.2.4. Controls

Following past research on employee resistance (Furst & Cable, 2008; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008), we controlled for the agent's age, gender, educational level, and tenure in current position. Additionally, we controlled for organizational size and change phase. Preliminary analyses indicated that only agent's tenure and the change phase were associated with our variables (see Table 2). Therefore, we included these two control variables in the further analyses.

4. Results

4.1. Correlations and associations between the variables

In Table 2, the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are displayed, both for the agent and for the recipient samples. Given that we asked the agents to rate recipient resistance for the recipient group as a whole, we aggregated the recipient sample to the group level.

In the agent sample, the tenure of the agents in their current position is not associated with any of the variables, while in the recipient sample the agents' tenure is associated with lower levels of resistance. In both samples, change phase and depth are associated, such that the later the phase of the change, the less deep is the change. In the agent sample, change phase is also associated with higher levels of framing behavior.

Regarding the relationship between the leadership behaviors and recipient resistance, there are notable differences between the agent and recipient samples. In the agent sample, we find creating behavior to be associated with higher levels of recipients' resistance, while in the recipient sample all leadership behaviors are associated with lower levels of resistance. These two patterns suggest that the recipients do see the agent as playing a role in decreasing their resistance, while agents see either no effect of their behavior (in their displaying of shaping and framing behavior) on resistance or they experience that creating behavior to actually increase recipient resistance.

Regarding the perception of the depth of the change, we also see some differences between the two samples. Agents in change projects with a greater depth report that they display higher levels of all leadership behaviors than those in more superficial projects, whereas recipients only associate higher levels of shaping and creating behaviors, and not framing behavior, with deeper changes. Furthermore, agents in change projects with a greater depth also report higher levels of recipient resistance, while for the recipient sample this association is not significant. Finally, in both samples, the leadership behaviors are associated with each other.

4.2. Answering the research questions

Our first research question was whether there was a significant difference in how agents and recipients rate the level of recipients'

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

Agent's perspective	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
1. Agent's tenure[a]	7.01	6.56	–						
2. Change phase[b]	2.74	0.94	0.10	–					
3. Change depth	4.77	1.22	-0.04	-0.23**	–				
4. Shaping behavior	5.44	0.88	-0.03	0.01	0.49***	–			
5. Framing behavior	5.67	0.76	0.08	0.26**	0.35***	0.51***	–		
6. Creating behavior	5.09	1.06	-0.01	0.04	0.47***	0.59***	0.55***	–	
7. Recipient's resistance	3.87	1.47	-0.02	-0.12	0.20*	0.04	0.01	0.21*	–
Recipient's perspective	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
1. Agent's tenure[a]	7.01	6.56	-						
2. Change phase[b]	2.74	0.94	0.10	-					
3. Change depth	4.30	0.97	0.07	-0.20*	–				
4. Shaping behavior	4.70	1.00	-0.02	0.02	0.21*	–			
5. Framing behavior	4.92	0.77	0.02	0.13	0.07	0.62***	–		
6. Creating behavior	4.42	0.99	-0.08	0.08	0.21*	0.70***	0.64***	-	
7. Recipient's resistance	2.66	1.01	-0.18*	-0.03	0.10	-0.26**	-0.40***	-0.22*	-

Note. $N = 117$; recipient data are aggregated to the group level.
***$p < 0.001$,**$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.
[a] Tenure in current position in years.
[b] 1 = beginning phase, 2 = middle phase, 3 = end phase, 4 = change finalized.

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Table 3
Hierarchical linear regression results.

	Resistance to change					
	Agent's perspective			Recipient's perspective		
	M1	M2	M3	M1	M2	M3
Step 1.						
Agent's tenure	-0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.19*	-0.20*	-0.15
Change phase	-0.12	-0.09	-0.11	0.02	0.08	0.06
Change depth	0.22	0.20	0.22	0.12	0.18	0.13
Step 2.						
Shaping behavior		-0.25	-0.13		-0.06	0.04
Framing behavior		-0.23	-0.23		-0.51***	-0.43***
Creating behavior		0.40*	0.38*		0.01	-0.17
Step 3.						
Shaping × Depth			0.35*			0.15
Framing × Depth			-0.31			-0.00
Creating × Depth			-0.03			-0.26*
F	1.80	1.90	1.91	1.80	5.08***	4.25***
Δ F		1.94	1.85		8.03***	2.24
Total R^2	0.05	0.09	0.14	0.05	0.22	0.26
Δ R^2		0.05	0.05		0.17***	0.05
Durbin-Watson			2.17			1.86

Notes. $N = 117$; Unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed.
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

resistance. To answer this question, we carried out an independent *t*-test, comparing the means on recipient resistance for the agents and for the recipients. We found a significant difference between the means of the agent ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.47$) and the recipient ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.00$) [$t(232) = 7.54$, $p < 0.001$] samples, indicating that agents perceive higher levels of recipients' resistance than do the recipients themselves.

We then performed hierarchical linear regression analyses to provide answers to the second and third research questions (see the results in Table 3). The second research question queried whether agents and recipients had different perceptions of the agent's contribution to the recipients' resistance to change. After controlling for agent's tenure, change phase, and change depth in an initial step, we regressed the three leadership styles onto recipient resistance in a second step, for the agent and recipient samples individually. The results show that, for the agent sample, creating behavior had a significant positive contribution to recipient resistance ($B = 0.40$, $p = 0.02$). Shaping behavior ($B = -0.25$, $p = 0.22$) and framing behavior ($B = -0.23$, $p = 0.32$) were not associated with employee resistance, nor did any of the controls. The model fit was marginal (F (6,116) = 1.90, $p = 0.09$), with an increase of the R^2-value from 0.05 in model 1 to 0.09 in model 2, where all leadership behaviors were added. The average VIF score of model 2 is 1.53, with an average tolerance of 0.68, which confirms that collinearity is not a problem for this model (Bowerman & O'Connell, 1990; Myers, 1990). The condition number for the smallest eigenvalue is 28.89, with variance proportions loading different dimensions, which further supports this conclusion (Field, 2013).

In the recipient sample, we found a significant negative relationship between framing behavior and recipient resistance ($B = -0.51$, $p = 0.001$), after controlling for a significant negative relationship between agents' functional work experience and employee resistance ($B = -0.20$; $p = 0.03$), indicating that, according to the recipients, the more leaders displayed framing behavior the less they resisted change. Shaping behavior ($B = -0.06$, $p = 0.62$) and creating behavior ($B = -0.01$, $p = 0.95$) did not influence recipient resistance, nor did the other controls. The model fit was excellent (F (6,116) = 5.08, $p < 0.001$), with a significant increase of the R^2-value from 0.05 in model 1 to 0.22 in model 2 ($p < 0.001$), where all leadership behaviors were added. The average VIF score of model 2 is 1.62, with an average tolerance of 0.69, which confirms that collinearity is not a problem for this model (Bowerman & O'Connell, 1990; Myers, 1990). The condition number for the smallest eigenvalue is 28.16, with variance proportions loading different dimensions, which further supports that no collinearity exists (Field, 2013).

These results indicate that agents and recipients have different perceptions of the agent's contribution to recipient resistance. Agents reported creating behavior leading to higher levels of recipient resistance, while recipients particularly reported framing behavior leading to lower levels of resistance. These results suggest that agents do not seem to perceive that they are able to decrease the resistance of recipients but are aware that sometimes they increase it, whereas recipients tend to experience that leaders do decrease their resistance (see also the correlations in Table 2), especially when their leader displays framing behavior (see Table 3). The difference between the R^2-values for the agents and for the recipients in model 2 suggests that the contribution of the leader to recipient resistance is perceived as greater by the recipients than by the agents.

The third research question addressed the moderating role of change depth in the relationship between leadership behaviors and recipient resistance to change. To examine this question, we regressed in the third step of our regression model, for the agents and recipients samples individually, and after controlling for the leadership behaviors and change depth, the interactions between the three leadership behaviors and change depth. As recommended, we mean centered all the variables before calculating the interactions (Aiken & West, 1991).

In line with the model 2 result, the agent sample showed a significant and positive main effect of creating behavior on recipient resistance ($B = 0.38$, $p = 0.04$), after controlling for agent's tenure, change phase, and change depth. Additionally, a significant interaction was found between shaping behavior and change depth ($B = 0.35$, $p = 0.03$), indicating that shaping behavior decreased recipient resistance in situations with only a shallow change, but slightly increased recipient resistance in deep change situations (see Fig. 1). The model fit was marginal (F (9; 116) = 1.91, $p = 0.06$) with an increased R^2-value from 0.09 in model 2 to 0.14 in model 3. The average VIF score of this model is 2.13, with an average tolerance of 0.54, which confirms that collinearity is not a problem for this model (Bowerman & O'Connell, 1990; Myers, 1990). The condition number for the smallest eigenvalue is 31.97, with variance proportions loading different dimensions, which further supports that no collinearity exists (Field, 2013).

Again in line with model 2, we found a significant negative main effect of framing behavior on recipient resistance ($B = -0.43$, $p = 0.008$) in the recipient sample, after controlling for agent's tenure, change phase, and change depth. In addition, we found a significant interaction between creating behavior and change depth ($B = -0.26$, $p = 0.03$), indicating that creating behavior decreased recipient resistance in situations of deep change, but increased recipient resistance in change situations of low depth (see Fig. 2). This model had an excellent fit as well (F (9; 116) = 4.25, $p < 0.001$) and the R^2-value changed from 0.22 in model 2 to 0.26 in model 3 ($p = 0.09$). The average VIF score of this model is 2.10, with an average tolerance of 0.56, which confirms that collinearity is not a problem for this model (Bowerman & O'Connell, 1990; Myers, 1990). The condition number for the smallest eigenvalue is 29.21, with variance proportions loading different dimensions, which further supports that no collinearity exists (Field, 2013).

These results indicate that agents and recipients do indeed have different perceptions regarding the moderating role of change depth. In addition to the main effects that were replicated in the

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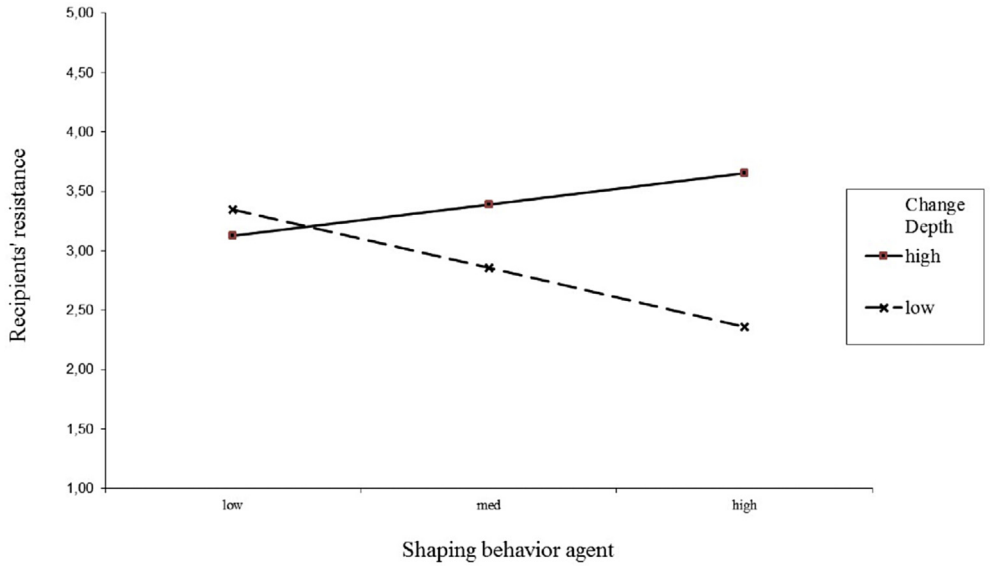

Fig. 1. Agent's perspective: the moderating role of change depth on the relationship between shaping behavior and recipients' resistance.

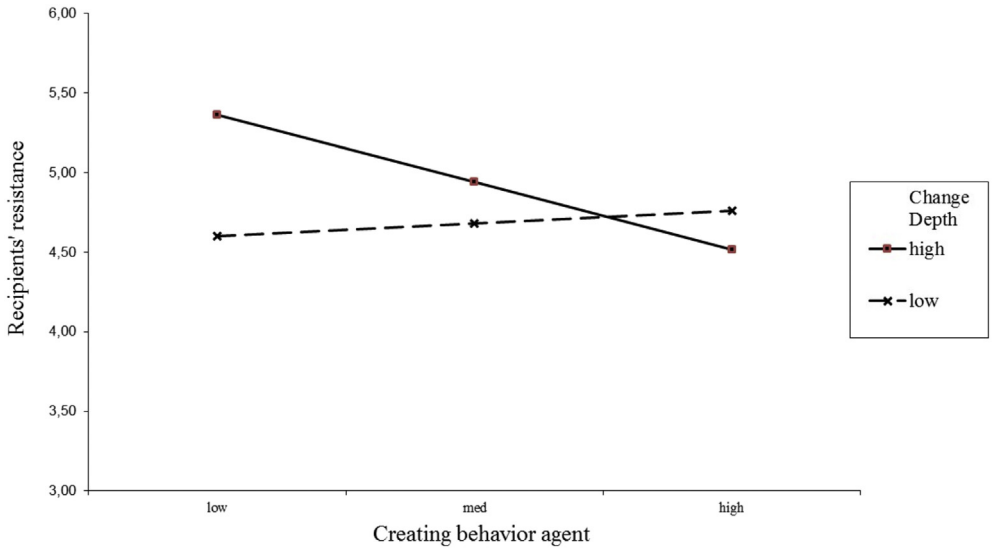

Fig. 2. Recipients' perspective: the moderating role of change depth on the relationship between creating behavior and recipients' resistance.

third model, we found two distinct interactions in the agent and recipient samples. Shaping behavior appeared to play a role in the agent sample, decreasing resistance in low depth change situations, but increasing resistance in deep change situations (see Fig. 2). In terms of the role that creating behavior played in decreasing or increasing recipient resistance, the recipients had a more nuanced view than the agents. Whereas the agents perceived creating behavior as increasing recipient resistance regardless of the change depth, the recipients also perceived such agent behavior as increasing resistance in shallow depth situations but as decreasing their resistance in deep change situations.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of research findings

This research empirically examined the relationship between change leadership behavior and recipients' resistance, including both agent and recipient perspectives. The results of our study indicate that agents and recipients do experience resistance differently and also have different interpretations of which and when the various leadership behaviors increase or decrease resistance to change. Our results suggest that agents perceive higher levels of recipient resistance than the recipients do. Regarding the relationship between leadership behavior and recipients' resistance to change, agents seem to underestimate their ability to reduce this resistance. Further, leaders even experience that creating behavior increases resistance. Recipients, on the other hand, experience agent's shaping behavior as reducing their resistance.

In addition, our study provides support for a contingency perspective on the effects of change leadership on recipients' resistance, again differently for agents and for recipients. Agents view shaping behavior (i.e., the more agent-centric behavior) as reducing resistance in low depth situations but as slightly increasing resistance in deep change situations. Recipients

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conversely view creating behavior as decreasing resistance in deep change situations, but as increasing resistance in change situations of low depth.

5.2. Theoretical and practical implications

This research has responded to Bouckenooghe et al.'s (2009) call for both agent and recipient perspectives to be included in change management research. The concept of resistance to change is well established in the change management literature, but research has paid only limited attention to agent's contributions to resistance. As such, this research has made a key contribution by providing a two-sided view on resistance and agent's influence on this resistance. That agents perceive higher levels of resistance aligns with Ford et al.'s (2008) reasoning that agents expect resistance (and thus will see it) and that it is in their interest to label certain recipient behaviors as resisting. It is remarkable that agents view that creating behavior, that is, the most recipient-centric behavior, increases recipients' resistance. Of the three types of change leadership behaviors, creating behavior is the one that particularly puts effort into communicating with recipients and is also the most facilitative toward these actors (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; 2011). Perhaps, agents who behave in this way better appreciate recipients' input during a change than do agents with other behavioral profiles. This would suggest that agents who are more open to recipients' inputs are the ones who see themselves as having a role in establishing the resistance level, rather than merely as a phenomenon that is located "over there" in the recipients and determined by them (Ford et al., 2008).

Our findings show that the depth of change matters (Michel et al., 2013). In deep change situations, recipients seem to appreciate a creating change leader who focuses on enhancing their capabilities. Deeper change situations have greater impacts on the recipients. For them to become supportive, they appreciate a leader who allows them to contribute. The finding of agents reporting that a directive approach, through shaping behavior, does not work very well in deep change situations since it leads to an increase of resistance is in line with this reasoning. In shallow change situations, on the other hand, recipients may feel better equipped to make the needed adjustments themselves. In such situations, an agent's creating behavior would needlessly slow down the pace of change, which may raise recipients' irritations and lead to an increase of resistance.

In achieving a two-sided view on resistance and agent's influence on this resistance, other more specific contributions have been made. Based on the change leadership behaviors identified by Higgs and Rowland (2005, 2011), we have developed an instrument that can be used in quantitative research to measure change leadership behaviors from the perspectives of both agents and recipients. Our testing and validation of the instrument confirms the presence of the three distinct behaviors of shaping, framing, and creating (Higgs & Rowland, 2005), but failed to find evidence of finer-grained behaviors (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). This suggests that the original distinction made by Higgs and Rowland into three types of leadership behaviors may be more robust. Future research could test our instrument on a larger sample and/or in different change situations to further validate this assertion.

In general, a practical implication is that what may seem to be a plausible interpretation of the relationship between resistance and change leadership for one group of change actors may appear implausible for the other group (Bartunek et al., 2006; Weick et al., 2005). Although it is perhaps not surprising that agents and recipients can have different perceptions of the role of change leadership in resistance, especially for change leaders, it is a factor that should not be overlooked. Our research suggests that recipients of change may not interpret change messages in the way the agent intended them to understand (Balogun et al., 2016). This implies that to achieve shared understandings between agents and recipients, the agent's change communications should relate not only to the subject matter of change but also to the ways the change will be approached.

More specifically and related to the previous point, our study has provided support for the notion that the agent's behavior should fit with the change situation. However, given that our results indicate that agents and recipients differ in their perceptions of which type of leadership reduces recipient resistance in a given situation, there is a danger that agents adopt a leadership style mistakenly believing it will lower resistance. Tailoring leadership behavior to the change situation not only requires that agents are aware of their leadership styles (Ford et al., 2008) but also recognizes what recipients need in specific situations (Burnes, 2015).

5.3. Limitations and future research

Our study has a number of limitations that suggest opportunities for future research. First, a few issues concerning the gathering of data are worth mentioning. One possible limitation of our study relates to its external validity. We used data collected in the Netherlands where a high value is placed on egalitarianism and this may be reflected in a strong emphasis on the need for consensus and the idea that goals need to be accepted by all parties before realizing them (Den Hartog et al., 1999). This means that our findings may have a limited generalizability to the Dutch cultural context. Bass (1997) convincingly posits the universality argument in leadership. Since his publication, particularly the notion of transformational is described as a universal process (e.g., Carter, Armenakis, Feild, & Mossholder, 2013; Den Hartog et al., 1999) and research has shown that leadership effects hold across divergent cultures (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007). Nevertheless, we recommend future research to investigate whether the effects of the three change leadership behaviors on recipients' resistance hold across cultures. Further, in our sampling, the agents identified potential recipients. Although our results do not provide evidence of this, it is possible that agents selected those recipients who they believed to be most in line with their opinions, which would have biased our results. Thus, different samples of connected agent-recipients groups in different contexts are needed to further validate the change leadership instrument, to further explore the relationship between the leadership behaviors and resistance, and possible underlying mechanisms that can explain the relationships found. In this respect, the role of gender (i.e., of both agent and recipients) and change initiatives in other cultural contexts offer more specific lines of inquiry.

Second, as our research focus was on agent's and recipients' behaviors during change, we confined our measure of resistance to change to its behavioral dimension, and excluded the cognitive and affective dimensions (Oreg, 2006; Piderit, 2000). We recognize that our measure therefore reflects a rather negative interpretation of resistance, whereas resistance may actually have a positive value (Ford et al., 2008). Resistance entails the introduction or increase of change-related conservations (Ford, 1999) and can create engagement within the change (Amason, 1996; Piderit, 2000). In future research, one could consider a more neutral or even positive interpretation of resistance, or extend the research to address readiness for change.

Finally, in our research, we took the context of change into account. We have compared specific change efforts across many different change situations. This enabled us to investigate the influence of change depth on the relationship between leadership and resistance. To build on our findings, we would encourage future

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research to include a more systematic analysis of the relevant contextual factors. In this regard, a relevant line of research would be to distinguish between planned and emergent changes (Burnes, 2004). The change situations also differed in their change phase and both agents and recipients seem to consider changes in a later phase as less deep. This suggests that actors grow accustomed to a change when they are in the process. How perceptions of both agents and recipients evolve and how that relates to the decrease or increase of resistance over time is an additional promising line of research (Dawson, 2014; Jones & Van de Ven, 2016).

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