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Master thesis Human Resource Studies

**Perceptions of justice in an organizational change situation: The effect on resistance to change and the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies**

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Project theme: Adaptability  
Project period: February 2012 – February 2013

### **Preface**

Organizational changes are needed to keep companies healthy. However, the impact of organizational changes on the emotions of their employees is often overlooked. Eventually the employees are the ones who are responsible for the success of the organizational change. Employees who dislike the change or think of it as unjust will walk around with negative feelings, this can cause a climate of resistance. Being sensitive to the feelings of employees prevents resistance and therefore can have a major effect on the success of the change.

To me, more attention for the emotions of employees in organizational change projects is a very promising development that should be applied in every change project. In my future work I hope to work for an organization where I can implement my vision about how to keep employees satisfied and motivated by taking into account their emotional feelings, even when enormous changes are ahead. Also in my personal live I hope to be sensitive and understanding to other's feelings because I strongly believe that will help me in being a good HR professional.

I would like to thank several people that helped and supported me in writing my thesis. First of all, many thanks to my supervisor, dr. Karen van Dam, for guiding me through the whole process of writing my thesis and giving me support and helpful comments. I would also like to thank my second assessor, dr. Marloes van Engen, for providing me with a critical view and useful feedback on my thesis. And last but not least I would like to thank my boyfriend, family and friends for their mental support.

I really enjoyed writing this thesis and I certainly hope that everybody will enjoy reading it too.

### **Abstract**

Building on Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) Affective Events Theory, the present study examined how perceptions of organizational justice in an organizational change situation relate to employees' resistance to change through employees' use of emotion regulation strategies. The results partly supported the conceptual model, showing that the relationship of distributive justice with resistance to change was fully mediated by emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and rumination. Reappraisal partial mediated the relationship between interactional justice and resistance to change. In addition, results revealed that employees who appraised the organizational change as just used more adaptive emotion regulation (reappraisal) and employees with injustice perceptions used more maladaptive emotion regulation (rumination). In turn, as expected, reappraisal was negatively related to resistance to change, whereas rumination was positively related with resistance to change. Together, this study contributes to the understanding of the role emotion regulation plays in an organizational change situation and shows the importance of employees' justice perceptions for their responses in a change initiative.

*Keywords:* organizational justice, emotion regulation strategies, resistance to change, affective events theory

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## Introduction

In contemporary organizations there is a growing need to implement changes on a constant base (Kalleberg, 2009; Cummings & Worley, 2009). These changes are needed due to continuous developments in the environment such as increasing globalization and new technologies. Especially in times of an economic crisis, organizations are forced to revise their strategy, culture and internal processes (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Nevertheless, despite the great effort organizations put in the implementation of the change, many change initiatives end up in failure. Balogun and Hope-Hailey (2008) report a failure rate of around 70 per cent of change projects. This indicates the urge for more knowledge of how to implement and manage organizational change. Although most research has been focused at the organizational level instead of on reactions of the individuals (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011), there is a growing consensus about the key role that employees' responses have in a successful change (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Primary reactions of employees towards change are often negative reactions, so is resistance to change a reaction that frequently occurs (Kiefer, 2005). Imagine how an organizational change project will progress when organizations know the effect of their acting on the emotions of employees and even better if they know how to steer the emotional reaction into the right direction.

In research and in practice there is a growing awareness of the importance of employee emotions to understand the negative reactions to an organizational change initiative (Fugate, Harrison, Kinicki, 2011). The present study will reinforce this awareness because the reactions of employees are investigated more in depth by focusing on the emotion regulation strategies that are associated with the perceptions of justice about the change initiative. Particularly, assessing the emotion regulation strategies employees use, sheds new light on existing research of the relationship between organizational change and the resistance this elicits. As Smollan and Sayers (2009) note, still few studies of organizational change have paid attention to employees' emotional responses to change. Although emotion regulation is a relatively new concept to investigate in the research field of organizational change, it is of major importance since it provides a better understanding of the process of how resistance occurs.

Emotion regulation during organizational change is likely related to perceptions of organizational justice (Oreg & van Dam, 2009). Perceived justice is of particular interest to investigate when it comes to organizational change, since it is found that a majority of employees' concerns about the change is related to organizational justice (Kiefer, 2005). Moreover, perceived injustice is an important predictor of negative emotions (Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Though the emotional outcomes of perceived justice are still under-researched (Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2008a; Rodell & Colquitt, 2009), many researchers argue that emotions play a central role in how perceived justice is translated into subsequent behavior (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999).

For organizations and managers this study is highly relevant since it is important to be aware of the influence certain actions, in the change process, can have on the perception of justice of employees. The perceptions of justice can affect the way emotions are regulated, which in turn determines the degree of resistance to the change. This suggests that organizations should take into account and can derive conclusions out of the emotion regulation strategies used by recipients of the organizational change.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effect of perceived justice in an organizational change initiative, on employees' emotion regulation strategies, and how this relates to resistance to change.

*'How is perceived justice related to resistance to change, and to what extent is this relationship mediated by emotion regulation strategies?'*

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Bridging justice perceptions and resistance to change via affective events theory**

In an organizational change project, the main concerns of employees appear to be perceptions of justice (Kiefer, 2005), which in turn is proposed as an important source of much resistance to change (Rodell & Colquitt, 2009). By initiating change in an organization, people are taken out of their comfort zone because for them this may mean an uncomfortable period of adjustment.

Resistance to change is a concept that has been extensively studied, and is usually seen as an explanation why an organizational change fails (Oreg, 2006). However, resistance to change is more complex than most studies indicate (Piderit, 2000), and definitions used in the literature of resistance to change are rather inconsistent. According to Piderit (2000), responses to organizational change are structured along three dimensions, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Since how individuals feel about the change will correspond with what they think and with their behavioral intentions, the three dimensions are not independent of one another (Oreg, 2006). Oreg (2006) found support for the three dimensional attitude towards change, which proves that resistance cannot be treated as an unified concept. Therefore, this study adopts the tridimensional conceptualization whereby resistance to change consists of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components.

How justice perceptions are related to resistance to change can be explained by Affective Events Theory of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). AET states that specific events at work generate specific emotions, which are in turn translated to spontaneous, affectively driven behaviors. In earlier research regarding AET, individual fairness perceptions were distinguished as an affective event (Rupp & Spencer, 2006). In this research, justice perceptions of employees are also viewed as an affective event. Emotion regulation strategies used by employees are seen in this study as the

emotional reaction which follows from the affective event. Eventually, following the model, people will pass into affectively driven behaviors, such as resistance to change.

Apart from building on the notion of AET, the relationship between justice perceptions and resistance to change has been extensively studied. A majority of employees' concerns with the change appear to be related to the perception of justice, therefore justice is often cited as one of the most important predictors of resistance to change (Krikman, Shapiro, Novelli, & Brett, 1996; Kiefer, 2005; Folger & Skarlicki, 1999). Organizational justice refers to the conditions of the employment relationship that lead employees to believe they are treated fairly or unfairly, and whether those beliefs influence other work-related outcomes (Moorman, 1991). Notable is the emphasis on the beliefs of employees, which implies that people can vary in what they see as just depending on one's point of view (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998).

Several dimensions of justice are distinguished in the literature, distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice (Colquitt, 2001). In general, earlier research found that negative reactions of employees occurred when an event is perceived as unjust (Greenberg, 1994; Cropanzano & Folger, 1989). Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the outcomes or allocations that an individual receives (Leventhal, 1977). Distributive justice can be of concern in an organizational change, because resources are potentially redistributed (Oreg & Van Dam, 2009). In the literature the specific relationship between distributive justice and resistance to change has not been investigated yet, however several studies did observe a negative relationship between distributive justice in an organizational change and turnover intentions (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Daly & Geyer, 1994). In this case turnover intentions is compared with resistance to a change, since it is argued that turnover is a primary indicator of resistance to change (Daly & Geyer, 1994), implying the importance of fair outcomes.

Procedural justice refers to the appraisal of fairness that individuals make about the decision making procedures (Rodell & Colquitt, 2009). Procedural justice has gained a lot of attention in the organizational change literature. How an organizational change is implemented appears to be of major importance to employees (Oreg & Van Dam, 2009). A study by Cropanzano and Folger (1989), showed that when procedures are perceived as unfair, individuals are more likely to show a resentment response. Moreover, Brockner and Siegel (1996) found that perceived fairness of procedures can moderate the impact of unfavorable employee outcomes caused by the change. Because procedural justice encompasses information providence and opportunities for participation, a link can be drawn with a study done by Van Dam, Oreg and Schyns (2008). They found that both more information and the opportunity for participation resulted in less resistance to change. This implicates the importance of a fair procedure in an organizational change to prevent or reduce resistance to change.

Interactional justice was introduced as a third type of fairness and refers to the perceptions of employees about the quality of the interpersonal treatment in the enactment of formal procedures (Bies & Shapiro, 1987). According to Folger and Cropanzano (1998), interactional justice consists of two

components, interpersonal sensitivity and explanations. Interpersonal sensitivity relates to the idea that a fair treatment should be truthful, polite, respectful and proper, and explanations provide employees with a rationale, it tells them why something is happening. The way people are treated interpersonally and the providence of an explanation for the change, is considered to account for a substantial proportion of the perceived justice (Mikula, Petrik & Tanzer, 1990). As mentioned earlier in the study of Van Dam et al.(2008) was found that employees who received more information, which in this study is assumed to account for better explanation, reported less resistance to change. Other studies who investigated employees' reactions on interactional justice found that higher interactional justice perceptions increased the acceptance of a change, such as a smoking ban (Greenberg, 1994; Rodell & Colquitt, 2009). Interestingly, when an adequate justification is provided, employees appear to be much more tolerant of an outcome even if it is unfavorable for them (Bies & Shapiro, 1988). This implies that in an organizational change, employees should be treated in the right way and that a clear understandable explanation is crucial, since this makes individuals more understanding even when the outcomes are unfavorable for them.

In summary, there is strong evidence suggesting that perceptions of justice appear to have a major role in the generation of recipients reactions to organizational change. Employees tend to be more open to the change when they perceive the outcomes and procedures of the change and interpersonal treatment during the change as just. Therefore the following hypothesis is formulated:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived distributive, procedural and interactional justice are negatively related to resistance to change.*

### **Emotion regulation strategies elicited by justice perceptions**

The relationship between justice perceptions and resistance to change can be further explained by investigating emotion regulation of employees. Since following AET, justice perceptions can be viewed as an emotionally laden experience (Barclay et al., 2005), employees might engage in emotion regulation when they perceive unfairness during the organizational change.

Emotion regulation is defined as 'the process by which we influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them' (Gross, 1998a, p.275). Emotion regulation strategies are used by people to select the right response suitable for meeting a person's goal (Campos, Frankel & Camras, 2004). The topic of emotion regulation has received increased attention in the literature over the past ten years and has its roots in research about psychological defences (Freud 1946), and more recently in the stress and coping literature (Lazarus, 1966). Emotion regulation differs from coping in the way that coping is the broader category, as it includes also non-emotional actions taken to achieve non emotional goals (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). However coping does not entirely subsume emotion regulation because emotional regulation also

includes processes such as sustaining or augmenting positive emotions which is not traditionally considered in the coping literature (Gross, 1998a; Gross, 2010).

Following the AET of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), an affective event is followed by an emotion. In this study, a direct relationship is expected from the affective event, the perception of justice, to the use of emotion regulation strategies. Campos et al. (2004), convincingly argues that emotion and emotion regulation interact with each other at all phases of their generation, manifestation, and termination. Therefore in this study emotions and emotion regulation are adopted as one conjoined process.

In the literature no studies have been found that assess the specific relationship from perceived justice to the use of emotion regulation strategies. Therefore, comparable empirical research is raised which investigates the emotional responses associated with perceived justice, since it can be argued that emotions and emotion regulation strategies are identified as one process (Campos et al., 2004). Schoefer and Ennew (2005) studied the emotional reaction during and after service complaint experiences. Results showed that low justice perceptions elicited higher levels of negative emotions such as anger or rage, whereas high levels of perceived justice increased the likelihood of positive emotions such as happiness and joy. Weiss et al. (1999) found that the emotion of happiness was mainly a function of distributive justice. Anger was highest when the outcome was unfavorable and procedural injustice was perceived. Also, guilt was found as an emotion that can be elicited through perceived injustice, which occurs when a person is over-rewarded. A study by Mikula et al. (1998) showed that by far the most indicated emotional reaction to a very unjust perceived situation is anger, followed by disgust. Additionally, sadness, fear, guilt, and shame were mentioned as possible emotional reactions (Mikula, 1998).

Since previous research found that injustice perceptions are associated with negative feelings, it is likely that one will engage in emotion regulation to influence this unwanted subjective state (Gross & Thompson, 2006). This implies less need for emotion regulation strategies when the organizational change is perceived as just because then there is nothing that has to be regulated.

In general, two categories of emotion regulation strategies can be distinguished, antecedent focused strategies and response focused strategies (Gross, 2002). With antecedent focused strategies an emotion is regulated before it even becomes fully activated, whereas with response focused strategies an emotion is already underway, and response tendencies have been generated. Three emotion regulation strategies are investigated in this research. One antecedent focused strategy, reappraisal, and two response focused strategies, suppression and rumination. With reappraisal a person changes the meaning of the situation positively, in order to alter its emotional significance (Van Dam, 2012). Through suppression a person inhibits the expression of an emotion to others. Following Nolen- Hoeksema (1987), rumination is a response to a depressed mood and the persevering focus on thoughts and feelings elicited by an event. In this study the focus will be on these three strategies, reappraisal, suppression and rumination, because these three strategies are common forms of emotion

down-regulation, all very different and applicable in organizational change situations (Gross, 2002, 1998; Mikolajczak, Nelis, Hansenne, & Quoidbach, 2008; Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010).

In sum, it is argued that when a person perceives the organizational change as unjust the need arises for emotion regulation to prevent or minimize a negative affective state. Therefore the following hypothesis is stated:

*Hypothesis 2: Distributive, procedural and interactional justice are negatively related to the use of emotion regulation strategies such as reappraisal, suppression or rumination.*

### **The role of emotion regulation strategies for resistance to change**

How people regulate their subjective states in an organizational change might influence the resistance they experience. As mentioned earlier, the emotional responses of employees to an organizational change are often overlooked (Smollan & Sayers, 2009; Fugate, Harrison, & Kinicki, 2011).

In the literature, adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies are distinguished (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Mikolajczak et al., 2008). This implies that different emotion regulation strategies can have different consequences. A study conducted by Bovey and Hede (2001), indicates that the maladaptive defence mechanisms, projection, acting out, isolation of affect, dissociation and denial, are positively correlated with resistance to change. The adaptive mechanism, humor, was found to be negatively related to resistance to change. This implies that the use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies results in more resistance to change, whereas the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies results in less resistance to change.

Based on literature, reappraisal is expected to be an adaptive strategy whereas suppression and rumination are expected to be maladaptive strategies. A study by Gross (1998b) showed that reappraisal decreases disgust experience. Besides results of Gross (2002) indicated that reappraisal was associated with less negative and more positive emotion experience and expression. About suppression, researchers found that suppression of a negative emotion led to increased blood pressure responses (Harris, 2001) and increased sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Also for rumination only negative consequences have been found. Following Leahy (2007), increased focus on negative feelings is associated with increase access to negative cognitions. In addition, Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema (1995) found that people who ruminated were more pessimistic about future events even if it concerned a positive event. Notable is that people use a strategy to alter the negative subjective state, however suppression and rumination are more likely to intensify this state (Gross, 2002; Leahy, 2007).

When translating these findings to an organizational change situation, reappraisal can be evaluated as a more effective emotion regulation strategy than suppression and rumination. Reappraisers attach a more positive meaning to the change, which following Gross (1998b) results in

less negative emotions which in turn is likely to result in less resistance to the change. Through suppression it is likely one will get an even stronger aversion against the organizational change and therefore also more resistance. This is because even though a negative emotion is not expressed, inside the emotion still exist and is likely to intensify (Gross, 2002). With rumination the negative cognitive state about the change process exacerbates (Leahy, 2007), which in turn is likely to increase the resistance to the change too.

Based on above mentioned research and logical translation to an organizational change situation, the following hypotheses are formulated:

*Hypothesis 3a: The use of the emotion regulation strategy suppression is positively related to resistance to change.*

*Hypothesis 3b: The use of the emotion regulation strategy reappraisal is negatively related to resistance to change.*

*Hypothesis 3c: The use of the emotion regulation strategy rumination is positively related to resistance to change.*

### **Emotion regulation strategies as mediator**

Following AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), it is predicted that emotions should mediate the link between the affective event, perceptions of justice, and the affective driven behavior, resistance to change. Specifically, employees perceptions of distributive injustice and interactional injustice should lead to the use of emotion regulation which in turn has an effect on resistance to change. Besides, several studies provide empirical support for this indirect relationship. A research conducted by Schoefer and Diamantopoulos (2008b), showed that emotions act as a mediator of the relationship between perceived justice and subsequent behavior. Chebat and Slusarczyk (2005) noticed that emotions mediated the effect between perceived fairness of customers and their loyalty. In addition, Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus and Dumont (2006), found strong support for the mediating role of emotional reaction in the relationship between appraisal of the situation and action tendencies. Based on the AET model and comparable empirical research, an indirect relation is expected for emotion regulation strategies as mediator. The following is hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 4a: The relationship between perceived organizational justice and resistance to change is mediated by suppression.*

*Hypothesis 4b: The relationship between perceived organizational justice and resistance to change is mediated by reappraisal.*

*Hypothesis 4c: the relationship between perceived organizational justice and resistance to change is mediated by rumination.*

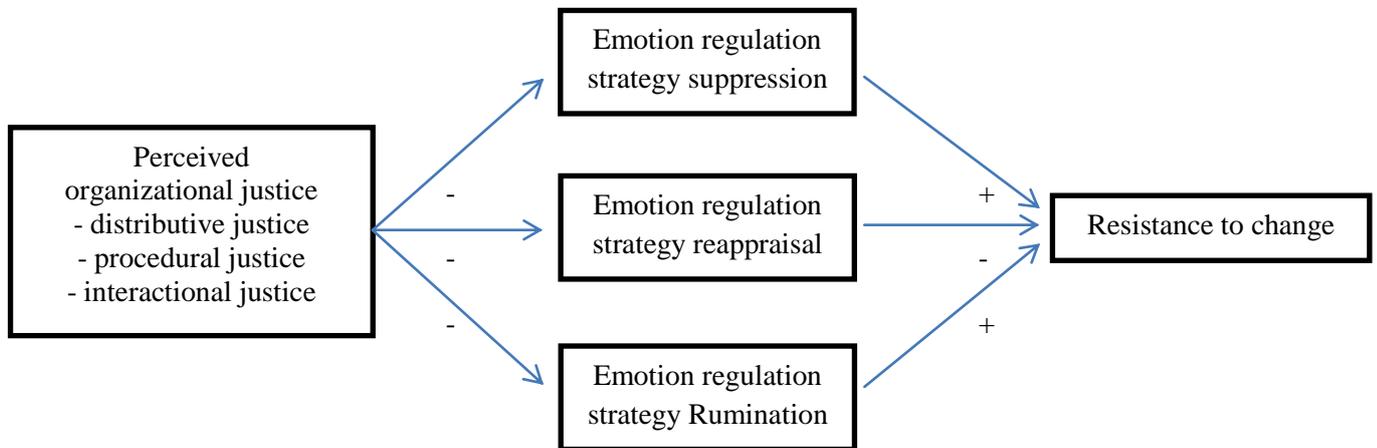


FIGURE 1: Conceptual model

## Method

### Procedure

Data have been collected in two organizations in different industries, with the use of a structured questionnaire developed in Thesis Tools. Organizations were approached when they were in the middle of an organizational change process or had just finished one recently. The two organizations that participated in this study were contacted by phone to give information about the study and ask for their participation. Upon approval employees were invited by e-mail to complete an online version of the questionnaire. The data collection took place in August and September 2012. The cover letter stressed that participation was voluntary and that anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. Furthermore, it briefly explained the goals of the study and gave an introduction to the subject. The digital questionnaire has been saved online and was automatically returned. It lasted approximately 20 minutes per respondent to fill out the questionnaire. Two reminders have been send in attempt to increase the response rate.

The two organizations that participated in this study were Royal Bank of Scotland NV and ThiemeMeulenhoff. Both companies were in the middle of a reorganization and therefore showed interest in participating in this study. Royal Bank of Scotland NV is headquartered in Amsterdam, and is part of the RBS Group of companies and delivers international banking and financial services in around 40 jurisdictions globally. From the 1700 employees in the Netherlands, 209 employees belonging to the divisions Finance, Risk and Group Secretariat, were send an e-mail with the

questionnaire link. ThiemeMeulenhoff is an educational publisher for teaching materials and teaching methods located in Amersfoort. All 250 employees were invited to participate in this study.

### **Sample of participants**

From the 186 returned questionnaires, 50 were removed because of missing data. Eventually the sample size consisted of 136 respondents in total, 69 employees of RBS (a response rate of 33 percent) and 67 employees of ThiemeMeulenhoff (a response rate of 26.8 percent), which is a total response rate of 29.6 percent. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

The sample characteristics per organization are summarized in Table 1. Mean age of the employees was 41.7 ( $sd = 9.16$ ) and the average job tenure was 8.57 ( $sd = 9.31$ ); 46.2 percent was male. Most employees had a Master's degree (40.5%) or a Higher education (37.4%), 12.2 percent had a Post graduate higher education and 9.2 percent had a vocational secondary education. No respondents had primary education and only one person had secondary education (.8%).

### **Measures**

Unless otherwise indicated, all scales were scored on a five-point Likert scale in which 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. For the questionnaire of ThiemeMeulenhoff the items of all scales were translated from English to Dutch. For each scale, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as an estimate of the internal consistency and a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted.

*Organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice.* Procedural justice and interactional justice were measured using Mansour-Cole and Scott's (2001) scale (14 items) which was developed to measure procedural justice and interactional justice during organization restructuring and associated layoffs. To use this scale for organizational change situations in general, words as restructuring and eliminations were replaced with organizational change. Distributive justice was measured with items from existing scales of distributive justice (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993; Price and Mueller, 1986). A PCA was conducted on all organizational justice variables. The four items of distributive justice clearly loaded on one component. However, this analysis did not show a distinction between the items of procedural justice and interactional justice. To exclude the risk of multicollinearity the choice was made to exclude the items for procedural justice from the analyses. Therefore about procedural justice was not reported. A second PCA did identify a clear distinction between interactional justice and distributive justice. Only one item of interactional justice loaded on both components and was therefore removed. This resulted in a 9 item interactional justice scale and a 4 item distributive justice scale. An example item of the interactional justice scale is "When decisions are made about job changes, management treated me with kindness and respect". An

item used in the distributive justice scale is for example “The changes will lead to a fair result for my department”. The interactional justice scale’s Cronbach’s alpha was .91 and for the distributive justice scale the Cronbach’s alpha was .89.

*Emotion regulation strategies.* A literature study was conducted to distinguish different emotion regulation strategies. These strategies were reappraisal, suppression, rumination, situation modification and attentional deployment. A new measure for these strategies was developed and tested in a pilot study. A small survey, consisting of 84 respondents, was conducted. After conducting multiple PCA’s, Scree tests and Parallel analyses, this pilot study resulted in a five item scale for reappraisal and suppression. For rumination no distinct items could be identified, therefore based on existing scales, other items of rumination were used in the final questionnaire. Although all five strategies were included in the questionnaire of this study, only reappraisal, suppression and rumination were further considered.

*Suppression* was measured with a combination of the The Expressivity of Discrete Emotions scale of Trierweiler, Eid and Lischetzke (2002) and the Expressivity scales used by Gross and John (1998). In the pilot study a Cronbach’s alpha of .86 was found. An item used in this scale is for example “I control my emotions by not expressing them”. In the present study, a PCA showed that all items loaded on one component; Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

*Reappraisal* was measured with four items of the short version of the scale cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire (Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven, 2001) and one item of the reappraisal scale of Folkman and Lazarus (1985). In the pilot study, a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 was found for this compounded scale. Example items are “I think that the situation also has its positive sides” and “I emphasize the positive”. A PCA and the reliability analysis both distinguished two items that were slightly different from the rest of the scale. Looking at the content and the wording of both items, it could be possible that these items were conceived as how positively people approach life rather than how positively they approached the organizational change. Therefore it was decided to remove these items from the scale. This resulted in a scale of three items and a Cronbach’s alpha of .83.

*Rumination* was measured with two existing items used in the study of Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001) and two self-composed items. An example item is “I worry about what has happened”. The four items all loaded on one component. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha was in an earlier study .89 (Kleine, 2012). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha was .78.

*Resistance to change* was measured using Oreg’s (2006) scale which consist of 15-items, that assess the cognitive, affective and behavior reactions to the change (Piderit, 2000). Since the items refer to a specific organizational change, a merger, this word was replaced with the general phrase “organizational change” which made this scale applicable to multiple organizational changes. Example items are “I am open to consider and try out the change”, “I am afraid of the change” and “I protest against the change”. Resistance to change and distributive justice appeared to load for a great extent

on the same component. Multiple PCA's were performed until two distinct variables were clearly identifiable resulting in a seven item scale for resistance to change with a Cronbach's alpha of .90.

### **Control variables**

Control variables incorporated in this study consist of employee characteristics which, based on past research, might be related to resistance to change. These control variables are gender, age, job tenure and the level of education. Besides because the sample consists of two different organizations, it was taken into account if these organizations score significantly different on the variables used in this study.

It is argued that for men social status and having power is more important than for women (Adams & Funk, 2012). An organizational change often goes together with a distribution of power which can affect one's social status, therefore men might show more resistance to change. Regarding age it is argued that younger people have a more flexible attitude towards changes, for example in technology (Aubert, Caroli & Roger, 2006). Moreover, the fear that changes in one's job will result in a loss of status and privileges, is particularly relevant to older workers (Yeatts, Folts, & Knapp, 2000). This makes it plausible that people with a younger age will be more adaptable and show less resistance to change. Further it is argued that adaption to changes in a job might be more difficult for long-tenured employees because they have to deviate from previously successful routines and need to adjust to new ways of working (Fossum, Arvey, Paradise, & Robbins, 1986). Therefore a positive relationship between job tenure and resistance to change is expected. For the level of education it is argued that the higher the level of education the better the ability to deal effectively with changing situations (Pulakos et al., 2002). This predicts a negative relationship between the level of education and the resistance to change.

### **Data analyses**

With the use of hierarchical regression analyses the relations between the variables were examined. Based on theoretical expectations the independent variables and the control variables were entered into the equation in steps. The mediating effect was studied by applying the rules of Baron and Kenny (1986) and was executed in the following steps. First, the dependent variable (resistance to change) was regressed on the independent variables (distributive justice and organizational justice); second, the mediating variables (suppression, reappraisal and rumination) are regressed on the independent variables (distributive justice and organizational justice); and third, the dependent variable (resistance to change) was regressed on the mediating variables (suppression, reappraisal and rumination). Before interpreting the outcomes of the analyses, assumptions for doing hierarchical regression analysis were checked. These assumptions are, sample size, multicollinearity and singularity, outliers, normality,

linearity, homoscedasticity and independence of residuals (Pallant, 2007). The mediation effects were tested by using a bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

## Results

### Independent samples t-test

To test if employees of Royal Bank of Scotland and ThiemeMeulenhoff score differently on the variables used in this study, an independent samples t-test was conducted. For the variables rumination and resistance to change the alternative t-value was consulted since the Levene's test suggests a violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance (Pallant, 2007).

For the variables interactional justice, rumination and resistance to change a significant difference in scores for employees of Royal Bank of Scotland and ThiemeMeulenhoff was found. The mean score on interactional justice of RBS ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) was significantly higher than the mean score of TM ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .79$ ). Also for rumination RBS ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) had a significantly higher mean than TM ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .99$ ). For resistance to change, TM ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) had a higher mean score than RBS ( $M = 2.15$ ,  $SD = .76$ ). The magnitude of the differences in the means for interactional justice (mean difference = .70, 95% CI: .41 to .98) was large (eta squared = .15). For rumination (mean difference = .50, 95% CI: .20 to .81) the magnitude of differences in means was moderate (eta squared = .08). Also for resistance to change (mean difference = -.39, 95% CI: -.71 to -.08) the magnitude of differences in means was moderate (eta squared = .05). The two organizations differ significantly in the mean scores on three variables, therefore the variable organization type was added as a control variable in the hierarchical regression analyses.

### Tests of the Hypotheses

Before the conceptual model was tested, preliminary analyses were performed to investigate the assumptions of multiple regression analyses. Based on the outcome of the independent samples t-test above, the control variable organization type, was entered in Step 1 of the regression analyses.

Hypothesis 1 assumed a negative relationship of perceptions of organizational justice on resistance to change. The results are reported in Table 4. In Step 1 the control variable organization type showed a significant prediction of resistance to change ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This means that employees of ThiemeMeulenhoff score significantly higher on resistance to change than employees of RBS. Distributive justice and interactional justice entered in Step 2 contributed significantly to the prediction of resistance to change ( $\Delta R^2 = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Interestingly, despite the high correlation between distributive justice and interactional justice, both variables made significant independent contributions ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ , for distributive justice;  $\beta = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ , for interactional justice) to the prediction of resistance to change. Thus Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that organizational justice would be negatively related to the use of emotion regulation strategies, suppression, reappraisal and rumination. To test this hypothesis, multiple regression analyses were conducted using the emotion regulation strategies as dependent variables. In all analyses the control variable organization type was entered in Step 1 and distributive justice and interactional justice in Step 2. The results for these regressions are shown in Table 3. First, suppression was used as dependent variable in the equation. Both Step 1 and Step 2 did not contribute to the prediction of suppression significantly. Interactional justice independently showed a significant negative relationship with suppression ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For reappraisal, Step 2 explained a statistically significant amount of variance in reappraisal ( $\Delta R^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Both distributive justice and interactional justice showed an independent significant positive relation with reappraisal ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ , for distributive justice;  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ , for interactional justice). By using rumination as dependent variable, Step 1 and Step 2 explained a statistically significant amount of variance in rumination ( $\Delta R^2 = .08$ ,  $p < .01$ , for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ , for Step 2). Whereas for suppression and reappraisal no difference between the two organizations was determined, organization type showed a significant prediction for rumination ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This implies that employees of RBS score significantly higher on the use of rumination than employees of ThiemeMeulenhoff. From the organizational justice variables entered in Step 2 distributive justice showed a negative relation with rumination ( $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Together, for the emotion regulation strategies suppression and rumination a negative relation with organizational justice was found as expected, however for reappraisal a positive relation with organizational justice was found. Consequently, the expectation that a higher justice perception associates with less need for emotion regulation does not apply in all cases. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was only partly supported.

To test Hypothesis 3, resistance to change was regressed on the emotion regulation strategies, in which a negative relation was expected for reappraisal and a positive relation for suppression and rumination. After the entry of the control variable in Step 1, distributive justice and interactional justice were entered at the equation in Step 2. In Step 3 the mediation variables were entered as well as the organization justice variables explaining significantly more variance in resistance to change compared to Step 2 ( $\Delta R^2 = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Together, all variables explained 51 percent of the variance in resistance to change. Regarding the independent contributions of the variables to the prediction of resistance to change, for suppression no significant relationship was found. So Hypothesis 3a was not confirmed. Hypothesis 3b and 3c were supported since reappraisal ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was negatively related to resistance to change and rumination ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed a positive relationship.

To investigate the mediating roles of the emotion regulation strategies in the relationship of organizational justice with resistance to change, two additional analyses were applied. First a Sobel (1982) test was conducted which partly found support for both Hypotheses 4b (*Sobel test* = -2.04,  $p <$

.01, for distributive justice) and 4c (*Sobel test* = -2.72,  $p < .01$ , for distributive justice). The Sobel test did not show a significant mediating role for suppression, therefore Hypothesis 4a was not supported. Second, because it is argued that the Sobel test frequently violates multivariate normality (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004), the bootstrapping procedure was used to estimate the confidence interval for the indirect effects in multiple mediator models (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Organization type was included as a control variable in the analysis. Again a significant mediating role for suppression was not found, therefore was Hypothesis 4a not confirmed. The 95% confidence intervals that excluded zero were: Hypothesis 4b [-.20, -.03, for distributive justice; -.17, -.02, for interactional justice] and Hypothesis 4c [-.20, -.05 for distributive justice; -.21, -.06, for interactional justice]. The results therefore supported Hypotheses 4b and 4c completely, in contrast to the Sobel test. However in the Preacher and Hayes method it is not possible to include multiple independent variables into the analysis. Earlier conducted regression analyses were executed with both distributive justice and interactional justice at once, showing that interactional justice was not significantly related to rumination. Therefore study's findings cannot support the mediating effect of rumination in the relationship of interactional justice with resistance to change. This suggests, that reappraisal and rumination mediate in the relationship between distributive justice and resistance to change and reappraisal mediates in the relationship of interactional justice with resistance to change. The relationship of distributive justice on resistance to change vanishes in the presence of emotion regulation strategies. Therefore these findings provide evidence that reappraisal and rumination fully mediate in the relationship between perceived distributive justice and resistance to change.

### **Discussion**

This research examined how perceptions of justice about an organizational change relate to employees' resistance to the change through their effect on the emotion regulation strategies employees use. The results of this study provide a strong theoretical contribution to the organizational change literature since it shows the important, not previously investigated, role of emotion regulation strategies employees use during a change process. It was found that the emotion regulation strategies reappraisal and rumination fully mediate the relationship of distributive justice with resistance to change. Moreover, reappraisal was found to partially mediate in the relationship between interactional justice and resistance to change. This is in line with AET of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) which was used to predict the hypothesized relationships. Dependent on employees' distributive justice and interactional justice perceptions, a specific emotion regulation strategy is used which in turn relates to the resistance they show to the change.

The findings of the relationship from organizational justice to emotion regulation strategies was not totally as expected. For reappraisal a relation in the opposite direction was found then was

hypothesized. It was predicted that when employees thought of the organizational change as unjust, emotion regulation was needed to alter an upcoming and unwanted subjective state. Therefore the reasoning in this study was that when the organizational change was seen as just, no emotion regulation would be needed. However, results clearly indicate this reasoning to be incorrect since the emotion regulation strategy reappraisal happened to be positively related to both distributive justice and interactional justice perceptions. An explanation for this finding might be found in the definition of emotion regulation. In the literature it is argued that besides altering and modifying negative subjective states, emotion regulation has also been used with the presence of a positive event or emotion to sustain or augment this positive subjective state (Gross, 1998a). This might explain why employees with high levels of distributive justice and interactional justice perceptions, which is associated with positive emotions (Schoefer & Ennew, 2005; Weiss et al., 1999), also pass into emotion regulation. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not the question if people use emotion regulation but the question is more what kind of emotion regulation they use. Moreover, it is notable that when a positive meaning, a perception of justice, was attached to the organizational change an adaptive emotion regulation was used, whereas with a negative meaning, an injustice perception, an maladaptive emotion regulation was used.

The emotion regulation strategy suppression was not related with either distributive justice or resistance to change. Only a direct relationship was found between interactional justice and suppression wherein employees with high interactional justice used less suppression. This is in accordance with previous studies who found that interactional injustice is positively associated with suppression of emotions in the form of surface acting (Rupp, McCance, Spencer, & Sonntag, 2008; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). This implies that the way employees are personally treated during an organizational change, is of high relevance for employees in daring to express their feelings. The findings showed that distributive justice was not related to the use of suppression. This might be explained by knowing that interactional justice was significantly related to suppression and it is argued that even when an outcome is unfavorable, when treated fairly and with respect it is possible that one will sustain a positive subjective state (Bies & Shapiro, 1988). This link can be drawn by knowing that one's justice perception of the outcome is highly associated with one's favorableness of this outcome (Guo & Giacobbe-Miller, 2012). Further, findings showed no relationship between the use of suppression and resistance to change. In the literature, outcomes of suppression are mainly increased blood pressure responses and increased sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system (Harris, 2001; Gross & Levenson, 1997). So although suppression had no impact on resistance to the change it might be harmful for one's well-being, however this was not investigated in this study.

Whereas distributive justice was clearly related to rumination, interactional justice did not show a significant relationship. A logical reason for this might be that it is found that rumination is associated with thinking about one's future (Andersen & Limpert, 2001; Lavender & Watkins, 2004).

So when the outcome is seen as unfair, people are more likely to use rumination; because this type of justice is aimed at the future of the company, one's department or one's personal situation. Hereby interactional justice can be seen as less important by employees because it is of concern for the short term.

In summary, this research clearly shows the importance of organizational justice perceptions of employees during an organizational change because, in line with AET, these perceptions relate to the use of either adaptive (reappraisal) or maladaptive (rumination) emotion regulation. Namely, altering and modifying one's subjective state is the purpose of emotion regulation with a negative affective event and sustaining and augmenting one's subjective state is the purpose of emotion regulation with a positive affective event. Furthermore employees who reappraised reported less resistance to change and employees who ruminated reported more resistance to change.

### **Limitations and recommendations**

Several limitations need to be acknowledged to properly interpret the results of this study. First, no causal conclusions can be drawn since this research was conducted at one moment in time. Therefore the possibility of reverse causations exists among the variables. For example, an alternative explanation from this study's findings could be that the use of reappraisal by employees leads them to see the change more as just. It would be worthwhile replicating the present study longitudinally to test such alternative explanations. Moreover a longitudinal design is of particular interest in organizational change situations because then it can be measured if one's meaning changes as the implementation of the change progresses.

In addition to the direction of causality limitation is the application of convenience sampling. To find participants for this study several companies in Amsterdam and surrounding area were approached. Therefore the two companies who eventually participated in this study were not randomly selected but investigated accidentally. Moreover there is the problem of common method variance since all variables were measured with one questionnaire and no other sources were used. Further, with this source employees are rating themselves which may have inflated the associations between the variables. Due to these problems the generalization of the results of this study to other organizations has to be taken with caution. To prevent these problems in future research, it is recommended to include other sources of information, such as supervisor or peer ratings.

Although the findings of this study provide interesting theoretical and practical implication, the role of emotion regulation in the research field of organizational change is still in its initial phase. Fortunately, in recent research, more awareness has arisen of the impact of emotions on the progression of a change process (Smollan & Sayers, 2009; Fugate, Harrison, & Kinicki, 2011). Future research can further extend the framework of emotion regulation in an organizational change situation. Moreover it might be interesting to investigate the role personality characteristics play in the

prediction of emotion regulation strategies. Building on the notion of AET it can be learned which other affective events predict emotion regulation and to what other specific behaviors this might result. Finally, only the outcome resistance to change was examined. Examining additional outcomes, such as performance, organizational citizenship behavior or turnover would extend the contributions of current study. In addition, with the aim to steer emotions of employees in the right direction, for managerial purposes it would be very interesting to investigate the influence of specific actions taken in the change process on emotion regulation.

### **Practical implications**

The findings of this study suggest benefits for managerial interventions that target improving employees' justice appraisals in organizational change situations. Given the circumstance that 70 percent of all change initiatives end up in failure (Balogun & Hope-Hailey, 2008), there is considerable room for improving the effectiveness of change processes. This study indicates that, fair outcomes, timely and clear explanations and treating employees with respect contribute to the use of the adaptive emotion regulation strategy, reappraisal, by employees during the change process. In turn reappraisal contributes to lower levels of resistance to change. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of a change initiative, it is important for managers to be aware of the influence their decisions and actions have on employees' perceptions of justice.

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## Appendix

Questionnaire items:

Distributive justice scale:

1. The changes will lead to a fair result for the organization
2. The changes will lead to a fair result for my department
3. The changes will lead to a fair result for me as a person
4. Overall I expect the outcomes of the change to be fair

Procedural and interactional justice scale:

1. When decisions are made about job reductions and reassignments, management treated me with kindness and respect
2. Management made sure that all employee concerns were heard before job changes and elimination decisions were made
3. When making decisions about job changes and eliminations, management offered explanations that made sense to me
4. When decisions are made about my job, management was sensitive to my personal needs
5. To make this decisions, management collected all the necessary information
6. Management explained very clearly all the decisions made about the restructuring
7. When decisions were made about job changes and eliminations, my manager and others in management treated me with respect and dignity
8. When decisions were made about the restructuring, management dealt with me in a truthful manner
9. Management clarified decisions and provided additional information when requested by employees
10. When decisions were made about job changes and eliminations, management showed concern for my rights as an employee
11. All job decisions were applied consistently across all affected employees
12. Employees were allowed to challenge or appeal job decisions made by management
13. People at my job level had adequate input in to the restructuring decision process
14. Procedures were put in place to provide the employees with timely information about the restructuring and its implementation

## Emotion regulation strategies:

1. I turn to substitute activities to take my mind off things
2. I try to hide my feelings
3. I try to come up with a strategy about what to do
4. I often think about how I feel about what I am experiencing
5. I am aware that there are worse things in life
6. I allow myself to express my emotions
7. I think of pleasant things that have nothing to do with it
8. I take action to try to get rid of the problem
9. I am preoccupied with what I think and feel about what I am experiencing
10. I think that the situation also has its positive sides
11. I make sure not to express my emotions
12. I do nice things to think about it less
13. I think about how to change the situation
14. I look for the positive sides to the matter
15. It is hard not to think about the situation
16. I worry about what is happening
17. I let my feelings come out freely
18. I try to change the situation
19. I think of something nice instead of what is happening
20. I think that it could have been worse
21. I think about pleasant experiences
22. I keep my emotions to myself
23. I think about how I might best handle the problem
24. I emphasize the positive

## Resistance to change scale:

1. I believe that the change will have a negative effect on the manner in which work is performed by the division
2. I think it's good that the change is taking place
3. I am open to consider and try out the change
4. I believe that the change will make my job easier
5. I believe that the change will benefit the division
6. I think the change will benefit me personally

7. I am afraid of the change
8. I have a bad feeling regarding the change
9. I am enthusiastic towards the change
10. The change make me angry
11. The change stresses me out
12. I tend to oppose the change
13. I am thinking of going along with the change
14. I am looking for ways to prevent the change
15. I protest against the change
16. I complain about the change to my friends
17. I express my objections of the change to members of management
18. I speak out for the change

TABLE 1  
Sample characteristics

	<b>RBS</b>	<b>TM</b>	<b>Total</b>
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	64.7%	25.8%	46.2%
Female	35.3%	74.2%	53.8%
Average age	43.2	39.9	41.7
Average job tenure	10.8	6.1	8.6
<u>Education</u>			
Primary education	0%	0%	0%
Secondary education	1.4%	0%	.8%
Vocational secondary education	1.4%	17.5%	9.2%
Higher education	27.9%	47.6%	37.4%
Master's degree	55.9%	2.8%	40.5%
Post graduate higher education	13.2%	11.1%	12.2%

*N* = 136

Results:

TABLE 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Reliability Estimates

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Distributive justice	129	4.13	1.60	(.89)									
2.Interactional justice	133	3.38	.89	.48**	(.91)								
3.Suppression	132	2.61	.89	.01	-.15	(.88)							
4.Reappraisal	133	3.65	.82	.40**	.37**	-.20*	(.83)						
5.Rumination	132	2.80	.91	-.36**	-.16	.12	-.14	(.78)					
6.Resistance to change	136	2.34	.93	-.44**	-.53**	.14	-.40**	.47**	(.90)				
7.Gender	130	1.54	.50	-.15	-.18*	-.09	-.07	-.12	.08				
8.Age	126	41.65	9.15	-.13	.03	-.05	-.04	.14	-.01	-.30**			
9.Education	131	5.23	1.23	.10	.12	.07	.03	.11	-.11	-.22	.12		
10.Job Tenure	129	8.57	9.31	-.11	.06	-.05	-.10	.12	-.06	-.31**	.59**	-.16	
11.Organizational type	136	1.49	.50	-.04	-.39**	-.00	-.02	-.28**	.21*	.39**	-.12	-.36**	-.17

*Note:* Numbers in parentheses indicate internal consistency reliability estimates. Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female. Organization type: 1 = Royal Bank of Scotland; 2 = ThiemeMeulenhoff.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

TABLE 3  
Results hierarchical regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	Suppression	Suppression	Reappraisal	Reappraisal	Rumination	Rumination
<u>Control Variables</u>						
Organization type	-.00	-.09	-.02	.10	-.28**	-.36***
<u>Independent variables</u>						
Distributive justice		.12		.27**		-.29**
Interactional justice		-.24*		.27*		-.18
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.03	.00	.20	.08	.24
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.03		.20		.16
ΔF		2.17		15.43***		12.84***

\* $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$ \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

TABLE 4  
Results hierarchical regression analyses, dependent variable:  
resistance to change

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<u>Control Variables</u>			
Organization type	.21*	.05	.22*
<u>Independent variables</u>			
Distributive justice		-.25**	-.07
Interactional justice		-.40***	-.26**
Suppression			-.01
Reappraisal			-.21**
Rumination			.43***
R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.33	.50
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.28	.17
ΔF		25.74***	13.82***

\* $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$ \*\*\* $p < .001$