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Remind me that I matter: how self-worth bias can enhance employee support for organizational change efforts

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this empirical study was to test whether presenting organizational change in a way that enhances employee self-worth will result in increased employee support for the identified change. In doing so, we developed a new measure, which includes a novel baseline element.

Design/methodology/approach – Items were developed, and then categorical validation data were collected through an online cross-sectional survey in which 222 respondents (adults over 18 years of age, and at least 6 months tenure) participated.

Findings – Within the items, we framed the activation of self-worth bias as requests for employee comments regarding change efforts. Results indicate there is a difference between asking for employee comment on change efforts, compared to asking for employee comment on change efforts and also providing feedback considerate of that input.

Originality/value – This study explores and presents a convergence between behavioral economics, management and applied psychology research – using both self-worth bias, and organizational change management communications; no other such comparable study or analysis could be found during the preparation of this research effort. Furthermore, a novel measure and innovative method is presented for developing and measuring self-worth bias during organizational change management communications.

Keywords Change, Behavioral economics, Self-worth bias, Status quo bias, Loss aversion, Organizational change, Change management, Leadership, Communication

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Carnegie (2006), in his famous book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* – first published in 1936, noted that at the core of human motivation, lies self-worth – a fundamental individual need to be appreciated, to feel important and to be valued. This individual need, when it is reflected in related self-beliefs, is often understood as self-worth judgments (Beauregard and Dunning, 2001). Within psychology, self-worth judgments are seen as critical to motivation and emotion in one's life space, and they hold critical importance in social judgments of situations such as threat appraisals and interpersonal evaluations (Beauregard and Dunning, 2001). Of note is that it is the "protective" function of behaviors rooted in the "preservation" of self-worth judgments that amplify the emotive power of such behaviors (Thompson, 1997). A related point is

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that self-worth judgments are not the same as self-efficacy, but the two concepts are highly related and deserve ongoing attention in the dynamics of motivation (Brown *et al.*, 2001). For example, it likely does not take a lot of time or effort to recall when you last received praise from a figure of authority, or the opposite, and how that made you feel.

The need for the preservation of self-worth judgments extends beyond personal interactions; it permeates organizational dynamics, particularly during times of change. Organizational change is a complex process that often disrupts established norms and routines within an organization, creating stress that can undermine identity concerns for employees (Smollan and Pio, 2017). At its core, organizational change is about people – how they perceive, react to and ultimately embrace or resist change initiatives will influence the intended outcome (Porter, 2004). Thus, building upon Carnegie's premise, engaging and influencing people necessitates speaking to their personal interests or self-worth, which activates an enduring personalized appraisal of one's own importance, success and value (Forsyth, 2008). Appealing to self-worth could be as simple as remembering a person's name, offering a smile, encouraging them to talk about themselves or making them feel like the idea is theirs (Carnegie, 2006). Furthermore, the notion of bias, as described within self-worth bias, is defined as an intuitive cognitive judgment, made upon presented information, that is influenced by a probability estimate and/or pattern calculation for obtaining desired outcomes (Barrouillet, 2011; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974).

Self-worth bias and organizational context

People are inherently social beings (Jabri, 2010), and individual realities are socially constructed (Hodgkinson, 2003) – a notion that is reinforced by Kuhn and Corman (2003) when they state that individual cognition is inseparable from collective influences. Hodgkinson (2003) furthers this observation by noting that the aforementioned "collective" can include a workplace and managers. Some scholars even claim that people are "obsessed" with their own self-interest (Walsh, 2014; Weisberg, 2018), and contemporary research affirms the importance of nurturing self-worth for overall performance (Peterson, 2018). These concerns are highly salient in the workplace (Den Hartog, De Hoogh and Belschak, 2020), where rewards and punishments are ubiquitous, and employees often feel the need to protect self-worth (Cameron and Green, 2020). This relates back to our central point that it is the *protective* function of behaviors rooted in the *preservation* of self-worth judgements that amplify the *emotive power* of such behaviors – and we note that behaviors that are protective of self-worth are often subconscious and include decision making biases such as self-worth bias (Cameron and Green, 2020; Thompson, 1997; Worley and Mohrman, 2014).

The significance of acknowledging an individual's self-worth was also highlighted by Kahneman and Tversky (1983) and Tversky and Kahneman (1992) who, through Prospect Theory, brought behavioral economics to the mainstream by underscoring the impact of loss and gain considerations in human decision making (Geiger, 2017). Within the context of proposed organizational changes, when individuals feel their self-worth is threatened by proposed organizational changes they may respond with resistance or skepticism to protect self-worth judgments.

Despite numerous recommendations around supporting organizational change efforts, limited empirical evidence means that understanding employee resistance to change remains elusive (Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009). To address this, this paper presents an empirical study that seeks to investigate if leveraging self-worth bias can bolster employee support for organizational change.

This study endeavors to bridge behavioral economics and applied psychology with the field of organizational change management, with a particular focus on enhancing the understanding of self-worth bias and its potential to assist managers in improving employee support during periods of transition. Considering that organizations do not exist in static environments and must contend with constant change for survival (Kotter *et al.*, 2021; Mulholland, 2023; Thomas and Hardy, 2011), collective efforts of employees are key to successful organizational change (Porter, 2004). Yet, change initiatives induce stress and anxiety (Cameron and Green, 2020; Weisberg, 2018), and threaten the employee-employer bond (Cameron and Green, 2020), which Carnegie, according to Weisberg (2018), viewed as sacred and symbiotic. Indeed, as noted by Worley and Mohrman (2014) and Evans and Evans (2019), it is common for employees to resist organizational change.

Literature review

Psychological protection of the self-concept is produced by the enhancement of the self (Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Markus, 1983; Sedikides *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, behavioral tactics such as self-promotion are adopted in the hope to present oneself as important, competent and influential (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2020). Sherman and Cohen (2006) suggest that receiving affirmations bolster perceived self-worth and overall thoughts of adequateness and effectiveness to present a positive image by emphasizing one's strengths, contributions, or accomplishments (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2020).

Operationalizing self-worth judgments

To contextualize the bolstering of self-worth, Halpern promotes a framework for leading/nudging behavior, in which one category is titled – "*Ego - we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves*" (Halpern, 2015, p. 50). To explain this proposition, the author references a study where a team helped jobseekers on government aid in the United Kingdom plan for the coming week (e.g. organizing interviews, discussing candidate skillset strengths with them, preparing scripts for what they would say in each interview etc.), rather than the existing practice of ensuring that the jobseeker had simply attended a set number of interviews in the week prior (Halpern, 2015; Halpern and Sanders, 2016). After a controlled trial, Halpern (2015) reports that the program helped an extra 10% of jobseekers successfully obtain employment, and therefore no longer require government financial support. Halpern (2015) and Halpern and Sanders (2016) conclude that the positive results were achieved primarily through increasing support for the candidate – helping them prepare, showing that a someone has faith in them, and specifically, increasing their "pride," which is encompassed within, and is important to self-worth.

Extending this position, van Dierendonck and Driehuizen (2013) state that people like to feel meaningful – and Crocker and Park (2003) suggest that self-appraisals (e.g. perceived judgments of successes or failures, and acceptance or rejection by others) impact how worthwhile an individual feels. What a person thinks that others feel about them is purported to be a key component of self-worth (Pierce and Gardner, 2004; van Dierendonck and Driehuizen, 2013). For example, the research of Crocker and Park (2003) includes a self-worth scale that captured commentary on how an individual appraises their academic competence, and how they feel people in their family and communities view, love and respect them. Extending this line of thinking, van Dierendonck and Driehuizen (2013) advise that individuals shape and maintain their self-appraisals by reflecting on the extent to which they, and others, believe them to be capable and worthy. From this, it can be concluded that to matter is to feel valued, and inherently inclusive of the opinions and actions of others.

Vorkunova (2022) suggests that having a stable identity is a basic human need, and that stability of identity is enveloped in membership and community, belonging and judgments of worth. Membership and community, which in the case of this research effort, can be considered inclusive of the workplace. Zamaraeva and Koptseva (2020), referencing Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory research through the 1970s, expand on this further when commenting that "identity theory" is driven from self-worth, and is activated as a set of representations of oneself and other members of a particular group/groups. That input and comparison allows for personalized appraisal categorization, hierarchical assessment and subsequent status, power and legitimacy conclusions to be drawn (Zamaraeva and Koptseva, 2020). "Complex identity" is a cognitive structure, includes multiple inputs (situational identities), and is created individually but shaped and influenced by others; based on the hypothesis – "*. . . people are motivated by a need for a positive social identity and the idea that to preserve, maintain, or achieve a positive social identity they must establish a positively valued distinctiveness* . . ." (Turner and Reynolds, 2010). Accordingly, self-worth is proposed to be multi-faceted – inclusive of social, physical and academic etc. self-appraisals (Brockner, 1988; van Dierendonck and Driehuizen, 2013). Pierce and Gardner (2004) suggest that self-worth consists of other components, like self-esteem, and rolls up to a global level – the culmination of perceived self-worth at work, at home, and elsewhere. Reissner (2010) is of the opinion that the work a person does, including the job role itself, the organization's reputation, and the service provided, is a crucial domain for self-worth. Given most people spend a large part of each day in the workplace, it is not surprising that "work" holds such importance to an individual (van Dierendonck and Driehuizen, 2013). Work is inescapably tied to meaning in someone's life (Porter, 2004). Work, therefore, carries weight when it comes to overall self-worth appraisal.

Self-worth and organizational change management – an inescapable dance

It is widely believed that change is everywhere, and constant adaption is required for organizations to survive (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; DuFrene and Lehman, 2014; Kotter *et al.*, 2021; Thomas and Hardy, 2011). However, if an individual's self-worth is apparently formed around work and organizational experiences, then it seems justified to conclude that organizational change and self-worth are inextricably linked. This sentiment is supported by Galpin and Sims (1999), who stress that increasingly complicated and dynamic working environments require organizational actors to reconcile competing demands and expectations, which impacts an employee's sense of self.

Porter (2004) suggests that work has become an integral part of personal identity, and that work consolidates status. If this is to be believed, then changes in the workplace have the potential to resonate and impact an employee further afield. It appears that people like to feel meaningful, effectual and worthwhile within the organization through which they are employed (van Dierendonck and Driehuizen, 2013). If organizational change is perceived by an employee to impact their self-worth, then organizational change becomes something of great personal sensitivity. Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) advised, after a series of status quo bias decision making experiments, that people are committed to what they have – they do not want to change. Katsaros and Tsirikas (2022) warn that organizational change provokes uncertainty, and that the goal of a change manager should be to reduce uncertainty because uncertainty can result in negative employee reaction. Many change efforts appear to fail due to employee change resistance; resistance that is said to be centered on a desire to maintain the status quo (Del Val and Fuentes, 2003; Galbraith, 2018; McDonald, 2015). If change heightens stress and increases discomfort, as reported by Cameron and Green (2020), Dahl (2011), Guidetti *et al.* (2018), then it can be argued that organizational change has the potential to negatively impact employee self-worth, both at work and overall in life.

When threatened, individuals are often motivated to protect or fight for maintenance of the status quo (Baumeister *et al.*, 1998; Korman, 2001). A threat of social identity is a situation that leads people to think that they could be devalued (Belmi *et al.*, 2015), and identity threats in organizations may cause stress (Blascovich *et al.*, 2001). This suggestion is supported by Fein and McKenna (2022), who note that "identity threatening stressors" in the workplace can lead to decreased positive self-appraisal, frustration, anger, lower levels of job satisfaction and subsequent disengagement. Or as professed by Lapointe and Rivard (2005), people do not resist change *per se*, they react to threats brought about by the change, threats like loss of status, loss of comfort, loss of security and loss of control. When discussing approach-avoidance motivation in personality, Elliot and Thrash (2002) suggest that people move towards positive and desirable events, and away from the opposite (the negative). Alicke and Sedikides (2009) support this positioning when commenting that people pursue pleasure, and avoid the unpleasant. Avoidance motivations seem to be based around surviving and protecting (Elliot, 2006); initial evidence from a correlation study and five experiments suggests that identity threats can trigger acts of deviance/non-compliance (Belmi *et al.*, 2015). This "protecting", as noted above, can be interpreted as employee change resistance. Motivation is important because motivation is the psychological process that gives people purpose and direction (Kreitner, 1995). Avoidance motivation is therefore the nemesis of a change manager.

Finally, communications and change are inextricably linked, according to Elving (2005). And, communications can be the linchpin in determining the success or failure of a change effort (Barrett, 2002; DuFrene and Lehman, 2014). Or, as summarized and suggested by Ford and Ford (2009), communication is the very medium through which change takes place. What is said is important, because what is said can build employee readiness for change, reduce uncertainty and enhance commitment and support (Simoes and Esposito, 2014). However, Jabri *et al.* (2008) believe that current change models do little to help change practitioners as they do not fully consider or address how message meaning is derived, extracted and repeated by employees. If change increases demand on employees, as stated by Porter (2004), and organizational change can affect, as outlined above, employee self-worth, then how organizational change is planned and communicated matters.

Research question

A gap in the research appears to exist, where insights from behavioral economics could perhaps be utilized to inform and improve organizational change management understanding and success. Or, perhaps better stated by Crocker and Park (2003), who suggest that what matters most in self-worth judgments is a person's interpretation of the event or circumstance, and its relevance to his or her personal appraisal of self-worth (with a view to maintain, protect and enhance). Using that sentiment as a foundation, and Kotter and Schlesinger's (2013) advice that one of the most common ways to overcome resistance to change is to educate people about it beforehand, this empirical study seeks to test the following Research Question (RQ):

RQ. Can presenting organizational change in a way that enhances employee self-worth result in increased employee support for the change?

Methods

To further evidence and support the aforementioned, after critiquing four dozen empirical studies that spanned more than a decade, Pierce and Gardner (2004) concluded that an individual employee's self-worth is formed, in part, by organizational experiences. And that self-worth appraisals influence intrinsic employee motivation, with positive appraisals resulting in higher levels of workplace satisfaction, commitment and performance, with negative appraisals producing the opposite (Pierce and Gardner, 2004). The review conducted by Pierce and Gardner (2004) included assessment of a 10 item hypothetical question and answer instrument that the lead author and other colleagues (Pierce *et al.*, 1989) had developed and deployed a number of years in advance; capturing Likert responses to test perceived employee levels of competence and capability, including a question potentially targeting self-worth – do "*I count around here?*" (Pierce and Gardner, 2004, p. 593). Citing earlier empirical research Brockner (1988), Korman (1970, 1976) and Pierce and Gardner (2004) conclude that employee self-worth should increase if employees feel valued (if they are told they are important, competent and capable); however, they also note that more research is needed in the area.

In addition, van Dierendonck and Driehuizen (2013) used a hypothetical question and answer instrument, similar to that of Pierce *et al.* (1989), to gain responses from 316 managers in a more recent study, concluding that a large part of a person's self-worth appraisal is based in the work context, and accordingly may impact their work attitude and productivity. Also, Vogel and Mitchell (2017) suggest that receiving positive and favorable feedback increases self-worth. Self-worth, and/or feelings of value, can be strong personal motivators (van Dierendonck and Driehuizen, 2013). Therefore, how change is communicated seems to hold significance and a change effort can be sunk before it even really starts if employees interpret the change effort to be a threat to their self-worth. As such, we propose that it can be concluded that if something is not going to make a person feel better or more competent, it will likely be met with resistance. Vogel and Mitchell (2017) suggest that enhanced employee self-worth reduces workplace deviance. So, how organizational change is communicated to employees appears to be of the upmost importance. However, popular change management models, including those provided by Lewin, Kotter and Prosci (Ghanim *et al.*, 2013; Mulholland, 2023; Tams, 2018; Udod and Wagner, 2018) contain no mention or advice with respect to appealing to employee self-worth.

Item development

Thus, after an extensive literature review, it appeared that testing self-worth bias in an organizational change management context is seemingly unchartered territory. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the authors of this empirical study turned to already published and influential behavioral economic, managerial and applied psychological reasoning, to assist with item development. To frame our items, we followed the process used by Brienza (2017), Kim and Kankanhalli (2009), Pierce *et al.* (1989), Shleifer (2012), Stanovich and West (1999), Tversky and Kahneman (1981, 1986, 1996), and van Dierendonck and Driehuizen (2013), who all present short hypothetical scenario-based (question and fixed answer) surveys. We followed this format in general, but we also included a secondary dimension in item and questionnaire construction, where depending on the recipient's first response, further scenario (self-worth bias promotion based) information was provided, and the participant asked whether the updated information would change the initial response. This secondary dimension (following a stated baseline) is original, and assists with inferring whether a change in position in the second part of the question was due to the bias prompt. As such, the secondary dimension embeds a containment mechanism (reducing potential influences) within the item.

Items

Question 1 (Q1)

A draft release of an internal restructure places you under a new manager, Catie Evans, that you have had professional conflicts with in the past when she was sponsoring a project that you were working on. Do you, without any threat of prejudice (employees have been asked to confidentially comment on the draft), request placement in a different team under a different manager?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

Participants who responded *Yes* to Q1, progress to Q1-A

Participants who responded *No* to Q1, exit the question

Secondary dimension

Q1-A

When considering whether to request placement under a different manager, a trusted higher level colleague tells you that you were placed in Catie Evans' team because she specifically requested that be the case; she stated that in the organizational restructure planning meeting that you are someone with exceptional values, who always speaks up in the best interests of the organization, and has leadership potential. Would you be happy to work under Catie Evans knowing this, or would you still request placement in a different team under a different manager?

1. *I would be happy to work under Catie Evans*
2. *I would still request placement in a different team under a different manager*

Q2

Your company announces a major restructure that will likely impact the team you work in and the manager you report to. Would you rather?

1. *Have been asked to provide input, done so, but then seen none of that feedback reflected in the new working model*
2. *Have not been asked to provide input*

Participants who responded *Have been asked been asked to provide input, done so, but then seen none of that feedback reflected in the new working model* to Q2, exit the question

Participants who responded *Have not been asked to provide input* to Q2, progress to Q2-A

Secondary dimension

Q2-A

In the days after the new working model is released you receive an email from the CEO, thanking you for your input, explaining how it influenced some key decisions made, and why the final version of the new working model did not exactly mirror what you had proposed. Knowing this extra detail (i.e. post having received the email) would you still prefer to not have been asked to provide input?

1. *Yes*
2. *No*

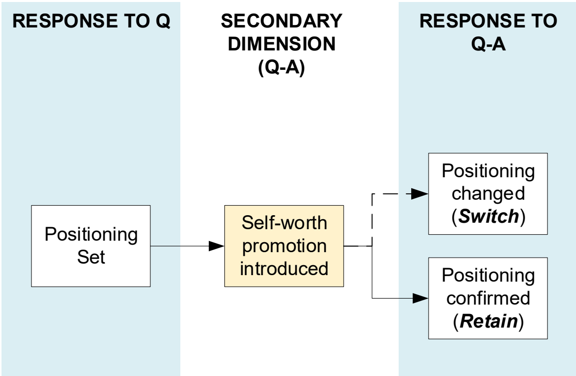
Time limits

Applied time limits were generous, without being overly short or long: 120 seconds for the initial items, and 90 additional seconds for potential response modifications. Less time was provided for the responses after modification because the participant would have already read the main content/context of the question within the Q element. If a participant did not answer the question within the set time limit, the survey automatically moved ahead (excluding that individual's answers from the final analysis of data in the main study). This survey was not intended to be a speeded test or to be stress invoking; cognizant of the fact that participants read at different speeds. Also, because provided scenarios were more than one sentence in length, the timing provided above seems practical and justified.

Targeted bias prompt

The secondary dimension is the crux of the item, and measurement – shown below in Figure 1. It can be inferred that following the dotted line to ***switch*** was a result of the introduction of self-worth promoting information (the secondary dimension). The bias prompt in Q1-A being . . . *because you were told that the manager specifically requested you, that she believes you are someone with exceptional values, who always speaks up, and has leadership potential*, and in Q2-A . . . *because you received a personal email thanking you for your input, and explaining how it was used and influenced the outcome)*, limiting other potential influences. The introduction of the secondary dimension means that drawn conclusions are founded off a baseline, and intended to improve clarity, control and accuracy.

As with any item, but especially an item that introduces a new measure, i.e. the secondary dimension, validity needs to be substantiated (outlined through the conduct of Study 1 – detailed below), prior to formal survey release (Study 2 – detailed below).



Source(s): Authors work

Figure 1. The secondary dimension – a targeted bias prompt

Study 1

Validity

It is important to ensure that an item tests what it is intended to test (Yassir *et al.*, 2017); item validity is a critical and complex step in the development of a survey (Almanasreh *et al.*, 2019; Polit *et al.*, 2007). Face validity (explained to be an assessment of – *on the face of it*, does the item appear to be clear, readable and feasible) is often considered to be too high-level and potentially superficial (Yassir *et al.*, 2017). As such, further instrument credibility was achieved by performing a more detailed and comprehensive content validity study (which encompasses and supersedes, face validity).

Content validity is essential to ensure overall validity, and (in terms of a survey), is the degree to which an item is relevant to, and representative of, the targeted construct (Almanasreh *et al.*, 2019; Yusoff, 2019). Put in terms of this particular research effort:

(1) Does the question test self-worth bias [a review into item **relevance**]?

(2) Will the average participant responding to the question know that self-worth bias is being tested, and if so, how or will that influence their response [a review into item **sensitivity**]?

Expert participant recruitment

Content validity activities are undertaken prior to survey deployment (so that questions can potentially be amended, improved, and/or omitted altogether), and should include question critique and comment by suitably qualified and experienced experts in the field (Yassir *et al.*, 2017). Yassir *et al.* (2017) stresses that at least three experts should be engaged, but a larger number is preferred. Almanasreh *et al.* (2019) suggests five to ten experts, with ten being the limit; a number that is supported by (Polit *et al.*, 2007). As such, this content validity study adhered to the latter, and engaged nine experts. For an extra level of assurance, an “expert” participant experience caveat was included, and is as follows:

(1) Must hold post graduate level qualifications in either psychology, business, communications, marketing, and/or project/change management.

(2) Has had experience with survey design, deployment, completion and/or assessment.

Expert participation was voluntary, no incentives were offered, and invitations were sent to individuals outside of the researchers direct personal and/or direct report working environment. A short biography of each expert is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1.
Expert participants

Expert N#	Field of expertise	Experience in field of expertise – years	Location
1	Project Change Management	21+	United States
2	Marketing	21+	United States
3	Psychology	11–20	Australia
4	Business	11–20	Australia
5	Business	21+	United States
6	Business	21+	United States
7	Business	21+	United States
8	Communications	11–20	United States
9	Marketing	11–20	United States

Source(s): Authors work

Procedures

The content validity study (capturing both quantitative and qualitative data) was structured as follows, and requested a three-part expert response.

1. A definition of self-worth bias was provided:

Self-worth bias is an off shoot of self-serving bias, self-worth bias is when motivational and psychological factors, driven by the want to maintain and enhance the self, distort perceptual and cognitive processing and lead to decisions based on self-promotion, advancement, and egotism (Forsyth, 2008; Stephan et al., 1976). Dale Carnegie (2006) professed; talk in terms of the person's interests, and make them feel important; we are all driven by self-worth. We find protection in the enhancement of the self (Lapointe and Rivard, 2005; Markus, 1983; Sedikides et al., 1998). "Our self-interest clouds our judgement . . ." (Prentice, 2012).

Materials

2. Q1 and Q2 (as displayed above) were provided, with the following response option explanation following:

Answering "1. Yes" to Q1, and "2. Have not been asked to provide input" to Q2 sets a base position, and those participants who do respond that way, then progress to the aligned part A, question. The part A question is designed to see if the participant's original position can be changed with the addition of some self-worth based detail, e.g. Q1, not wanting to work under Catie Evans, to Q1-A potentially being happy to work under Catie Evans when told that she specifically asked for you. Similarly, with Q2-A not being happy that your input was not reflected in the new working model, so why bother proving it in the first place, to then a. potentially changing position after being told from someone in authority how your input influenced the new working model.

3. A mandatory expert response was requested, measuring question relevance:

Based on the provided definition, do you think that the question demonstrates the psychological phenomena of self-worth bias i.e. does the question actually test what it purports to test?	O *Yes* O *No*

4. A mandatory expert response was requested, measuring question sensitivity:

Do you think the typical participant (cognizant of the 'OCMQ participant caveat') will be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested?

- O *The typical participant will not be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested.*
- O *The typical participant may be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested, but that will not compromise their response.*
- O *The typical participant will be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested, and that will compromise their response.*

5. An optional, free text box, expert requested:

Optional – Do you have any suggestions as to how we could improve the question? Leave the free text block on the right blank and continue if not.

Analytical strategies

Content validity is most commonly determined by utilizing a Content Validity Index (CVI) (Almanasreh *et al.*, 2019). A CVI allows Item CVI (I-CVI), and deployed Scale (i.e. all items) CVI average (S-CVI/Ave) measures to be determined (Yassir *et al.*, 2017; Yusoff, 2019). To further strengthen analysis, the probability of chance occurrence amongst experts' (p_c), was calculated, and then a modified kappa statistic (k^*) – a recalibrated baseline that corrects the I-CVI to account for expert chance agreement, applied (Almanasreh *et al.*, 2019; Polit *et al.*, 2007). As below:

$$p_c = \left[\frac{N!}{A!(N-A)!}\right].5^N$$

Probability of chance (p_c), where N = total number of experts, and A = number of experts who agree on relevance

$$k^* = \frac{CVI - p_c}{1 - p_c}$$

Modified kappa (k^*)

The k^* score adheres to and promotes the following numeric item thresholds (Polit *et al.*, 2007):

(1) between 0.40 and 0.59 = **Fair**

(2) between 0.60 and 0.74 = **Good**

(3) > 0.74 = **Excellent**

Measures

For the first mandatory expert response (**relevance**, as detailed above in the *Validity* section):

(1) Yes = 1 (i.e. question tests self-worth bias)

(2) No = 0 (i.e. question does not test self-worth bias)

For the second mandatory expert response (**sensitivity**, as detailed above in the *Validity* section):

(1) The typical participant will not be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested = 1 (i.e. question tests self-worth bias)

(2) The typical participant may be able to sense that self-worth bias is being tested, but that will not compromise their response = 1 (i.e. question tests self-worth bias)

(3) The typical participant will be able to tell that self-worth bias is being tested, and that will compromise their response = 0 (i.e. question does not test self-worth bias).

Results

Expert item relevance scores (see Table 2 below).

Expert item sensitivity scores (see Table 3 below).

Only one free text comment was added, by Expert 6, who noted/reinforced (as it was already captured through the second mandatory expert response request) that – *"It is clear that the follow up question* [-A] *involves self-worth, but that should not affect the participant's response."*

In short, both items attracted the highest scores possible for relevance and sensitivity from all nine expert participants, and therefore deemed ("**Excellent**" and **RETAIN**) appropriate and effective for deployment.

Reliability is best described as consistency and repeatability with respect to responses (Yassir *et al.*, 2017), achieved here, at least at some level, through item development (i.e. test/retest on small audiences) and the fact that Q1 and Q2 repeat the same pattern.

Items	Expert Number 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Experts in Agreement	I-CVI	p_c	k^*	Evaluation: Excellent / Good / Fair	Decision: RETAIN / REVISE / REJECT / EXPLAIN
Q1 / Q1-A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN
Q2 / Q2-A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN
S-CVI/Ave										1.0					
Average 'relevance' agreement across all nine experts										1.0					
Totals											1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN

Note(s): All nine experts completed the content validity study in full – nil values were missing

Source(s): Adapted from: Almanasreh *et al*. (2019), Polit *et al*. (2007), Yusoff (2019)

Table 2.
Collected OCMQ "relevance" scores

	Expert Number									Experts in Agreement		I-CVI	p_c	k^*	Evaluation: Excellent / Good / Fair	Decision: RETAIN / REVISE / REJECT / EXPLAIN
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9							
Items																
Q1 / Q1-A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9		1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN
Q2 / Q2-A	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9		1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN
S-CVI/Ave										1.0						
Average 'sensitivity' agreement across all nine experts										1.0						
											Totals	1	0.002	1.00	Excellent	RETAIN

Note(s): All nine experts completed the content validity study in full – nil values were missing
Source(s): Adapted from: Almanasreh *et al.* (2019), Polit *et al.* (2007), Yusoff (2019)

Table 3. Collected OCMQ "sensitivity" scores

Study 2

Post the conclusion of Study 1, two questions were deployed through survey method to test the aforementioned RQ – a quantitative research method supported by Hoe and Hoare (2012) and O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2013).

Participants

The total number of participants engaged for this study was 222. As shown below in Table 4, representation was gained by participants who primarily came from three countries (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States). Participants were aged between 23

Demographics	Items	Number	% of respondents
Country	Australia	91	41
	United Kingdom	39	18
	United States	83	37
	Other	9	4
Age bracket	18–22	8	4
	23–38	60	27
	39–54	108	48
	55–73	46	21
	74+	0	0
Company size	Under 10	4	2
	11–50	12	5
	51–250	34	15
	251–1,000	44	20
	1,001+	128	58
Current role	Not a manager	73	33
	Mid-level manager	91	41
	Senior Manager	58	26
Highest educational qualification	High school	36	16
	Undergraduate	100	45
	Postgraduate	86	39

Source(s): Authors work

Table 4. Survey participants

and 73 years, came from companies sized 51 to 1,000+, held varied levels of seniority with their organizational, and had tertiary qualifications.

Control variables

The following caveat was presented to participants prior to survey completion:

(1) *Must be 18 years or older, have held a full-time position for at least six months, and are not the Chief Executive Officer/owner operator of the business, i.e. have had direct experience as a recipient of organizational change.*

Procedures

The survey was deployed online for a period of three months – from start November 2021 to end January 2022. 270 participants opened and started the survey, with 222 completing it in full. Participant names, if submitted (this was optional), were not linked to provided responses in any way.

Analytical strategies

Given the data capture was quantitative, with a single categorical variable, a chi-square goodness of fit test was considered most appropriate (Nihan, 2020). Chi-square tests represent one of the most utilized statistical analyses for determining associations and differences between categorical variables (Franke *et al.*, 2012).

$$X^2 = \left[\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}\right]$$

Chi-square statistic (X^2), where O_i = observed frequency, and E_i = expected frequency

Measures

Only data from participants that completed the survey in full (222 for Q1, and 221 for Q2) was carried though to analysis (as follows).

Q1

Participants that progressed to Q1-A (**x 165**) had a defined position, that is, requesting placement in a different team under a different manager.

Q1-A tested whether those participants would stay with their original choice:

Answering 2. to Q1-A. = ***Retain***, expected/null hypothesis (Ho).

Or changing position after being provided with a self-worth enhancing prompt by answering 1. to Q1-A. = ***Switch***, research/alternate hypothesis (Ha).

Q1 Results

As shown below in Table 5.

Q2

Participants that progressed to Q2-A (**x 93**) had a defined position, i.e. had not been asked to provide feedback.

Q2-A tested whether those participants would stay with their original choice:

Answering 1. to 2-A. = ***Retain***, Ho.

	Observed frequency (O_i)	Expected frequency (E_i)	Difference	Difference Sq	Difference squared/ Expectation frequency
Retain, Ho	52	165	−113.00	12769.00	77.39
Switch, Ha	113	0	113.00	12796.00	∞
	165	165			
X^2 value	∞				
p-value	<0.00001				

Note(s): Setting Level of Confidence at 95%, and therefore an alpha (α) of 0.05, the X^2 result is deemed *significant* ($p < 0.05$), and the null hypothesis (Ho) rejected
Source(s): Authors' work

Table 5.
Q1 results

Or changing position after being provided with a self-worth enhancing prompt by answering 2. to Q2-A. = ***Switch***, Ha.

Q2 Results
As shown below in Table 6.

	Observed frequency (O_i)	Expected frequency (E_i)	Difference	Difference Sq	Difference squared/ Expectation frequency
Retain, Ho	28	93	−65.00	4225.00	45.43
Switch, Ha	65	0	65.00	4225.00	∞
	93	93			
X^2 value	∞				
p-value	<0.00001				

Note(s): Setting Level of Confidence at 95%, and therefore an alpha (α) of 0.05, the X^2 result is deemed *significant* ($p < 0.05$), and the null hypothesis (Ho) rejected
Source(s): Authors work

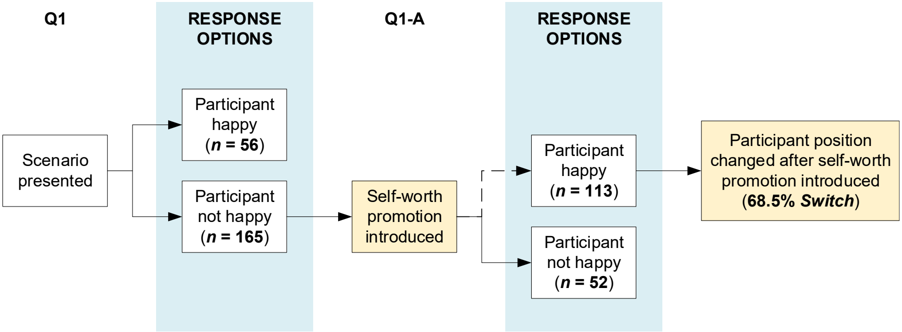
Table 6.
Q2 results

Discussion

The primary purpose of this empirical study was to test whether presenting organizational change in a way that enhances employee self-worth will result in increased employee support for the identified change. In Q1, post being provided with a self-worth enhancing prompt, 69% of participants change their position, and in Q2, 70%, as shown below in Figures 2 and 3.

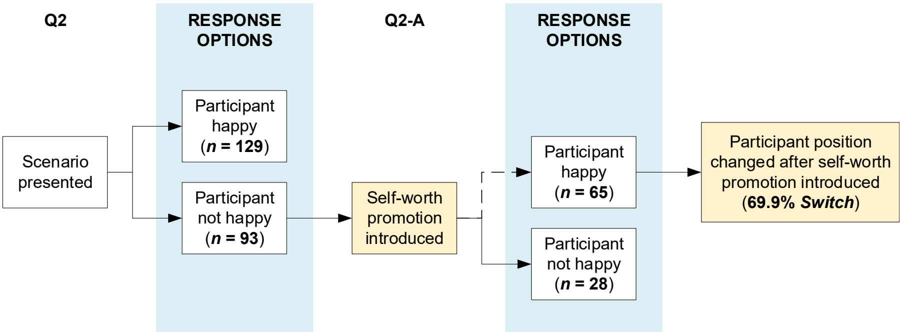
In direct response to the posed RQ, the collected results indicate that taking the time to provide self-worth enhancing explanatory feedback can make a substantiated difference, and could result in increased employee support. As part of the secondary dimension in both questions, nothing outside of respectful and courteous self-worth enhancing information was provided (making the employee feel valued; maintaining, protecting and enhancing their self-worth, showing that they mattered).

There is an important distinction to note within these findings, common change management methodologies like Kotter's eight-step change model, and Prosci's Awareness-Desire-Knowledge-Ability-Reinforcement [ADKAR] model encourage the change manager to engage stakeholders (Worley and Mohrman, 2014) but, evidenced through the collected data, there is a difference between asking for input, and then providing feedback considerate of that input. Galli (2018) adds Kurt Lewin's Change Management Model, The McKinsey 7-S



Source(s): Authors work

Figure 2.
Q1 participant response flow



Source(s): Authors work

Figure 3.
Q2 participant response flow

Model, and General Electric's Change Acceleration Process to the previously mentioned Kotter and Prosci models, in naming them as the five most popular, major and tested change management models used today. However, the closest any model gets with reference to engaging stakeholders is Kotter, noting that employees need support – support to achieve the vision (Galli, 2018). Hiatt (the creator of Prosci) states that employees need to know how to change, and what the change will entail (Galli, 2018), which is again very one directional. Some models talk about training, and the importance of employee buy in (Galli, 2018), but none reference purposeful two-way communication in detail, nor self-worth at all. In both items, it is not the asking for input that seems to be the most important action, it is the explanation with respect to what was considered and how the input was used that led to the participant's decision to ***switch*** positions – the latter (deliberately targeting and promoting self-worth) trumps and transforms the former.

One possible explanation for these findings is that loss aversion is avoided, or at least suppressed and/or secondary, when met with self-worth promoting feedback. Providing that feedback may mean that personal identity in the workplace is protected. None of this should really come as a surprise, it is simply using Vogel and Mitchell's (2017) advice that favorable feedback enhances self-worth. The results suggest that through providing feedback that is competence enhancing and/or simply respectful of the time taken to provide input, significant advantage for an organization can be gained, with feelings of loss aversion halted, the status quo enforced or enhanced, and change resistance behavior avoided.

Brenner *et al.* (2007) present loss aversion as being the most successful and widely used explanatory construct in behavioral decision making research. Novemsky and Kahneman (2005) explain that there is strong evidence for loss aversion; experimental findings show that people weigh losses approximately 1.5–2.5 times more than gains, that is, losses loom larger than gains. Much of the aforementioned loss averse decision-making research is based on willing-to-pay versus willing-to-sell, and sure loss versus sure gain etc. hypothetical scenario questioning (Guillemette *et al.*, 2015). No research similar to that undertaken in this empirical study (contextualized in organizational change management, and founded on self-worth bias triggers), could be found during the conduct of this research. It is of interest that the changing of position evidenced above in Q1-A and Q2-A comes with rates of 2.17 and 2.35 respectively, neatly positioned, inversed within and at the higher end of, Novemsky and Kahneman's (2005) 1.5 to 2.5 range; losses may loom larger than gains, but perhaps self-worth promoting prompts can help flip (***switch***) that reticence? This empirical study may have, by introducing behavioral economic logic and learnings to the world of organizational change management, just demonstrated for self-worth bias what Kahneman and Tversky (1983) and Tversky and Kahneman (1992) demonstrated for risk in decision making, 4 decades ago.

Theoretical and practical implications

This research integrates current understanding of behavioral economics and applied psychology with the field of organizational change management, and in doing so, enhances the understanding of self-worth bias and its potential to assist managers to improve employee support during periods of transition. Therefore, the research raises several theoretical and practical implications.

First, our paper presents a contextualized measure of self-worth bias data that reduces potential respondent influence and noise. This will offer social science researchers, pursuing future research, a useful tool to build on, improving the integrity of drawn conclusions.

Second, our findings show that the "bridging" of behavioral economics and applied psychology with the field of organizational change management is worth exploring further, as is self-worth bias as a standalone phenomenon. Crocker and Park (2003) suggested that what matters most in self-worth judgments is a person's interpretation of the event or circumstance, and its relevance to his or her personal appraisal of self-worth; our study provides support for this statement by demonstrating that a person's interpretation can be lead with carefully crafted self-worth promoting communications. These insights are useful for scholars and academics interested in effective change management, alike. For example, scholars examining change management models may want to utilize the measure presented and use the findings to enhance existing methodological approaches. On the other hand, from a practical perspective, change practitioners and leaders may embed insights generated into project planning and day-to-day management activities. Similarly, our findings show that considering what feedback is given to an employee who submits an idea to an organizational improvement register (i.e. explaining how their idea was considered and used, over a simple automated "thank you" response), or a manager taking on a new team, sourcing and reading the resume of their new direct reports prior to meeting with them one-on-one (i.e. being able to quote, connect and start conversations with deliberate employee self-worth promoting commentary).

Noting that change is everywhere, constant and increasing – particularly in organizational settings (Kotter *et al.*, 2021), and there is a lack of empirical evidence to assist with understanding the reasons why employees resist change (Kim and Kankanhalli (2009), along with concerns that change management is not working like it should (Fernandez and Rainey (2006) – our paper presents novel theoretical and practical findings on a timely topic.

Limitations

This research effort developed and utilized two items; creating additional items would provide further data, and enhance support for drawn conclusions.

Further, both items presented a hypothetical scenario, and then called for a hypothetical response (rather than an observed, real time case study-like, response). Using hypothetical questioning in cognitive psychology research is common, evidenced through prior research conducted by Camerer (1999), Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000), Korobkin (1997), Liberman *et al.* (1999), Novemsky and Kahneman (2005), Sen and Johnson (1997). Barrouillet (2011) also advises that System 1 (heuristic mode – rule of thumb) thinking and reasoning is in itself based on hypothetical estimations, that is, imagined outcomes inform our actions. That said, the authors of this study also understand that, in the words of Perner and Kühberger (2002) – people may behave differently [to what they say they will do] in the real world. It is hoped that this study can be the catalyst for further hypothetical, and observed, self-worth bias research and knowledge extension.

Study 2 collected quantitative data; expanding that capture to include qualitative participant comment could assist with furthering understanding and conclusion validation.

Directions for future research

Pretesting showed that it is easy to unexpectedly pull other biases into scenario questioning, like that of "hedging your bets" – explained by (Grant and Xie, 2007) as participants choosing to sit in the middle if presented response options are similar. Item development needs to scrutinize, and screen out as much as possible, the influence of other potential biases.

Instrument validation is a dynamic and ongoing process (Schwab, 1980). As such, continued item development, deployment, data collection and review should be performed. This is also an important reliability measure.

The novel measure proposed and deployment in this research effort (i.e. the secondary dimension element) could potentially extend to the testing of other biases. This should be explored.

Given, as referenced above, individualized competence and capability appraisals seem to play a key role in organizational success, appealing to employee self-worth outside of the introduction of organizational change would appear to hold benefit – in an employee performance review, or during onboarding, for example. Further analysis with respect to how managers and leaders provide feedback to, and develop, employees would be a useful area to explore. There are also links through that subject to self-worth and personality trait research which would be useful to expand upon.

Related to the aforementioned, identity theory and complex identity, as referenced in the literature review, are wide ranging; how those constructs interact with self-worth bias in a work environment would be useful to probe. As would extending analysis of identity threatening stressors in the workplace; how they apply to managers and employees, and change resistance in general, with an affirming, optimistic and approach motivation framing lens applied.

With self-worth bias linking to a want to maintain the status quo, as referenced above, further research could also examine the difference between negative, neutral and positive employee responses to presented change. Loss aversion may play a role in negative and neutral response. This could be tested with secondary dimension questions that focus on loss aversion, and/or qualitative data collection at the end of survey deployment.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this research effort is that, authentically (we do not support falsifying this feedback in any way; it must be honest, genuine and accurate) taking the time to ask for, consider, and then explain to individual employees how their input (through demonstrated competence and/or requested feedback) shaped the organizational change effort, can result in a quantifiable change in behavior and support for the identified change. Is the time and effort needed to do this worth it? The collected data suggests, yes; over 69% of participants changed their position after being provided with a self-worth bias prompt.

Furthermore, this research effort proposed, tested and collected evidence to confirm the effectiveness of a new self-worth bias measure, which included a novel baseline element.

The presented findings lend support to Carnegie's near century old suggestion (the genesis of this research effort) that humans are driven by self-worth, with a craving to be appreciated. This conclusion is provided with strained obviousness – people want to matter, so be courteous, be kind, and make them matter. The payoff is not only humanistic, but organizationally beneficial.

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