# Chapter 10
# Following Through the Good and the Bad?
## Building a Positive Change Culture With Authentic Followers

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## ABSTRACT

*Followers are underrepresented in the organizational change literature despite their considerable influence on change success. Politics, culture, motivation, communication, and readiness have a large impact on change success, and these influences are examined in the change context. Each of these are influenced by leaders and followers. The role of authentic followers in enabling positive change through their organizational engagement is explored in depth. This chapter demonstrates that while the influential role of leaders in change is established, the authentic follower represents a large body of potential change agents with the capacity to positively influence the success of change. Many behaviors of the authentic follower make them an ideal candidate for this role, including moral potency, high levels of engagement in organizational structure, and flexibility. Further research highlighting the value of the authentic follower is warranted.*

## INTRODUCTION

Change is a facet of daily life and should be an expectation rather than a surprise. The rapid rate of innovation and evolution in contemporary beliefs, influenced in part by globalization, has brought with it a period of significant transformation. Organizational change, however, is still poorly understood, and the rate of change failure is one indicator of such. Some studies indicate rates of failure as high as 80 percent (Strebel, 1996) and others found that of 125 mergers, 40 percent failed to achieve anticipated savings (Doucet, 2000). In fact, there appears to be a consensus that most organizational change initiatives fail (e.g. Franken et al., 2009; Gilley et al., 2008; Pasmore, 2011; Sterling, 2003). Considering how common change has become in society and organizations, such a high rate of failure is problematic.

Scholars have turned their attention to exploring the antecedents of successful organizational change practice and have begun to document the extensive complexity associated with organizational change (Lewis et al., 2005). For example, recent studies identify that psychological capital (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2019), individual readiness (Haffar et al., 2019), and motivation (Ryan & Danaher, 2019) have a positive influence on organizational change. Perhaps one of the most effective predictors of organizational change is leadership (Agote et al., 2016) and the organizational culture such leaders can cultivate.

The weakness in organizational change literature is the dearth of understanding of the role of the follower. Research supports the effect of employee involvement (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003), cynicism (Stanley et al., 2005), and commitment (Turner Parish et al., 2008) on organizational change. However, while these studies should inform our understanding of followership, the followership context is underdeveloped within the contemporary leadership domain (de Zilwa et al., 2014). The organizational change context is no exception, despite the integral role that employee resistance can have on the success or failure of change implementation (Piderit, 2000). It is not surprising then, that evidence indicates around 70 percent of change initiatives fail (Meaney & Pung, 2008).

The importance of follower behaviors becomes more pertinent when considering that many change agents emerge from employee groups. That is, followers sometimes become leaders or enact leadership in periods of change. Leader-follower fluidity does tend to occur when individuals are required to utilize different behaviors in multiple environments (Crawford et al., 2018). The behaviors of the change agent are important in facilitating organizational change (Specht et al., 2017). Where the individual characteristics of the follower are important in the leader-follower relationship, so too are these behaviors important when the follower is taking on a temporary leadership role such as a change agent. Indeed, the follower becomes the leader, for at least a time. Therefore, scholars need to consider followers who are

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