

A Field Investigation of Multilevel Cynicism Toward Change

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Although most research on cynicism toward change (CTC) has been conceptualized at the individual level, we propose that CTC is better conceptualized as a multilevel phenomenon, acting as both an employee attitude and an organizational climate. We conducted a multilevel investigation of CTC in a field sample of 687 correctional officers in the 14 prisons in a state penal system. Consistent with our hypotheses, both employee CTC and CTC climate uniquely predicted negative employee attitudes and behaviors directed at the organization. Offering insight into how to address CTC, we found that transformational leadership negatively relates to employee CTC and CTC climate. Our results highlight the importance of studying CTC in organizations from a multilevel perspective and suggest that transformational leadership is significant for supporting both functional employee attitudes and a facilitative climate toward organizational change.

Key words: cynicism toward change; climate; transformational leadership; empowerment; insubordination; organizational commitment

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A lot of times [change] is not really happening right here We have a supervisor that comes and sits [us] down, we have a meeting and they tell us “we do this, we do not do that, we do this, we do not take care of that,” and so forth. Then we will be waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, and nothing happens. Everything comes right back [to how it always is].

—Correctional officer (name withheld)

Kurt Lewin (1947) first suggested that organizational change is invariably met with equal and opposing social forces, creating an inevitable uphill battle for its effective implementation. Since then, a large body of scholarship and practitioner efforts has been dedicated to examining factors that can derail organizational change initiatives (see Armenakis and Bedeian 1999 for a review). Despite this vast amount of research and related practical approaches aimed at successfully implementing change, most organizational change efforts fail (Burke 2002, Mourier and Smith 2002). One possible contributing factor is the development of cynical attitudes among employees that characterize organizational change efforts as just the “flavor of the month” (see Herold et al. 2007, p. 942), rather than legitimate initiatives that will improve the organization and deserve commitment and attention. Such employee cynicism toward change (CTC), characterized by extreme pessimism and skepticism about the organization’s ability to change (Andersson 1996), is

a significant and challenging problem for organizations implementing change (Armenakis et al. 1993, Piderit 2000). This employee attitude is quite common—the unfortunate reality for most organizations undergoing change is that employees are cynical in their attitudes toward change (Burke 2002, Probst and Raisch 2005). CTC attitudes can also be quite damaging; research has demonstrated that CTC can result in employees who, at best, do not support the change process and, at worst, even work to sabotage it (Vance et al. 1995).

Given the significance of employee attitudes surrounding organizational change efforts, it is no surprise that researchers are contributing to a growing body of literature that investigates employee CTC (e.g., Bommer et al. 2005, Reichers et al. 1997, Wanous et al. 2000). This research has greatly enhanced our knowledge about the wide-ranging effects that CTC can have, including less willingness to engage in change efforts; lower job satisfaction and motivation (Reichers et al. 1997); and greater absenteeism, grievance filing, and turnover (Wanous et al. 2000). However, despite considerable attention, research has not yet explained why employee CTC varies so widely across research sites (e.g., Bommer et al. 2005, Rubin et al. 2009, Wanous et al. 2000), nor why CTC appears to be so persistent (Bommer et al. 2005, Wanous et al. 2000). One potential reason for these unexplained findings is that existing research has conceptualized and

examined CTC as an individual-level attitude, although employees might hold shared perceptions of CTC in an organization-level attitude or “climate” (see Schneider and Reichers 1983). Employees make sense of organizational change by talking with and observing their coworkers, which influences their interpretation (Weick et al. 2005) and often leads to similarity among employees’ perceptions. Therefore, it seems likely that employees not only communicate with each other about their organizational change experiences and beliefs but may come to share similar cynicism regarding their organization’s ability to implement change.

It is important to note that research findings from the individual level cannot readily be generalized to climate-level constructs (House et al. 1995, Klein et al. 1994, Morgeson and Hofmann 1999). This is because research demonstrates that employee climate perceptions often occur at the organizational level, are distinct from and more entrenched than individual-level attitudes, and frequently have unique antecedents and outcomes (e.g., Morrison et al. 2011, Naumann and Bennett 2000, Schneider 1987, Schulte et al. 2006). Therefore, a full understanding of CTC might actually require a multilevel conceptualization, including both the individual attitude and organizational climate levels. Yet, despite the significant interest in understanding CTC and its role in organizational change, there has been virtually no research to provide theoretical guidance or empirical findings to offer understanding of CTC as a multilevel phenomenon.

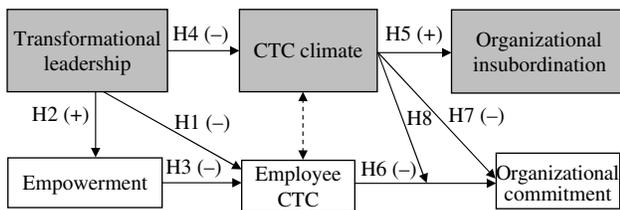
Investigating a multilevel model of CTC allows for more complex models to explore how this phenomenon relates to negative outcomes for organizations, which may provide valuable insight beyond what is already known. For example, at the individual level, we theorize that employees’ CTC may corrode their bond with the organization, leading to negative attitudes and behaviors directed toward it. However, an employee’s own CTC takes on a considerably different meaning when it exists in the company of like-minded peers versus working in a climate that is more optimistic about organizational change. Consistent with the organizational climate literature (e.g., Schneider 1987, 1990; Schneider and Reichers 1983), we argue that a CTC climate sends pessimistic cues to employees about the (low) likelihood of improvement in their organization, resulting in employees who feel less attached to their organization. Furthermore, when combined with employee CTC, a CTC climate could even amplify the corrosive effects of employee CTC, as employees see their negative viewpoints validated by these cues; this results in an even more tenuous attachment. In contrast, an individual employee who is cynical toward change could feel more attached to his or her organization if he or she resides among a group of peers who send cues that

are more encouraging and hopeful about improvement in their workplace.

In addition, although the traditional approach to the study of CTC implies that organizations should replace or otherwise attempt to alter the attitudes of certain “bad apple” employees to decrease CTC, the existence of a CTC climate suggests organization-level intervention may be necessary to overcome multiple levels of CTC. That is, organizational climates are likely to strengthen over time and become more entrenched than individual employee attitudes (Johns 2006, Morgeson and Hofmann 1999, Schneider 1987). This suggests that a CTC climate may be especially difficult for organizations to surmount.

When considering possible ways for organizations to conquer CTC, one antidote to the development of a CTC climate could be through the unique multilevel manner in which leadership can influence both employees and climates in organizations—particularly senior leaders of units or divisions who supervise a collective unit of employees (Oreg and Berson 2011). More specifically, these leaders are structurally poised to influence both individual-level employee perceptions as well as the climate to be more receptive toward change. As argued in the climate and leadership literature (e.g., Kozlowski and Doherty 1989, Zohar and Tenne-Gazit 2008), the most senior leader within a collective of employees is the most relevant leader of reference because of his or her proximal influence over unit policies, practice, and procedures. Furthermore, the senior leader is the one who provides the most universally visible leadership in the unit and also interacts with individual employees on day-to-day management issues (Kozlowski and Doherty 1989). Thus, such leaders are potentially one of the primary means of shaping employee attitudes at both the individual and collective levels. However, these multilevel mechanisms by which leaders may shape CTC have not been theoretically developed or empirically tested.

More specifically, prior research suggests that transformational leadership in particular is critical for more favorable employee attitudes toward change because transformational leaders are able to intellectually stimulate and inspire followers in ways that facilitate receptivity and openness to it (Bass 1985, Bommer et al. 2005, Oreg and Berson 2011). Although this research has examined how transformational leadership relates to contextually based concepts such as employee CTC and openness toward change, it has largely overlooked how transformational leaders may directly shape the organizational context itself (e.g., CTC climate). Additionally, even though a great deal of scholarship exists on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement in change efforts (Atwater and Bass 1994, Bono and Judge 2003, Herold et al. 2008), little work examines precisely how transformational leaders are able to accomplish this. Therefore, we

Figure 1 Multilevel Model of CTC, Predictors, and Outcomes

Notes. Organization-level constructs are in gray boxes, whereas individual-level constructs are in white boxes. The dotted line signifies the top-down and bottom-up processes in the theorized emergent, compositional model of CTC climate (rather than a tested hypothesis).

theoretically and empirically examine how senior transformational leaders shape both the CTC climate and employee CTC.

In sum, our objective is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of CTC by investigating a multilevel model, including how transformational leadership relates to these different conceptualizations of CTC and how CTC at multiple levels relates to negative outcomes directed at the organization. Next, we develop and test this model (pictured in Figure 1), which allows for the exploration of linkages across employees and organization-level phenomena (Naumann and Bennett 2000).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Cynicism Toward Change

Cynicism has been studied in a variety of ways (Dean et al. 1998), including dispositional conceptualizations (e.g., Cook and Medley 1954) and negative attitudes regarding unmet expectations of authorities or society (e.g., Kanter and Mirvis 1989). Regarding organizations, cynicism has been conceptualized as mistrust and lost pride in one's work or occupation (e.g., Niederhoffer 1967), as well as an attitude of frustration and distrust toward one's organization (e.g., Andersson and Bateman 1997). Here, we focus on CTC specifically, which scholars generally agree is a state (rather than trait) variable, distinct from dispositions such as negative affectivity (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly 2003), and encompassing a pessimistic attitude toward one's organization regarding its ability to successfully implement change (Bommer et al. 2005, Reichers et al. 1997, Wanous et al. 2000).

Extant work has conceptualized CTC as an employee attitude (e.g., Bommer et al. 2005, Wanberg and Banas 2000, Wanous et al. 2000). However, this implies that employees assess the effectiveness of organizational change by themselves, whereas employees are likely to have shared experiences with their organization's change efforts and to collectively interpret events to make sense of them (Daft and Weick 1984, House et al. 1995). Therefore, we argue that employees—as a collective—are

likely to develop shared meanings (Schneider and Reichers 1983) surrounding cynicism toward change. These shared meanings, referred to as a “climate,” are a pattern of collective beliefs or attitudes about a specific and psychologically important aspect of a work environment (Ashforth 1985, Schneider and Reichers 1983, Schneider 1990), such as a climate for customer service (Schneider et al. 1980) or organizational justice (Naumann and Bennett 2000). Organizational climates concern the particular practices, procedures, and behaviors that are expected, rewarded, or supported in the organization (Schneider 1990, Schneider and Reichers 1983), and they establish norms and expectations for employee attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth 1985). It is important to note that organizational climates often pertain to what is socially rewarded and expected, rather than only to formal organizational rewards (Chatman 1991, Louis 1980).

We argue that CTC climates evolve in part from employees' attitudes about the organization's ability to successfully manage change and emerge into a construct at the organizational level of analysis (Kozlowski and Klein 2000, Morgeson and Hofmann 1999). Compositional, organizational-level constructs are believed to influence the attitudes and behaviors of employees above and beyond their own personally held attitudes (Tesluk et al. 2002). Compositional models represent phenomena “that are essentially the same as they emerge upward across levels” (Kozlowski and Klein 2000, p. 16). That is, they have the same content and meaning across levels aside from qualitative differences. Following this logic of CTC climate as a collective, emergent property (Morgeson and Hofmann 1999), we define CTC climate as a collectively shared perception among employees that change efforts in their organization will not be successful.

Following prior research on collective, emergent constructs (Morgeson and Hofmann 1999), we see that an organizational climate such as CTC can develop in several ways. First, CTC climate is likely to develop through employees' shared direct experiences and observations of their organization's efforts to manage and implement change. Second, CTC can evolve through employees' interaction and discussion about organizational change efforts (Reichers et al. 1997, Vance et al. 1995). Employees are likely to engage in collective sensemaking about events that they experience, which is likely to foster similarity among their viewpoints (Weick et al. 2005). Finally, attraction–selection–attrition theory suggests that employees with similar attitudes are more likely to be attracted to interact and engage with each other (Schneider 1987). Such employees are more likely to remain in the organization over time, leading to the homogenization of employee views that contribute to and reinforce a CTC climate (Schneider and Reichers 1983).

Antecedents of Multilevel CTC

Transformational Leadership, Empowerment, and Employee CTC. Transformational leaders “change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers” by providing employees with intellectual stimulation, vision, appropriate behaviors to model, goal alignment, high performance expectations, and individualized support (Podsakoff et al. 1990, p. 108). We argue that transformational leaders will reduce employee CTC in part because they are able to provide an inspirational vision of the future and to encourage followers to challenge existing approaches by providing intellectual stimulation (Bass and Avolio 1990, Podsakoff et al. 1990, Shamir 1995). Through these unique abilities, transformational leaders facilitate an understanding of the rationale behind change, increase employee motivation for change, and enhance employee optimism that change is possible. By providing a clear and inspiring vision that challenges the status quo, transformational leaders help employees clearly understand the overarching objective of change because they are able to convey the purpose and meaning behind organizational change efforts (Bass 1985, Bommer et al. 2005).

Transformational leaders are able to get employees to see why change is needed in their organization, increasing their understanding that existing approaches, practices, and procedures can and should be improved. As a result, employees are more motivated to engage in change efforts, more open to exploring new directions and ideas, and more likely to see changes to their work as necessary and important rather than as nonsensical burdens. Transformational leaders also help convince employees that an improved organization is not only necessary, but possible. For example, transformational leaders may persuasively defend prior changes that employees had interpreted as failures, reframing these events in a more positive light. By providing employees with more believable and persuasive information that a “better future” is ahead (Bommer et al. 2005, p. 739), transformational leaders are able to more effectively communicate optimism to their employees about the likely success of change efforts. Therefore, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 1. *Transformational leadership will be negatively related to employee CTC.*

Another way in which transformational leaders are likely to engage their followers is through psychologically empowering them (Kark et al. 2003), which we expect to negatively relate to employee CTC. Psychological empowerment is defined¹ in terms of employees’ experienced feelings of meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer 1995). Transformational leaders engage employees in greater consultation about decisions and act in ways that encourage followers to take responsibility (Dvir

et al. 2002). Therefore, these leaders enhance feelings of competence, autonomy, and self-determination (Spreitzer 1995) among followers. When transformational leaders articulate their vision by appealing to higher-order values (e.g., how change efforts relate to achievement of publicly valued goals), employees come to see their work as more personally meaningful and important (Bono and Judge 2003). Employees also come to feel more personally efficacious in their roles and identify with their organization (Walumbwa et al. 2008). Employees who feel empowered as a result of transformational leadership will therefore be more likely to believe that their efforts will make a difference, increasing the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that support change. As a result, empowered employees likely place more effort on facilitating the organizational change and are more invested in seeing the change succeed, which results in less cynicism toward change. Therefore, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 2. *Transformational leadership will be positively related to employee psychological empowerment.*

HYPOTHESIS 3. *Employee psychological empowerment will be negatively related to employee CTC.*

Transformational Leadership and CTC Climate. In addition to influencing employee attitudes toward change, transformational leaders may inhibit the emergence of a CTC climate. As other scholars have articulated, as a “structuralist” perspective, organizational climate can be a result of employees’ similar exposure to policies, procedures, and practices (Kozlowski and Doherty 1989, Schneider and Reichers 1983). Employees in the same organization share exposure to leaders’ behaviors and abilities, and therefore they experience the same policies, practices, and procedures that leaders initiate. In addition, transformational leaders frequently interact with employees as a collective, such as through organization-wide communication efforts. Thus, employees often experience their transformational leader’s speeches, behaviors, and discussions about organizational change efforts collectively.

Transformational leaders convey a sense of optimism about change efforts through organizationally targeted messages and actions that facilitate change, verbal persuasion, and inspirational appeals (Bommer et al. 2005, Oreg and Berson 2011). Thus, transformational leaders provide strong optimistic cues about an improved organization on the horizon (Bommer et al. 2005). Coming from the senior leader, these encouraging cues are likely to be highly visible, getting employees to focus on positive information about organizational change. Thus, transformational leaders will facilitate their organization’s climate to be more receptive toward organizational change.

Transformational leaders directly set the “tone” of the organization’s climate to be more optimistic about

change by providing an appropriate model for employees to follow (Podsakoff et al. 1990) and may set specific behavioral norms surrounding the expression of CTC among employees. Transformational leaders are also likely to establish organizational practices and approaches that translate their leadership style into a climate that is supportive of change. For instance, because transformational leaders actively solicit employees' ideas and concerns (Bass 1985, Podsakoff et al. 1990), they are likely to implement employee suggestion programs and other mechanisms to encourage employee input and engagement, contributing to a climate supportive of change. Transformational leaders also develop practices such as staffing, training, and performance management practices that foster employee motivation, trust, and flexibility (Zhu et al. 2005), which contribute to a positive climate toward change. These types of actions shape the climate as perceived by employees (Kozlowski and Doherty 1989). In sum, through this combination of factors, we offer the following hypothesis between transformational leadership and CTC climate.

HYPOTHESIS 4. Transformational leadership will be negatively related to CTC climate.

Outcomes of Multilevel CTC

CTC Climate and Insubordination. Most work has evaluated outcomes of employee CTC, but we are also interested in explaining organization-level outcomes of CTC climate. We argue that higher CTC climates will be associated with greater resistance to supervisor requests and the failure to carry out required job duties; that is, CTC climate will be associated with greater rates of insubordination in the organization. We argue that this occurs for several reasons. First, a CTC climate may encourage employees to reject performing what are seen as pointless changes to their jobs. Thus, a CTC climate may result in increased levels of insubordination (i.e., disobeying direct supervisory commands). Research in the voice, loyalty, neglect, and exit framework (Hirschman 1970, Farrell and Rusbult 1992) suggests that when employees are dissatisfied, they react in several ways—such as through voicing their discontent, exiting the organization, or neglecting aspects of their jobs. Thus, insubordination behaviors might be classified as neglectful behavior, which has consistently been found to be associated with employee dissatisfaction (Farrell and Rusbult 1992).

In addition, climates strongly shape employees' perceptions about how others feel and act by sending cues that focus employees on salient information and norms, thereby providing expectations about behavior (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). An organization with a CTC climate has norms that disregard the value of change; therefore, it is likely that employees in such climates perceive that

others are avoiding the implementation of the change behaviors in their work. As such, it is likely that a CTC climate works to mobilize employees in the collective to work against their superiors and the change process. Wanous et al. (2000) found that employees with higher CTC had a greater likelihood of filing grievances against the organization and that as employees become more cynical toward change, they are more likely to resist change efforts they see as futile.

This research implies that employee CTC will relate to employee insubordination. However, the use of anonymous questionnaires in the present study prohibits formal testing of an individual-level hypothesis, and therefore we focus on the theoretical reasons in predicting the relationship between a CTC climate and an aggregated insubordination (organizational insubordination rate). Insubordination at the collective (organizational) level of analysis is of interest for scholars because an organization with a high rate of insubordinate staff indicates the presence of a negative climate for reactions to supervisor commands. When employees refuse to engage in particular aspects of their jobs, their coworkers may be given extra work as a result. If employees resent this extra work or see it as unfair that others are not doing it, they may also begin to refuse to perform critical functions or tasks. Employees are likely to observe one another being insubordinate and to learn to refuse orders from superiors, resulting in grouplike properties of insubordinate behavior (Naumann and Bennett 2000). Therefore, we propose the following.

HYPOTHESIS 5. CTC climate will be positively related to insubordination at the organization level.

Employee CTC and Organizational Commitment. CTC is likely shaped by prior negative experiences and disappointment with previously failed change efforts (Klein and Sorra 1996). Ineffective organizational change attempts are particularly frustrating for employees with higher CTC because they tend to see where and how the organization most needs to improve (Niederhoffer 1967, Reichers et al. 1997, Vance et al. 1995). Yet, because employees who are highly cynical of change are convinced that the organization will be unable to bring about needed improvements through its continual and ongoing change efforts, they view their participation in the organization's attempts at change as pointless and futile (Reichers et al. 1997). This CTC likely decreases employees' feelings of commitment to their organization because they will see their organization as a place that needs improvement, but with little likelihood of actually ever improving.

Research supports the idea that those who are more cynical toward organizational change will have lower organizational commitment. Wanberg and Banas (2000) showed that employees who were less open to change

in their organization had stronger intentions of leaving the organization. Similarly, we believe that as an employee becomes increasingly cynical toward organizational change, he or she will see the organization in an increasingly negative light, fuelling a gradual psychological separation with the organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). Therefore, we predict the following.

HYPOTHESIS 6. *Employee CTC will be negatively related to employee organizational commitment.*

Multilevel CTC Relationships and Employees' Organizational Commitment. In addition to the CTC employees individually experience, collectively shared attitudes toward change create a climate that may shape employees' organizational commitment by providing negative cues. We argue that this happens in two ways. First, following established theory and empirical findings that demonstrate that the social context influences how employees interpret and respond to their work environment (Johns 2006), we argue that a CTC climate will demonstrate a direct, negative, cross-level relationship with employees' organizational commitment. This is because a CTC climate sends pessimistic cues to employees about the (low) likelihood of improvement in their organization, weakening the bond of attachment between employees and their employer. However, a less cynical climate sends more optimistic cues about the likelihood of an improved organization, enhancing the attachment employees feel to their organization with the hope that their workplace will soon be better.

Second, a CTC climate may amplify the effects of employees' own cynical attitudes toward organizational change efforts. This is because a CTC climate sends cues that may influence employees' own views, thus giving employees additional information by which to process their attachment to their organization. Prior research on individual and contextual effects of organizational justice has found that the relationship between individual justice perceptions and job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) is moderated by justice climate, such that the relationships are stronger when justice climate is high (Mayer et al. 2007). Similarly, an employee with high CTC who is surrounded by pessimistic peers may find that the CTC climate in the organization legitimizes his own personal viewpoints. Therefore, employees who were already feeling doubtful about their organization's likelihood of improvement who also perceive that their peers agree with them receive an additional signal that they should feel negatively toward their organization. This is likely to even further decrease employees' organizational commitment. In contrast, an employee with high CTC who is surrounded by less cynical peers may find herself reassessing some negative views of the organization. That is, those employees with high CTC who work among less cynical peers receive a signal that they should feel more positively toward their

organization, likely weakening the relationship between employee CTC and organizational commitment.

HYPOTHESIS 7. *CTC climate will be negatively related to employee organizational commitment (after controlling for employee CTC).*

HYPOTHESIS 8. *The relationship between employee CTC and employee organizational commitment (Hypothesis 6) will be stronger for those in organizations with higher CTC climates.*

Methods

Setting

For an initial test of our model, we sought a reasonably comparable set of organizations in an appropriate field setting. We collected data from 687 correctional officers from all adult prisons in a mid-Atlantic state ($N = 14$), excluding "supermax" and prerelease facilities, during December 2003 and January 2004. There are several reasons that prisons are a particularly well-suited context in which to investigate our research questions about the effects of multiple levels of CTC. First, state prisons are arranged and controlled in a way that allows for maximal organizational unit-level comparison of leadership and climate while holding constant other organization-level factors, such as industry, location, job duties, structure, and training. Second, the initial work on cynicism in organizations (Niederhoffer 1967, Regoli et al. 1990) was especially concerned with employees' development of cynical attitudes toward change in the law enforcement context.

Theoretically, law enforcement organizations are mechanistic structures, characterized by rigid structures that emphasize order, strict control and hierarchy, centralized power, and formalized rules and procedures (Burns and Stalker 1961, Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). This may make such organizations especially likely to develop CTC because mechanistic structures make the implementation of change particularly difficult for employees to embrace (House 1991). Mechanistic structures make change burdensome for employees to implement because rules and restrictions are placed on employees' access to information, and there are fewer opportunities for employee voice, discretion, questions, and information exchange (Ambrose and Schminke 2003, House 1991, Schminke et al. 2000). Consequently, employees are likely to have limited understanding of the reasons behind changes and little sense of influence and control over their shifting jobs. This can lead to attitudes that are critical of and resistant to organizational change (Regoli et al. 1990), making mechanistic organizations especially relevant for evaluating an initial multilevel model of CTC.

It is important to note that we argue that prison, as a mechanistic organizational structure, is especially rather

than uniquely likely to demonstrate CTC. That is, our empirical context is bounded by the assumption of a mechanistic context. However, our theory and model (see Figure 1) are broadly generalizable to many types of organizations (as we address in the Discussion). Thus, we argue that mechanistic organizations (here, a set of state prisons) are appropriate for investigating CTC precisely because they might be more likely to illustrate this common organizational phenomenon in a uniquely illuminating way. That is, although they are common across many organizations beyond mechanistic ones, these constructs might otherwise be much more difficult to assess (Eisenhardt 1989, Pettigrew 1990).

Sample and Procedure

We were given personnel rosters from 10 of the 14 prisons in advance of the survey and therefore were able to randomly select approximately 50% of all employees. In the remaining four prisons that did not provide personnel rosters in time for us to randomly preselect employees to take the survey, all participants were purely voluntary.² As part of a larger data collection effort to assess organizational attributes of correctional systems, data were collected on employees' attitudinal measures. Our sample was on average 39.3 years old ($SD = 8.8$) and had an average of 8.0 years of tenure in their organization ($SD = 6.3$), and 60.3% were male. The sample was 53.2% black, 43.4% white, 1.2% Native American, 0.6% Hispanic, and 1.6% other/unidentified. In addition to correctional officers, data were also collected from each prison's warden on all incidents of insubordination in the prison, which they are required to track.

The prisons in our data set were largely comparable with one another in terms of types of offenses for which inmates had been incarcerated, resources, structure, rate at which staff openings were filled, and the availability of rehabilitation programs. However, prisons varied in terms of size of staff, location (urban/rural), and type of facility (i.e., mixed nature of the incarcerated population from medium through maximum security). Therefore, we ran a correlation matrix including all prison-level study variables—prison staff size, location, security level, and number of inmates—to evaluate the possibility of spurious relationships between constructs of interest and prison-level characteristics. The only significant correlation between control variables and those of interest to the study was a positive relationship between organization size (number of staff members) and insubordination ($p < 0.05$); therefore, this was controlled for in all organization-level analyses.

Measures

Insubordination. All prisons reported comprehensive lists of all disciplinary data on correctional officers for the year 2004, including a brief description of the incident. Therefore, a vast majority of these data that were

collected occurred after our initial data collection of the independent variables. We then used these offenses to create insubordination occurrences for each prison. We did this by first eliminating repeat offenses by single correctional officers within each facility.³

It is important to note that although there may be some variation in supervisory determinations about what infractions were written up, there are standardized, written employee rules, and behavior regulations that are enforced consistently across prisons by the personnel office of the state department of corrections. Moreover, incidents of insubordination were all categorized as a level one offense on a four-point system, where one is the lowest level of a written employee offense (e.g., failure to maintain position at one's post or the use of foul language) and four is the highest (e.g., incidents of excessive force leading to inmate injury or death, which would warrant immediate termination). Our hypothesis involving insubordination was also tested using an incidence rate weighted by seriousness level, created by multiplying each event by its seriousness score (one–four), summing the number of weighted incidents per institution, and dividing this number by the number of staff in each prison.

Finally, because active insubordination incidents are low base-rate phenomena, investigating the relationship between CTC and insubordination is also methodologically most appropriate at the aggregate (organization) level of analysis (Hofmann and Mark 2006, Zohar 2000).

Empowerment. Because of restrictions on survey length, empowerment was measured using two of the highest loading items from each of Spreitzer's (1995) four subscales of empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact). This resulted in an eight-item scale, including items such as "The work I do is very important to me" and "I have significant freedom in determining how I do my job," where respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Following Spreitzer (1995), we averaged scores across the subscales to form a single empowerment score. Reliability was calculated at 0.76.

Employee CTC. CTC was measured using selected items from the organizational cynicism and improvability scale of Tesluk et al. (1995). More specifically, we selected three items from the six-item organizational cynicism subscale that most strongly tapped employees' pessimistic beliefs about organizational improvements (rather than assessments of their own actions toward change). Respondents indicated their level of agreement with three items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which included the following: "Efforts to make improvements in this facility usually fail," "When we try to change things here they just seem to go from bad to worse," and "It is hard to be hopeful about the future

because people have such bad attitudes.” Reliability was calculated at 0.83.

Organizational Commitment. We measured organizational commitment with four items from the organizational commitment scale adapted for public sector employees by Balfour and Wechsler (1996). We selected items that tapped the two dimensions of commitment most closely related to the generally accepted construct of affective commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990, Meyer and Allen 1997) in the organizational literature. Allen and Meyer’s (1990) measure of affective commitment is composed of an employee’s emotional attachment to an organization (affect) as well as an affective-cognitive component of attachment (identification) (see Solinger et al. 2008). Therefore, we selected the two highest loading items from the scale of identification commitment and the two highest loading measuring affiliation commitment. Respondents rated their agreement with these four statements on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree): “I am quite proud to be able to say to people that I work for this organization,” “What this organization stands for is important to me,” “I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization,” and “I feel like ‘part of the family’ at this organization.” Reliability was calculated at 0.87.

CTC Climate. Following previous authors (e.g., Chen et al. 2004, Marrone et al. 2007), we conceptualized climate as the average level of the construct of interest (here, CTC) in a given organization. That is, we expected that employees would have CTC attitudes they would act on and express to their coworkers, which would lead to the formation of a collective attitude at the organizational level. Using the employee CTC measure as described above, we followed the logic that a CTC climate was best represented by an emergent, compositional model (Chan 1998, Kozlowski and Klein 2000). This conceptualization closely follows Morgeson and Hofmann’s (1999) description of collective constructs as developing through a bottom-up, emergent process based on individuals’ interactions that form a collective construct that, in turn, shapes and influences subsequent attitudes and behaviors at the individual and collective levels.

An alternative approach to measuring climate might include asking employees to rate their peers’ CTC. However, we relied on aggregating employees’ assessments of their own cynicism because (a) doing so is consistent with the compositional model we have argued for CTC climate, (b) it is not clear how accurately employees may be able to assess CTC in others, and (c) we assessed for the justifiability of aggregating the employee self-assessments by testing for significant and reliable between-organization variance in the aggregated data (see below).

Transformational Leadership. Following previous researchers (Kirkman et al. 2009, MacKenzie et al. 2001), we measured transformational leadership with a shortened version of the Podsakoff et al. (1990) measure of transformational leadership by selecting items from each dimension of transformational leadership. We selected six items by choosing the highest loading item from each of the six first-order transformational leadership behaviors (articulation of vision, providing appropriate behavior to model, fostering acceptance of goals, communicating higher performance expectations, individual support, and intellectual stimulation). We asked respondents how strongly they agreed (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) with the following statements: “My warden... (1) is able to get others to be committed to his/her vision for this prison; (2) leads by ‘doing’ rather than simply by ‘telling’; (3) gets people to work together for the same goal; (4) insists on only the best performance; (5) takes the time to carefully listen to and discuss people’s concerns; and (6) suggests new ways of looking at how we do our jobs.” Reliability was calculated at 0.92.

Leadership behaviors are directed toward and influence groups of followers who are under the authority of the leader, in addition to each individual follower (Kark et al. 2003). Therefore, we follow previous scholars who have conceptualized transformational leadership at the level within the organizational hierarchy at which the leader resides (e.g., Bono and Judge 2003, Kark et al. 2003). In this case, because the warden is the unit leader, the most senior and visible manager in the prison, and is the one who most directly provides leadership for the prison, we treat correctional officers’ ratings of their warden’s transformational leadership at the organizational (i.e., leader) level of analysis.

Construct Validity

We assessed construct validity for employee CTC and other variables that were collected but not used in this investigation.⁴ That is, we expected that CTC would be strongly positively related to accepted measures of burnout (Pines and Aronson 1988) and job frustration (Peters et al. 1980) and negatively predictive of employee performance. Results indicated that our measure of employee CTC was both positively related to burnout and frustration ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$; and $r = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$, respectively) and negatively predictive of employee performance ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$), controlling for respondent age, sex, and tenure.

We also ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the measured constructs of employee CTC, organizational commitment, and empowerment, although related, are empirically distinct. Results of this CFA indicated that the theorized model, χ^2 ($df = 81$, $N = 867$) = 381.60, $p < 0.001$ (comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.07), provided a fair fit to the

data (Browne and Cudeck 1993, Hu and Bentler 1999). Moreover, each item loaded significantly with its intended construct ($p < 0.001$). Because we believed that the relationship between employee empowerment and CTC was most at risk for same-source bias in the model, we then performed an additional CFA including the same three constructs, where we merged employee CTC and empowerment by setting the covariance of these constructs to 1 and checked the relative fit of this model (Podsakoff et al. 2003). This model fit the data significantly worse than the theorized model ($\Delta\chi^2$, 1 = 112.90, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.09). Therefore, we were confident that the relationships that we found in our data were due largely to theoretical relationships rather than methodological relationships.

Data Aggregation

We generated transformational leadership and CTC climate values by aggregating employee data to the organizational level. First, we assessed the degree of employee agreement regarding these constructs by calculating the $r_{wg(j)}$ statistic (George and James 1993). This statistic is used to assess interrater agreement. The mean $r_{wg(j)}$ statistic for transformational leadership was 0.83 and 0.72 for CTC climate. Although debate exists regarding the proper cutoff value for $r_{wg(j)}$ (Lance et al. 2006), the values were largely greater than the generally accepted 0.70. We also calculated intraclass correlations (ICCs) to determine the reliability of transformational leadership and CTC climate (Bliese 2000). The ICC(1) helps examine the degree of variability in responses at the individual level attributed to being an employee of the organization, and the ICC(2) helps to examine the reliability of organization means. For transformational leadership, the ICC(1) was 0.06, $p < 0.001$, and the ICC(2) was 0.65, $p < 0.001$. Regarding CTC climate, the ICC(1) was 0.04, $p < 0.001$, and the ICC(2) was 0.64, $p < 0.001$. Although these ICC(1) values indicate relatively small effects (Bliese 1998), they still demonstrate significant variance in each of the constructs because of organizational membership, and they are very similar in magnitude to the generally accepted ICC(1) values considered high enough to justify aggregation (0.05; see Bliese 2000).

Although no cutoff values exist for accepted values of ICC(2), higher values are considered to be better, with published results for ICC(2) generally ranging from 0.5 and upward, demonstrating acceptable reliability. However, although the ICC(1) values may appear low given the range that ICC(1) values can have in the organizational literature, they were not surprising because of the context in which we were testing our hypotheses—that is, a highly structured state prison system has consistent procedures, and this context reduces between-organization variance. Moreover, within prisons, officers do not work in teams but largely as individuals or pairs of officers in shifts and different areas

of the prison, with little overlap with one another and relatively limited socialization, leading to greater within-organization variance than might be expected. Despite these issues, we still find reliable means and consistent effects, indicating that the organization-level variance is, in fact, important in explaining our phenomena of interest. If anything, the lower organizational-level reliabilities (ICC(2) values) work against our ability to find support for our hypotheses (Bliese 1998, 2000), reducing the ability to find relationships involving organizational-level variables. Other studies examining similar types of cross-level relationships to individual-level relationships have had similar ICC(1) and ICC(2) value combinations (e.g., Chen and Bliese 2002). In sum, we concluded that we had sufficient justification to examine CTC climate at the prison level.

Analyses and Controls

We tested the organization-level model with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, including the control variable of organizational size measured by the number of employees. Individual- and cross-level hypotheses were tested using the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) method (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992), including the control variables of employee sex, age, and tenure, described in depth below.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation matrices appear in Table 1. First, given that our model was restricted in our number of level 2 observations because of the number of state prisons in the system, we conducted a multilevel power analysis using Optimal Design software (Liu et al. 2005). Assuming a moderate effect size ($d = 0.40$; see Cohen 1988), moderate effect size variability (Raudenbush and Liu 2000), coefficient alpha of 0.05, and an average of 49 employees per organization, the statistical power for the multilevel portion of this study exceeded 0.70 (Liu et al. 2005).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD		
Level 1 ^a				
1. Empowerment	3.66	0.63		
2. Employee CTC	3.26	0.92	-0.30**	
3. Organizational commitment	3.06	0.83	0.49**	-0.61**
Level 2				
1. Transformational leadership	3.02	0.29		
2. CTC climate	3.05	0.58	-0.62**	
3. Insubordination	0.05	0.04	-0.76**	0.86**

Note. Level 1 (employee-level) variables were averaged over all organizations; thus, the correlations reported do not accurately estimate the true level 1 relationships among level 1 variables.

^aLevel 1 (employees) $n = 667$ –687 because of missing data; level 2 (organizations) $N = 14$.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Given the multilevel nature of the model, the cross-level nature of several of the hypotheses, and the fact that individual employees are also “nested” within organizations, we used hierarchical linear modeling HLM method (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992) and tested the model in several steps. First, we estimated a null model that had no predictors at either level 1 (individual) or level 2 (organization) to partition each dependent variance into within- and between-organization components. Second, in a level 1 analysis, within each organization, individual-level dependent variables were regressed on group-mean centered individual-level predictors and control variables (Hofmann and Gavin 1998), where a regression line was estimated for each of the 14 organizations, except to test for unique cross-level effects of transformational leadership and CTC climate. In these level 2 analyses, we used the intercept estimates obtained from level 1 as outcome variables, and we regressed these on the grand-mean centered organization-level predictors and grand-mean centered level 1 predictors. Results for level 1 and cross-level hypotheses tests are presented in Table 2.

Null Model

Our hypotheses predict that individual- and organization-level variables will be related to individual-level

empowerment, CTC, and organizational commitment. To demonstrate support for these hypotheses, there should be significant between-organization variance on each of these dependent variables. Therefore, using HLM, we estimated a null model in which no predictors were specified for either level in order to test the significance of the level 2 residual variance of the intercept of each dependent variable. The results indicated a significant level 2 residual variance of the intercept for empowerment ($\tau = 0.01, p < 0.01$), CTC ($\tau = 0.03, p < 0.001$), and organizational commitment ($\tau = 0.04, p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis Tests

The first set of hypotheses focused on predicting employee CTC. In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that transformational leadership would be negatively associated with employee CTC. To test this hypothesis, we estimated an HLM model in which we regressed the intercept coefficients obtained from level 1 on the measures of warden transformational leadership at level 2. Results indicated that transformational leadership was significantly related to employee CTC ($\gamma = -0.48, p < 0.05$), providing support for Hypothesis 1. In Hypothesis 2, we predicted a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee psychological empowerment. Results indicated that transformational leadership was significantly

Table 2 Results of HLM Analyses

Variables in model ^a	$\sim R^2$ ^b	Parameter estimates	SE	t ratio	p-Value (two-tailed)
Dependent variable: <i>Empowerment</i>					
Level 1 model					
Intercept	—	3.66	0.04	94.39	0.00
Level 2 model					
Transformational leadership	0.06	0.42	0.12	3.50	0.00
Dependent variable: <i>Employee CTC</i>					
Level 1 model					
Intercept		3.27	0.06	52.73	0.00
Empowerment	0.06	-0.38	0.06	-6.55	0.00
Level 2 model					
Transformational leadership (before controlling for empowerment ^c)	0.06 (0.02)	-0.31 (-0.48)	0.21 (0.22)	-1.44 (-2.20)	0.18 (0.04)
Dependent variable: <i>Organizational commitment</i>					
Level 1 model					
Intercept		3.14	0.05	46.44	0.00
Employee CTC	0.24	-0.49	0.03	-14.20	0.00
Level 2 model ^c					
CTC climate	0.29	-0.41	0.19	-2.45	0.03
CTC climate × Employee CTC	0.30	-0.30	0.16	-2.24	0.03

Notes. Level 1 $n = 667$ – 687 because of missing data; level 2 $N = 14$. Entries are estimates of the fixed effects coefficients. Level 1 reports the slopes and level 2 (cross-level effects) reports the intercepts as unstandardized coefficients.

^aAfter the null model, all models include control variables for level 1 of respondent age, tenure, and sex.

^bPseudo R^2 reported according to the Singer (1998) estimate of variance accounted for based on estimates of the proportional reduction of error for predicting an individual outcome.

^cWith level 1 variable grand-mean centered following Hofmann and Gavin (1998).

positively related to employee empowerment ($\gamma = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), thereby supporting this hypothesis. Hypothesis 3 predicted a negative relationship between psychological empowerment and employee CTC. Results also supported this hypothesis, finding that empowerment had a significantly negative relationship with employee CTC ($\gamma = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$).

In Hypothesis 4, we predicted that transformational leadership would be negatively related to CTC climate. To test this hypothesis, we first randomly assigned half of the employee sample within each organization to the measurement of transformational leadership and the other half to the measurement of CTC climate. This was done to reduce same-source variance concerns, resulting in more independent organizational measures for these two constructs. We then conducted ordinary least squares regression (Baron and Kenny 1986, James and Singh 1978), controlling for organization size (number of employees). Results indicated a significant main effect for transformational leadership on CTC climate ($B = -2.75$, $p < 0.01$), in support of Hypothesis 4.

In Hypothesis 5 we predicted that CTC climate would be positively related to insubordination at the organization level. To test this hypothesis, we conducted ordinary least squares regression (Baron and Kenny 1986, James and Singh 1978). It is important to note that we controlled for organization size by including the number of correctional officers on staff in this regression. Next, we took the natural log of the number of unique insubordination events in the organization to transform the shape of the distribution of the count data to an appropriate distribution for OLS regression (Cameron and Trivedi 1998). Regressing organizational insubordination on CTC climate indicated a significant, positive relationship ($B = 2.9$, $p < 0.05$), in support of Hypothesis 5. We also tested this hypothesis using an incidence rate weighted by the seriousness level of each disciplinary offense. This weighted measure of disciplinary actions was positively correlated with the insubordination measure at 0.60 ($p < 0.05$). However, this weighted disciplinary incidence rate was not significantly associated with CTC climate or transformational leadership. We believe this is likely because more serious offenses may be heavily influenced by factors largely extraneous to our theory of transformational leadership and CTC, such as inmate aggression, collusion, or employee substance abuse. Furthermore, it is possible that this measure simply captures too much error from the various administrators who assigned values to incidents. Therefore, we are confident that our theory on how CTC climate relates to insubordination behaviors holds merit, but it may not extend to more severe disciplinary infractions.

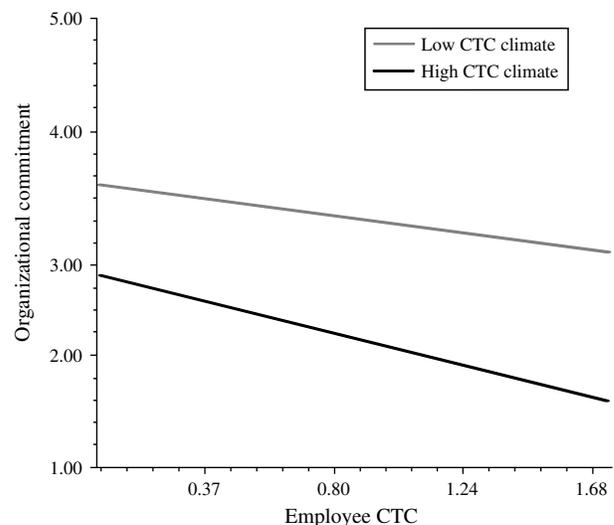
In Hypothesis 6, we predicted that employee CTC would be associated with employee organizational commitment. Using standard procedure to account for organizational nesting of employees while testing

individual-level hypotheses (Hofmann and Gavin 1998), we estimated a level 1 model with commitment as the dependent variable and employee CTC group-mean centered as the predictor, with no level 2 predictors. Results indicated that employee CTC had a significantly negative relationship with commitment ($\gamma = -0.49$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for this hypothesis.

In Hypothesis 7, we predicted a cross-level relationship in which a CTC climate would be negatively related to employees' levels of commitment. To test this hypothesis and demonstrate the unique effects of CTC climate (level 2) on employees' organizational commitment over above employee CTC (level 1), we used HLM to test the cross-level effect. Following recommendations in testing cross-level direct effect relationships such as this (Enders and Tofighi 2007), we grand-mean centered employee CTC. Results indicated significant intercepts, meaning that CTC climate was significantly negatively related to employee commitment ($\gamma = -0.41$, $p < 0.05$) when controlling for employee CTC, supporting this hypothesis. These results also appear in Table 2.

In Hypothesis 8, we predicted a cross-level moderation effect, such that CTC climate would moderate (i.e., increase) the negative relationship between employee CTC and employee organizational commitment. To test this hypothesis, CTC climate was entered as a level 2 predictor as well as a predictor of the slopes for employee CTC and commitment. Level 1 predictors were group-mean centered to avoid confounds when testing cross-level moderation effects (Enders and Tofighi 2007, Hofmann and Gavin 1998). Results indicated that CTC climate moderated the effect of employee CTC on commitment ($\gamma = -0.30$, $p < 0.05$). This interaction was then graphed according to Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) and appears in Figure 2. Consistent with

Figure 2 CTC Climate Magnifies the Negative Relationship Between Employee CTC and Organizational Commitment



our hypothesis, it shows that for employees working in organizations with higher CTC climates, the negative relationship between employee CTC and organizational commitment is stronger than for employees working in organizations that are lower in CTC climate.

Discussion

We examined a multilevel model of cynical attitudes toward change in organizations, the negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of CTC, as well as the mitigating role of organizational transformational leadership on multiple levels of CTC. We found support for all of our hypotheses: employee CTC is related to lower commitment and CTC climate acts as a negative context that predicts employees' commitment over and above their own CTC attitude. CTC climate also amplifies the negative relationship between employees' CTC and their commitment and is also related to insubordination within the organization. These results suggest that CTC can go beyond damaging change efforts to actually disrupting the fundamental functioning of organizations. We also found evidence suggesting that transformational leadership may limit the development of both employee CTC and CTC climate and is related to greater employee psychological empowerment. Such results imply the important role that transformational leaders have in potentially reducing CTC across multiple levels and improving employee attitudes regarding change.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature. One set of contributions stems from extending existing research on CTC, which has conceptualized and operationalized this concept at the individual level of analysis (e.g., Bommer et al. 2005, Wanous et al. 2000) to show that CTC, when viewed as a climate, can create a strong context that can fuel negative outcomes. This theory and evidence of CTC climate helps explain curious past findings that employee CTC can vary widely across organizations (Bommer et al. 2005, Wanous et al. 2000). We also identified two ways in which a CTC climate may negatively relate to employee attitudes. First, we demonstrated that these influences can occur in a direct, cross-level fashion and predict organizational commitment over and above employees' own CTC. Second, we found that CTC climate can function as a cross-level moderator by strengthening the relationship between employees' own levels of CTC and the amount of commitment employees experience in their job. Together, these findings suggest that CTC may function as a dimension of climate with multiple and pernicious effects on employee attitudes.

Additionally, we demonstrated that CTC climate can have organization-level implications, as shown by its relationship with insubordination. This type of direct relationship between CTC climate and an important indicator of organizational functioning shows that by going

beyond the individual level of analysis, organizational change researchers may develop a more complete perspective. We have demonstrated that negative attitudes toward change, as they manifest themselves at the organizational level in the form of cynical climates, can have particularly deleterious effects. In summary, we presented a multilevel model that extends prior theory and research on employee attitudes toward change, which have primarily been studied at a single level of analysis (Armenakis and Bedeian 1999), and thereby provided both a more robust and complete picture of how negative attitudes toward change function and a better understanding of why addressing them can be so challenging.

A second set of contributions focuses on developing a greater understanding of how senior leaders can effectively manage employees' reactions to change; we show that transformational leadership is crucial because it is related to employees' cynical attitudes toward organizational change as well as to CTC climates. In particular, our findings suggest that when senior leaders engage in high levels of transformational leadership, they can mitigate a climate of CTC and create a feeling of empowerment that is associated with lower employee CTC. Our study therefore contributes to the literature on employee attitudes toward change by developing a greater understanding of how leaders can effectively manage employees' attitudes. It is important to note that although an abundance of research documents the relationship between transformational leadership and greater employee engagement (Atwater and Bass 1994, Bono and Judge 2003, Herold et al. 2008), little work has explored how transformational leaders are able to accomplish such outcomes. Our research suggests that perhaps transformational leaders are able to accomplish effective organizational change because they are able to mitigate CTC at multiple levels in the organization.

Our work also contributes to the broader literature on employee attitudinal reactions to change by presenting a multilevel model. Herscovitch and Meyer noted a "paucity of research on employee reactions to change" (2002, p. 474), and although research has since incorporated more employee attitudinal reactions to change to include employee resistance and their commitment to change (Ford et al. 2003, 2008), most of this research remains conceptualized at the individual level of analysis. Instead, we examine the role of the social context in influencing employee attitudes toward change, as well as how employee attitudes develop into part of this social context itself to influence other employee and organizational outcomes. Moreover, much of the limited amount of research that does incorporate a multilevel approach to examining influences on employee attitudes toward change (e.g., Herold et al. 2007, 2008) examines the work group as the higher level of interest, rather than the

organization, and it does not theorize or examine organizational climates toward change or how organization-level factors can influence and result from an organizational climate toward change. Our research suggests that these employee attitudinal reactions to change, such as resistance (Piderit 2000), openness (Wanberg and Banas 2000), and commitment to change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), might also be promising to study to examine how and why they might be related to multiple levels of CTC and transformational leadership.

Finally, very few studies in applied psychology and organizational behavior have been conducted in the context of prisons. And yet, in the United States alone, prisons are estimated to employ almost half a million people (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000), not including those services that are contracted out or community based, such as parole and judicial systems, and prisons and other criminal justice settings consume tremendous resources. There is a surprising dearth of organizational field research on such a significant organizational context, and this research makes an important contribution to the organizational literature by demonstrating how this context is both applicable to organizational scholars and a theoretically compelling context.

Practical Implications

Our study also offers several practical implications. When considering the possible health and safety consequences of understaffed prisons and insubordinate staff (e.g., staff and inmate assaults, inmate escapes and riots; see Myers 1999), examining CTC in prisons, and how it is related to negative outcomes, is especially important. Although we cannot make strong causal claims, our findings point to promising directions for the role of leadership in addressing some of these potentially damaging employee attitudes and behaviors associated with cynical attitudes toward change. Specifically, our results imply that senior leaders can potentially impact CTC at different levels of analysis, and they suggest that senior leaders might be selected for and/or coached on demonstrating transformational leadership as a means to psychologically empower employees and reduce employee CTC. In turn, less CTC at multiple levels relates to greater employee commitment to the organization, which is known to be related to reduced turnover and disengagement (Balfour and Wechsler 1996). In the prison context, employees face “alarmingly high” commitment problems, as illustrated by extraordinary high turnover rates of 50% in the first year of service and 38% overall (see Schaufeli and Peeters 2000). Thus, even small management efforts to reduce CTC at multiple levels and to enhance psychological empowerment could have a large impact on employee retention.

We have also demonstrated that CTC climate is associated with greater levels of insubordination, which might be considered one indicator of organizational

functioning. In the public sector, there is an absence of financial indicators of organizational performance, and in a prison setting, the levels of disruptive employee behavior is a key gauge of organizational functioning because it threatens the safety and security of the staff and facility. Behaviors that can place the health, security, and safety of the facility at risk are therefore important indicators for prison administrators to look at in order to evaluate the current state of organizational functioning and the level of employee discontent among a prison staff. Our research also implies that negative climates can fuel aggressive employee behavior, which potentially could be associated with even more problematic employee misconduct, such as excessive force.

Although theorizing and modeling those potential cross-level effects is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to study insubordination in the prison context because it is a low-level indicator of aggression among staff, which, when brought to an extreme level, could possibly have severe consequences. For example, Folger and Skarlicki (1998) explained that individual and situational factors interact to affect workplace aggression, using a “popcorn” metaphor. That is, workplace contextual factors such as climate can be analogous to the temperature of the oil when popping popcorn, and that the hotter the oil becomes, the greater the likelihood of employee violence (just as more popping kernels are likely). Hence, senior leaders need to be highly mindful of the potential development of a CTC climate in their organization, which may serve to amplify employees’ own negative attitudes toward change. Leaders may proactively limit the development of such cynical climates by engaging in transformational leadership and making sure that their words are backed by specific actions, such as establishing mechanisms to routinely solicit and act on employee feedback and providing ways for employee participation and engagement in organizational change efforts.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to mention some of the limitations of our study and ways they can be addressed in future work. First, we have a relatively small number of organizations for our second-level analysis, thus limiting our power and generalizability. However, we note that although the number itself is small, this largely serves to make our level 2 hypotheses tests more conservative. Notably, the data represent a full set of organizations within a state system. Second, we believe it would have been valuable to have broadened the measurement of CTC climate to include a referent shift compositional model (Chan 1998), or even a global construct, such as employees’ CTC as rated by the organizational leader. It would have also been valuable to have employees discuss and come to an agreement about the level of CTC in their organization and compared it to our construct here: CTC as

an additive property at the organization level (Hofmann 2002). However, it is important to note that our additive representation of CTC climate demonstrated reasonable organizational-level reliability and significant and independent cross-level and organizational-level relationships, consistent with our theoretical definition of the construct (see Klein and Kozlowski 2000).

A third limitation of our research concerns possible organization-level differences that we did not account for in our model. There are differences across the prisons that we investigated, such as location, security level, and size. After looking at these differences in a correlation matrix with our study variables, we do not see that they appear to be affecting our results, but it should be noted that other differences at the organization level might exist that should be accounted for in future multilevel research. For example, we did not measure leader tenure, which may be related to employee attitudes toward change. Because of the difficulties inherent in conducting field research with this context, we were also unable to collect data to fully eliminate same-source, self-report concerns or to incorporate longitudinal designs. As a result, we concluded that although our model implies mediation of many relationships in our theorizing, our data were largely cross-sectional, and therefore we were limited in our ability to test for true mediated relationships among variables. Future research would greatly benefit from longitudinal designs and additional data sources that would allow for more rigorous testing of these relationships.

Future research might also benefit from investigating additional ways that organizations may impact CTC at multiple levels. We primarily investigated transformational leadership at the senior leadership level; alternative leadership styles (e.g., transactional leadership or leader–member exchange) and other levels of leadership might also be interesting to explore (e.g., shared leadership or lower levels of leadership). However, when it comes to climate perceptions, as suggested by other research linking leaders and climate at the work group, department, and organizational levels (e.g., Tesluk et al. 1995, 1999; Zohar 2002a, b), we would argue that the leadership level is less likely to be a potential boundary condition of our theory. Instead, what is likely more important is whether leaders at the level of interest have influence over the “levers” that shape climate perceptions and can provide visible leadership.

Just as employee CTC has been demonstrated in many different types of organizations, including law enforcement, state department employees, for-profit managers, and manufacturing (Bommer et al. 2005, Vance et al. 1995, Wanous et al. 2000), we argue that a CTC climate is likely to exist in a similarly diverse sample of organizations and to be associated with theoretically consistent employee and organizational variables. For example, it is likely that employees who feel

empowered in their jobs will feel confident in attempting new ways of performing their jobs, especially during change efforts, and thus be less likely to experience CTC in for-profit and public organizations alike. Similarly, organizations with transformational leaders who can continuously motivate employees by presenting a long-term vision about the future are both less likely to have employees with high CTC and less likely to have higher CTC climates.

Even though we argue that our theoretical model will hold in a diverse sample of other types of organizations, there may be some differences that would be worth further development in our model. For example, we have argued that mechanistic organizations may be especially likely, rather than uniquely likely, to demonstrate CTC. Employees working in hierarchical settings are under strong pressures to conform to authority, and they tend to turn to each other to cope with these pressures (Niederhoffer 1967, Van Maanen 1975). Also, because employees working within the hierarchy of a mechanistic context have rather limited opportunities for voice and participation (Ambrose and Schminke 2003), employees may be more likely to share their concerns with one another and experience a sense of strong cohesiveness (Hirschman 1970), promoting reinforcement of their views and influence over one another and enhancing attitudinal similarity. Therefore, future research should test this model in a nonmechanistic context or perhaps evaluate how a mechanistic context operates as a moderator to increase the likelihood of these relationships.

We were interested in outcomes demonstrating negative employee attitudes and behaviors directed toward the organization; future research should investigate outcomes and predictors of CTC more directly related to change and possible positive outcomes of CTC. Our choices to include commitment and insubordination as outcomes were guided by two things. First, our theory centers on CTC sending negative cues to employees about the possibility for organizational improvement, thereby weakening employees’ attachment to what they see as a failing employer and resulting in negative attitudes and behaviors directed toward the organization. Second, given the major practical problem of insubordination and low commitment in the prison context, we felt that it was important to examine how CTC was related to these two dependent variables. However, it would be useful to incorporate constructs such as commitment to change (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002) and resistance to change (Piderit 2000) and examine how these constructs are related to CTC at multiple levels, given their theoretical relevance. Similarly, whereas our theory focuses on how CTC erodes the bond between employees and their organization and results in negative outcomes, some scholars suggest that there are possible positive outcomes as a result of resistance to change

(e.g., Dent and Goldberg 1999, Piderit 2000). Thus, it would also be interesting to examine when and if CTC might predict positive outcomes, such as constructive voice (Morrison and Milliken 2000).

Conclusion

We believe that we have made important steps toward understanding a more complex and multilevel construct of CTC and have done so in a rather underresearched organizational context. These more complicated and contextual models of CTC emerge as multilevel in nature, both in antecedents and outcomes, and have important theoretical and practical implications for how organizations and senior leaders manage employees' attitudes toward change.

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Endnotes

¹Although alternative definitions exist that conceptualize empowerment as managerial actions that create behavioral autonomy, resulting in less managerial supervision and discipline required (e.g., Fineman 2006), we follow Spreitzer (1995) and use the more commonly accepted definition of psychological empowerment as a motivational psychological state.

²Response rates averaged 44% per prison for those preselected to take the survey (i.e., approximately 22% of the entire staff) and 29% of the entire staff for the other prisons. Voluntary versus preselected respondents were compared on demographics and study variables, and no significant differences between samples were found.

³Analyses were completed using all incidents of insubordination (without eliminating duplicate offenses by single correctional officers) and resulted in the same significant results using this variable.

⁴We collected a subsample ($N = 170$) of officers' performance ratings by their supervisors from 2004.

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