Making sense of organisational change failure: An identity lens

Hay, G.J. and Parker, S.K. and Luksyte, A.

Abstract

This study investigates how employees craft narratives of organisational change failure through the lens of their work identity. We analysed change recipients' retrospective accounts of an organisational re-structuring in a university, finding these accounts to be filled with widely-varying descriptions of failure – of errors, dysfunction, and loss. We explored how employees' organisational, professional, and work-group identities were intertwined with, and fundamentally challenged by, their sensemaking about the change and its failure. Our inductive analysis revealed four distinct narrative trajectories – Identity Loss, Identity Revision, Identity Affirmation, and Identity Resilience – each characterised by distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioural patterns. We discuss the unique contributions that this study makes to the literatures on organisational change failure, sensemaking, and identity.

Keywords: Identity, Failure, Identity threat, Sensemaking, Change recipients, Organisational structure, Organisational change

Introduction

With increasing globalisation, competition, and market volatility, today's organisations must be more proactive and agile than the organisations of the past; they must adapt to changes in their environment quickly, before the onset of any catastrophic effects – such as firm bankruptcy or death (Crosina and Pratt, 2019). Yet, achieving successful organisational change is difficult; it has been deemed 'undoubtedly one of the most complex and important endeavours in modern organisational life' (Nag, Corley, and Gioia, 2007: 844). Thus, organisational change failure – organisational transformation that deviates from desired or expected outcomes (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001) – is all too common. Some have estimated that about 70% of change initiatives fail (Beer and Nohria, 2000).

Researchers have investigated the organisational, structural, cultural, and change process factors that lead to change success or failure, with a view to predict and prevent failure (e.g., Balogun, Bartunek, and Do, 2015; Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, and Do, 2018). They have also examined how organisations can learn from failure and continue performing and growing after such setbacks (e.g., Shepherd and Cardon, 2009). The majority of the research on change failure is organisation-centric in its perspective, focusing on organisation-level analyses that seek to understand the strategic process of managing change and failure (cf. Mellahi and Wilkinson, 2010; Oreg, Michel, and By, 2013). Although informative, these studies have overlooked how *change recipients* perceive and make sense of organisational change failure, and its implications for themselves and their future work life.

It is important to consider how and why change recipients make sense of change failure for two key reasons. Firstly, organisations need to appreciate and anticipate the likely-significant and unpleasant implications of employees perceiving a change as a failure. While organisational change involves considerable ambiguity and uncertainty for employees (Bordia et al., 2004), we expect organisational change *failure* to be particularly confronting

for employees due to its inherent negativity and permanence. If judgements of organisational change failure represent a perceived deviation from the goals of change (cf. Cannon and Edmondson, 2001), perceiving failure is likely to be challenging to the specific interpretive frame from which these subjective goals were generated, such as employees' values (cf. Petticia-Harris, 2019). As such, the effects of organisational change failure on employees may be profound, substantially unsettling their sense of self-at-work, as well as influencing their affect, cognition, and behaviour at work more broadly – all depending on exactly how they perceive the change as a failure, and why (as we discuss later).

Secondly, broadening the organisation-centric focus of the change failure literature to consider 'the active roles that change recipients play in organisational change events' (Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, and Do, 2018: 65), including through their understanding of its failure, may elucidate some of the unanswered questions about why change fails and its consequences for the organisation. Understanding how individuals interpret and experience failure, and how they engage with the change motivationally and behaviourally, may shape the course of the change and its effects on the wider organisation following its implementation – through the micro-level sensemaking processes that 'produce the macro social order' (Gephart, Steier, and Lawrence, 1990: 44-45). Such focus is noteworthy because, historically, 'short shrift has been given to people who implement and live with organizational changes they did not initiate' (Bartunek et al., 2006: 183). Yet, the assumption that change agents and change recipients share the same understandings about the change may not be accurate; change recipients may have vastly different perceptions of organisational change failure, compared to change agents (cf. Oreg, Vaokla, and Armenakis, 2011). Employees who view the change as a failure may withdraw from opportunities to participate in the change, and their negative perceptions might spread to their colleagues through a social contagion effect (cf. Rozin and Royzman, 2001). This may exacerbate the failure of the change, or even *create* change failure

where it may not have existed otherwise – all of which may potentially occur alongside change agents who purport the success of the change (i.e., change is multi-vocal [cf. Petticia-Harris, 2019]).

In sum, understanding when and why employees perceive failure in organisational change may have powerful implications. Consequently, our research sets out to explore employees' subjective interpretations of failure in organisational change and, specifically, how they make sense of this failure through the lens of their identity. By investigating employees' retrospective narratives about a tumultuous organisational change within a higher education institution, we seek to understand (a) how employees' narrative constructions of the change failure are intertwined with their pre-existing work identities, and (b) how they carry forward this narrative into their ongoing work lives.

Our research makes two important contributions to the change failure literature. First, further expanding on the documented differences between how change agents and change recipients interpret organisational change, we contribute to the understanding of how change recipients' interpretations of *failure* vary from one another. While it is not often acknowledged, the definition of organisational change failure (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001) inherently allows for the possibility that individuals may vary in what they expect and want from change, and are also likely to hold different perceptions as to whether these expectations are ultimately met – and whether a given change it a failure. In fact, research that examines how employees make sense of other work-related failures such as denied promotions (Vough and Caza, 2017) and organisational failure (Walsh et al., 2018), demonstrates that individuals' experiences of failure within organisational contexts are subjective. Through our inductive qualitative approach, we explore the inherent subjectivity of organisational change failure; and we adopt a broader conceptualisation of change failure,

whereby we explore the complexity of individuals' perceptions of failure in organisational change, beyond a single, global judgement of 'failure or not'.

Secondly, this study unpacks the role of identity in how different change recipients perceive and make sense of organisational change failure – and how this is different from organisational change more generally. We argue that the unique nature of organisational change failure likely invokes a distinct process of sensemaking that is intertwined with individuals' work identities, or their sense of self at work. Identity is closely related to the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), and both have been investigated together in studies of organisational change (e.g., Van Knippenberg et al., 2002), but rarely in relation to organisational change failure. We explore how the subjectivity of organisational change failure is associated with differences in the salience, centrality, and content of individuals *multiple* work identities. Further, we go beyond the predominant focus on organisational identity in the identity literature, exploring the role of employees' work group, professional, and organisational identities (cf. Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar's [2010] work-related identities; cf. Vough, 2012) in how they make sense of change failure.

We begin by outlining the context of this research and describing how and why it represents a case of organisational change failure. Thereafter, we explore how employees in this study came to differing conclusions about the failure of the same organisational change. We identify and describe four different types of trajectories within employees' sensemaking narratives – each with unique cognitive (i.e., identity), affective, and behavioural patterns – that characterise employees' constructions of failure in this organisational change.

Failure of a University Restructure

Research has examined how universities have been restructured to be effective within an environment characterised by ever-changing market demands (e.g., Gioia and Chittipedi, 1991) – and, at least for public universities in Australia, in the face of ever-decreasing

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government funding. This research focuses on a case of university restructuring in which the executives intended to reduce operational costs, increase efficiency, and foster innovation. Using a qualitative case study approach, we analysed the change recipients' retrospective accounts of this restructuring, focusing on how employees and low level managers (both change recipients) in a particular department ('School X') perceived and interpreted the organisational change. We conducted the interviews six months after the implementation of the new organisational structure, which involved the amalgamation of multiple departments (including School X) into larger faculty entities, and the introduction of a shared services model (Redman et al., 2007) for the provision of administrative services to new faculties. These changes entailed substantial centralisation of strategic decision-making.

As to the success or failure of the change, we first recognise that failure is a subjective phenomenon. Nevertheless, even allowing for variation in individuals' perspectives, we note that, in this particular case, there was considerable agreement amongst recipients that the organisational change was a failure in some way, to at least some degree. We found that employees' retrospective accounts of the change were filled with varying descriptions of failure. For some individuals, the organisational change failure was 'a tragedy' from which they were 'bruised and scarred'; for others, the poorly-run change was an inconvenience, something that 'perhaps should have been done differently', or that the failed change was understandable, given the 'complex, fast-moving' circumstances. These interpretations of failure prompted many of them to question the meaning of their work and their attachment to the organisation: 'What is the role of research for me now? What proportion of what we do is just a consequence of politics?' As such, employees held varying perceptions of the failure of the organisational change, which were intertwined with sensemaking about their identity at work. We therefore consider this an appropriate and rich context in which to study recipient sensemaking about organisational change failure.

Theoretical background

Here, we discuss sensemaking and identity, and outline why they are important in the context of organisational change more generally. To understand these concepts in regards to organisational change failure more specifically, based on the exiting literature, we then propose two ways in which individuals' sensemaking about failure and their work identity are intertwined: (1) identity as a lens through which individuals perceive failure in organisational change, and (2) change failure as a context in which identity change or 'identity work' is rife.

Sensemaking and identity in organisational change

Sensemaking, defined as the process 'through which individuals work to understand novel, unexpected, or confusing events' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 58), captures how individuals and collectives experience and interpret organisational change events. Sensemaking is a necessary part of organisational change because change inherently 'interrupts well-rehearsed patterns of action' (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010: 558) and thus 'generates considerable uncertainty, ambiguity and confusion' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 76) – all of which individuals must come to terms with. Researchers have considered how, in the face of this uncertainty and complexity, employees try to regain control, predictability, and positive meaning in their work by crafting a clear and coherent narrative of the change, by actively making sense of what the change meaning – which can lead to the emergence of multiple accounts of the goals, expectations, desires, and outcomes of organisational changes (e.g., Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

Identity is defined here as 'the central, distinctive, and continuous characteristics of an entity', or the answer to the question: 'Who am I as an individual?' (Ashforth, Rogers, and Corley, 2011: 2). In contrast, *social identity* reflects the answer to the question: 'Who are we as a collective?' (Ashforth, Rogers, and Corley, 2011: 2), and thus *social identification* captures the 'perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate'

(Ashforth and Mael, 1989:135). Similarly to sensemaking, identity has been heavily implicated in the study of individuals' experiences of organisational change due to the environmental uncertainty that exists in organisational change (Bordia et al., 2004) and the challenges it presents to the status quo (Battilana and Casciaro, 2012). These experiences trigger identity-related cognitions and experiences (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Consequently, scholars have repeatedly advocated for the use of identity theory in studies of sensemaking and organisational change (e.g., Mailtis and Sonenshein, 2010, Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006).

(1) Identity as a lens for sensemaking about organisational change failure

We propose that identity is an interpretive lens that change recipients may rely on to perceive and make sense of organisational change failure (cf. Weick, 1995; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015). The experience of high uncertainty and ambiguity, combined with a sense of threat, is likely to make identity a salient frame for employee interpretations of organisational change failure, as it may implicitly motivate identity-driven uncertainty reduction and self-esteem enhancement (Hogg, 2000). In an effort to restore a sense of certainty and positive self-esteem in the context of a turbulent and identity-threatening organisational change, change recipients may construct certainty through their narratives of the change failure. This may include in- and -outgroup attributions that position the change agents as self-interested individuals. Such attributions likely protect the status of individuals' organisational identity; or may elevate the subjective status of their work-group identity relative to other work groups, to compensate for their group's loss of resources through the change. Thus, employees may seek to reclaim control, certainty, and/or positivity of a change they cannot objectively control through their subjective retelling of the change narrative –told through the lens of their salient identity.

We expect that recipients' organisational identity might be closely intertwined with perceptions of failed organisational change. Organisational change may challenge organisational identity, consequently requiring employees to re-establish what it means to be a member of the now-different organisation, and what this organisation represents (e.g. Sonenshein, 2010; Corley and Gioia, 2004). However, such processes of questioning organisational identity may be acute in the case of failure because the change agents are typically high-level managers, and thus are seen to be reflecting the values of the organisation (i.e., they are the prototypical member of the organisational social identity [Hogg and Terry, 2000]). Therefore, perceiving that the change agents' volitional behaviour contributed to the failure likely poses a substantial threat to employees' organisational identity, as this violates their understanding of what it means to be a member of this social groups. Further, perceiving the cause of the failure to originate from within the organisation may amplify the subjective intensity of the identity threat via proximity. The subjective lack of control felt by employees who perceive the change failure to be in the hands of the organisational executives may further exacerbate their desire to regain control through crafting an identity-informed narrative of the change. Consequently, change failure may be even more threatening to organisational identity, and sensemaking-provoking, than a crisis triggered by an external, uncontrollable event (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) or by organisational change in general.

We further argue that employees organisational, professional, and/or work group identity may be a salient interpretive lenses for their perceptions of change failure, due to the well-established link between identity and organisational processes and structures (cf. Nag et al., 2007). These work identities will be threatened if the change involves the re-structuring of work processes and/or job structures pertaining to that social identity locus – with negative implications. Such 'negative re-structuring', which may entail the denigration of groups' resources (cf. Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), may consequently threaten the meaning, value,

and/or enactment of these social identities (cf. Petriglieri, 2011). In other words, employees desire to retain the meaning, value, and ability to enact their salient social identity at work; and when organisational change inhibits this, employees experience threat. Such identity threat is common in organisational change; and identity threat is known to be 'a powerful prompt for sensemaking' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014).

Notably, we extend this theorising by exploring it in the context of organisational change failure. We propose that employees' salient work identities inform their desires and expectations regarding the change (cf. Cannon and Edmondson, 2001), and thus the subjective failure of the change. In instances of *successful* organisational change, any threat arising from the re-structuring is eventually mitigated or overshadowed by other positive outcomes – or there may be no threat at all posed by the change. However, perceptions of change failure are intertwined with the *permanent* or lasting violation of these desires and expectations and the *unresolvable* identity threat that this entails. These perceptions of extreme and subjectively unresolvable identity threat may prompt employees to view the change negatively and to craft threat-based narratives of the change failure.

We explore the interplay between threat to employees' work identities and their narratives of change failure. Limited research exists about how professional, work-group, and organisational identities (cf. Vough, 2012) may be linked with employees' sensemaking of the organisational change failure. The extent to which employees perceive organisational change as a failure, may relate to the centrality of their work identities to their self-concept (cf. Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). As a result of the different ways in which the failing change threatens employees' central identity, we expect that they will make subjective interpretations of failure, despite being exposed to the same organisational change (cf. Vough et al., 2015).

(2) Organisational change failure as a context rife with identity work

We also propose that employees' perceptions of organisational change failure may precipitate substantial identity re-construction, or a turning point in individuals' 'identity work' (Ibarra, 2003). As Maitlis and Christianson (2014) observed, 'although trauma and loss researchers have addressed the individual sensemaking that follows such major challenges to self… less is known about this process in a work or organizational context' (73). We argue that the experience of organisational change failure, and the sensemaking that ensues, may lead individuals to consider: *"What does this failure mean for me and who I am at work?"*, thus '[calling] into question members' beliefs about central and distinctive aspects of their identity' (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013: 126).

While all organisational change typically entails a period of ambiguity and uncertainty, there is still generally a sense of hope about the future outcomes of the change; employees may still retain their expectations that it will succeed. Any such negative experience will be 'worth it' when the change succeeds and the uncertainty evaporates. On the contrary, perceiving the change as a failure implies a loss of hope; certainty has been regained through the judgement of the change as a failure, and the relinquishing of any expectations that the change will succeed. An unlikely experience in successful organisational change, this transition from hopeful to hopeless may serve to amplify the negativity of the change failure experience for change recipients, and lead them to search for positive meaning through alternative identities or identity reconstruction. This is consistent with the sensemaking literature, which describes how triggers of sensemaking vary in their subjective intensity, from disruptions in which something feels slightly amiss, 'in which people accommodate, explain away, or normalise discrepant cues' to dramatic discrepancies between 'what one expects and what one experiences' (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014: 70).

Relatedly, perceiving that a change has failed also implies that it is permanent. Petriglieri's (2011) model of responses to identity threat describes the way in which identity

re-structuring is the most likely coping response in the instance of identity threat that is unable to be 'fixed' or re-framed – such as that of perceived organisational change failure. Thus, permanent identity threat likely leads to identity work. This is consistent with Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) ideas about sensemaking during crises, and the existential problems that can arise when individuals' identities are threatened in such "turbulent conditions" (p. 551).

Methods

This study was part of a broader investigation into how identity affect the re-design of work. We approached this study with an inductive, grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It quickly became apparent that every one of our participants described salient interpretation of the change as involving failure, with rich descriptions of sensemaking, and what seemed to be implicit indicators, of identity. We thus iterated our inductive analysis, pivoting to focus on the role of identity as an interpretive lens through which employees narratively construct and experience organisational change failure.

Our focus is consistent with the narrative-based approach, in which interpretivist assumptions are adopted (e.g., Bindl, 2019) and the focus is on individuals' subjective recollections of events and experiences in 'psychological time' (cf. Ship and Cole, 2015; e.g., Jansen and Shipp, 2018, Slay and Smith, 2011). This is because, in our study, the central research question is not about change over time, but about how individuals create narratives of causality and change subjectively, *within* their narratives, as they recall events of the past and relate them to the present (cf. Daskalaki and Simosi, 2018). Such 'storytelling research' that yields insights into critical moments of sensemaking – that punctuate ongoing processes of change and identity – has produced 'a rich body of knowledge, unavailable through other methods of analysis' (Stutts and Barker, 1999: 213; cited in Brown et al., 2008).

We also conceptualised narratives as 'sponsored texts' (cf. Harris, 1989), wherein individuals use narratives to (a) make sense of experiences, (b) position themselves within the phenomena, and (c) assign judgements 'as to what may be regarded as good or bad, right or wrong, including basic beliefs and values' (Petticia-Harris, 2019: 594). This emergence of often-conflicting narratives about the same events captured our interest. Hence, our narrative-based approach to data collection and analysis was well suited to our research goals.

Research setting

The senior executives of an Australian university undertook an organisation-wide re-structuring, citing the need to address poor financial state of the university and remain competitive with other domestic and international universities – which are common objectives in restructuring efforts (McKinley and Scherer, 2000). Archival documents (e.g., the Change Proposal document) revealed a consistent theme in the change agents' efforts to frame the process as genuine consultation. Across one year, all employees were invited to attend meetings in which the content of the re-structuring was discussed. A fracture of them participated in workshops to contribute to the re-design of the organisation. The consultation processes were in line with the Australian Fair Work regulations, which require that all employers 'consult with employees about major workplace changes that are likely to have a significant effect on the employees' (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2014: 3).

The change involved decisions to: (1) reduce the number of faculties across the university by amalgamating existing faculties into a small number of large faculties, and (2) centralise administrative/business functions into a centralised support unit – i.e., a shared services model (Redman et al., 2007). For example, in the school that we studied, the re-structuring halved the number of professional (i.e., administrative) employees supporting the academic staff; and these staff additionally went from being responsible for a single

discipline within a school, to being responsible for a faculty comprised of multiple schools. The re-structuring also included a substantial number of redundancies.

To ensure a manageable scope, we chose to interview employees in a specific school (i.e., *School X*). In contrast to other schools at the university, School X went from being a single-school faculty, to becoming a school within a larger faculty – thus losing both its independence and many its professional staff to the centralised, faculty-level administrative unit. Multiple written submissions from School X were made as part of the consultation process, and all were consistent in advocating against merging the school with others into a single faculty. The dean and senior faculty spoke out against the change in various forums. The consequent re-structuring thus represented a sizable change for employees in School X, relative to many other schools – one that many employees resisted. Notably, many academics from School X were specialists in organisational studies and organisational change. This served to create further opportunities in which employees' identities could become salient or under threat in the re-structuring process.

Data collection

Prior to any data collection, the first author spent time immersing herself deeply in the research context (cf. Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Interviews were conducted approximately 18 months after the change consultation process had taken place, and about six months after the new organisational structure had been implemented. At the time of the interviews, the consultation period was not so far in the past that our interviewees would forget important details, but far enough to give them enough time to make sense of the change. As the interviews revealed, the six months following the implementation of the new structure was a tumultuous time in which employees were still adapting to the change, and in which post-hoc modifications were being made to the organisational structure by the change agents. Consequently, the change was still salient in employees' minds at this time.

We contacted participants from across School X, who vary in their occupations, teams, departments, and employment histories – in capture a breadth of perspectives, and allowing us to cross-validate on the emergent findings during data analysis (cf. Pazzaglia et al., 2018). Using the snowballing, we contacted employees who had left the organisation since the change. We reached theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) after we conducted 50 interviews[1]: 32 with professional[2] staff members (e.g., finance officers, support staff), and 18 with academic staff members. We required many interviews with professional staff members to achieve saturation due to their diversity of the experiences of the change. Of these 50 interviewees, 25 were employed in School X at the time of the interview, 20 had moved to the faculty-level administrative unit and 5 had quit.

Throughout the interviews, we probed participants to elicit rich descriptions of their thoughts and experiences related to the organisational change (cf. Pazzaglia et al., 2018; for further detail please see Appendix A). Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes in duration, with most lasting around 60 minutes. All interviews, with the participants' informed consent, were audio-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcription service.

Data analysis

The analysis entailed moving iteratively between the narrative data and the literature; thus progressively moving from describing the data in the participants' words, to

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[1] This sample included employees who had some management responsibilities – for example, Heads of Department. Because we focus on employees' experiences of organisational change as change recipients (cf. Oreg et al., 2011), we emphasise that the individuals with management responsibilities were nonetheless change recipients –not change agents – for the purpose of this change. Notably, they were not involved in change-related decision making because decisions were made primarily by the university executives. Thus, whilst these interviewees were involved in helping their direct reports to understand and cope with change (cf. middle managers in Balogun and Johnson, 2004), the centralised nature of the decision making in this specific change meant that these employees were essentially as equally 'on the receiving end of change' as their subordinates (cf. Sonenshein, 2010: 482).

[2] Not to be confused with 'professional' in the sense of identity (e.g. Vough, 2012); academics can also identify with their profession (i.e. their occupation) as an academic. In this organisation, the term 'professional' staff was used to describe administrative employees, and thus we have adopted this terminology here also.

understanding them in terms of more abstract, theoretical constructs (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The first author engaged in a thematic analysis of the data, organising individuals' narratives of anything related to the change – 'thick descriptions' (Langley, 1999; Van Maanen, 1979) – as well as evidence of their broader interpretive context, creating preliminary 'in vivo' codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Van Maanen, 1979). This process was iterative, leading to increasing refinement, elaboration, and cross-validation of codes as the analysis progressed. Throughout this process, all co-authors queried the themes emerging from the first author's analysis, based on their interpretations of the data. The second-order codes and aggregate dimensions were conceived by moving closer to the literatures on employee reactions to change (e.g. Oreg et al., 2011; Oreg, 2006), employee sensemaking about change (e.g., Balogun and Johnson, 2005), and identity (e.g. Elsbach, 2009).

Next, we moved from description to explanation by exploring the interrelationships between employees' identities and their sensemaking. We searched for patterns (cf. Jansen and Shipp, 2018), by comparing the narratives of failure and the nature of identification (cf. Slay and Smith, 2011). These analyses revealed four distinct trajectories within employees' narratives of the change and its failure (Table 1). We initially focused on identifying patterns in employees' identity-related cognitions. We then realized that these narratives had a distinct emotional undertone (e.g., *grief* and *loss* in Figure 1), *across* each of the identity narrative trajectories (rather than *within* them). We coded these affective components of employees' narratives (Figure 2), noting their presence in the four narrative trajectories (Table 2).

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We also clarified the similarities between our conceptualisation of the cognitive and affective features of the narrative trajectories, and employees' 'reactions' to change (Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis, 2011) as having cognitive, affective, and behavioural facets (Oreg,

2006). Consequently, to complete the tripartite, we re-examined our data, noting employees' descriptions of their behavioural responses to the organisational change failure (Table 2).

Findings

Aggregate dimensions: Failure across People, Process, and Product; and Identity

The above analysis resulted in four aggregate dimensions: People, Process, Product, and Identity. Extending the conceptualisation of failure as the deviation from goals (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001), we found that individuals expressed expectations about specific aspects of the change that were more subtle than a simple, global diagnosis of 'failure or success'. Accordingly, we conceptualised these perceptions of failure broadly: shortcomings across the People, Process, and Product aspects of the change. Some informants described failure in the People, who were 'deceitful' and 'misleading' (*Internal Attributions, People)*; others depicted failure in the Process, deeming it to be superficial, 'just ticking a box' (*Consultation/Participation, Process)*; while others portrayed failure in the change Product, describing how things were now 'falling through the cracks' and being missed or forgotten (*Processes, Product)*.

The fourth aggregate dimension, *Identity,* reflects the codes of identity-related experiences and cognitions within the context of the change. The first two second-order codes within this aggregate dimension, *identification* and *identity threat*, capture the conceptualisation of identity as an interpretive frame in employees' sensemaking about change failure. We coded the different levels of *identification* based on explicit and implicit indicators of the centrality and strength of each identity for the individual. We elicited the explicit indicators by directly asking interviewees (e.g., *Would you say that having a career in your field is an important part of who you are?* [strength]; *Would you say that you define yourself more in terms of your profession, or your employment at [the university]?* [centrality]). The implicit indicators of identification were evident within our informants'

narratives of the change (Section 3 of the protocol [see Appendix A], *The Re-design Narrative*), coded using an approach similar to that adopted by Elsbach (2009). We conceptualised social identification as informants' defending the organisation, their profession, or School X, or using language such as 'us' versus 'they' to talk about the social units. We applied Petrieglieri's (2011) definition of *identity threat*: 'experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity' (644). *Identity re-construction* reflects data pertaining to how, at the conclusion of their change narrative, as they made sense of the apparent failure of the change, employees re-evaluated and re-defined their work identity. These data include employees' explicit descriptions of identity work-type activities or experiences; as well as differences between our interviewees' recollections of their pre-change identity, and their descriptions of their work identity in the wake of the change and its failure (Appendix, Section 4 questions).

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Trajectories in narratives of change failure

Our analysis revealed four archetypal narratives of the organisational change failure which varied according to the nature and extent of the identity re-construction (or 'identity work' [Ibarra, 2003]) that employees described engaging in following the change, or the *identity outcome* at the 'conclusion' of each narrative. Figure 3 depicts the relative extent of the identity re-construction, the nature of this re-construction (in italics; cf. Petrieglieri's [2011] model of responses to identity threat), and the nature of the judgements of failure that characterised each of the four narratives. We describe the specific *cognitive* and *affective* characteristics of each narrative trajectory, as well as employees' self-reported behavioural change engagement and behavioural change reactions, exploring the role of identity in each of these elements of employees' change stories.

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Identity Loss Narrative. This narrative trajectory was associated with the most sizable change to identity, wherein employees described the loss of and exit from their previously-central work-group or organisational identity (Petriglieri, 2011), in the wake of their perceptions of widespread and significant failure in the change. Individuals whose narratives aligned with this archetypal trajectory typically held a central pre-change organisational identity, and subsequently experienced a seemingly-unresolvable threat to the meaning of this identity as a result of the change. Their descriptions of failure across the People, Process, and Product aspects of the change were implicitly rooted in an incompatibility between the meanings they had previously attached to their organisational identity and that which they derived from these elements of the change failure. As such, they reflected on how this new organisational identity aligned with their professional identity. They ultimately behaviourally or cognitively exited from their organisational or work-group identities, describing it as a 'tragedy' and a 'loss' with an associated process of 'grieving' (e.g., 'I hope the new chancellor or somebody starts asking questions, because it's a tragedy….Because people love this place. It's a tragedy.').

For example, Angela, a professional employee, began her narrative of the change by recalling a sense of excitement for the opportunity to improve the organisation, and described actively participating in a number of consultation activities. However, her narrative evolved into a realisation that the change Process was 'all spin', because the People 'already knew exactly what they wanted to do'; 'So any 'consultation' even when they did call it that wasn't real'. These attributions of self-interest and a lack of warmth in the People (Cuddy et al., 2002) were also reflected in her interpretations of the change Product: 'Centralization. It's all about "Hey let's control everything 'cause", I hate to say this, "You can't trust those academics. You can't trust them, so you need to put controls in place the whole time".' For

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Angela, this represented a fundamental change in the meaning she had attached to the university as an organisation that valued its employees and their input – 'the old [university] I knew cared about people; the new [university], you are a number.' Thus, through the lens of her organisational identity, she saw irreconcilable failure across People, Process, and Product, and consequently psychologically detached from this identity: 'I don't want to know what else is going on [in the university]. Don't want to know.'

Theresa, a professional staff member, identified strongly with School X, and struggled to find that identity so substantially challenged by the organisational re-structuring. Like others in this group whose work-group identity was lost, it was not the meaning of the School X identity that Theresa felt was threatened. Instead, the change Product represented the loss of School X's independence, and thus constituted a threat to the value of the School X identity as being known for 'doing things a bit differently' and, 'if somebody comes up with an idea', being able to 'throw some money at it and run with it'. Additionally, the associated loss of tangible resources (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) represented a threat to the ability of the members of School X to enact the School X identity – 'it's going to affect student numbers, it's going to affect everything.' Similar to Angela, Theresa's interpretations of the Product were intertwined with low-warmth and malicious attributions (Cuddy et al., 2002) about the People; she described how School X was the 'prime target' of the re-structuring. Theresa's narrative of the failure of the change, and the permanence of its negative implications for School X, was associated with a complete exit from her School X identity, which she described with a sense of inevitability: 'Things have to fall down for the university executive to realise that people are struggling, unfortunately. Which I find quite difficult to see and to watch, but for the five years that I was [in my role], I felt that School X was my responsibility. It was, but in the new structure I can't feel like that because it would be awful

just to watch. I've got to let it go… I don't feel any connection to the School X anymore. So I just come to work, do my seven and a half hours, then I go home.'

These feelings of inevitability and loss coloured the affective and behavioural aspects of the Identity Loss narrative trajectory. Employees described the beginning of the change with a sense of positivity, they felt as though they had the ability and opportunity to contribute to its course, and thus were 'optimistic' and 'hopeful' about the potential for the change to positively impact the organisation. Perhaps consequently, they described engaging actively in the consultation process. However, also characteristic of this narrative trajectory was a marked decline in this affective and behavioural positivity. Identity Loss employees, in their narratives, described a 'growing realisation' about the 'true' intentions of the People aspect of the change. They lamented how 'naïve' they were in the early stages of the change – corresponding to their cognitive attributions about the People as being malicious and self-interested (e.g., 'I thought "Oh yeah. Go onto one of these work stream groups. It's really important. We value some input." But I went to those meetings and realised that it was just ticking a box. "Ah yes, we've had work streams. Tick." We've had work stream meetings, but the reports we put together were worth nothing.'). As such, over the course of the change, while the affective tone of these narratives remained highly activated, and the descriptions of behavioural responses equally active, both took a turn in the negative direction without any sign of improvement or recovery (e.g., 'What happened was just this growing realisation was that the decisions were already being made. You know what I mean? That's what was happening. We kept fighting. We want to be heard. We want to be involved. And then you would think you're about to be involved and then what'd happen, you'd go "This is not worth it.'). Employees in this trajectory ultimately behaviourally or psychologically exited from their organisational or work-group identities, describing it as a 'tragedy' and a 'loss' with an

associated process of 'grieving' (e.g., 'I hope the new chancellor or somebody starts asking questions, because it's a tragedy….Because people love this place. It's a tragedy.').

Identity Revision Narrative. Individuals in this group narrated the change through the lens of threat to the value and meaning of their professional identity, which was likely a salient interpretive lens in light of their descriptions of strong pre-change professional identification. Employees perceived change as challenging to their professional identity, and reported engaging in efforts to revise the meaning of this identity (Petriglieri, 2011) – but, importantly, had not undertaken a complete identity exit. When asked at the beginning of the interview what he enjoyed about his professional work, Michael, a senior academic, described 'the research element of new discoveries; doing something useful that might change how people work'. Consequently, Michael's perception of failure in the change Process, a 'bad imitation of consultation', and the resulting Product, a 'silly' and illogical faculty structure, challenged the importance and meaning he had attached to his professional identity and expertise: 'I just cannot sense anywhere in this where trying to understand what people want from work, how this has any relevance to anything that happened. And that's weird.' These perceptions of failure prompted him to re-consider and revise the meaning of his professional identity: 'At this point in time, I'm just questioning that. What is the role of research? What do we contribute to if it's just a ... We just reflect with a kind of outcome of a bunch of competing policies and policy settings that contradict each other in the big scheme of things. And that's kind of not very motivating. I'd like to believe that there's something more to it than that. But it's been so highly political that ... It's affecting me in that way.' Thus, the Product represented a challenge to the fundamental *meaning* of his professional identity, thereby colouring his perceptions of failure in the change Product.

Beyond experiencing the change failure as an affront to his professional identity as an academic, Michael was revising and re-structuring this identity– he was 'tempted to study

more economic theory and institutional theory'. His narrative captures failure in the Process and Product aspects of the change. Yet, Michael's perceptions of the People aspect of the change retained some level of positivity and hope. Michael made situational attributions about the change agents' decision-making, describing the change as a 'complex, fast-moving situation' that 'would require a degree of knowledge and insight and power that is hard to ... It's hard to have…Everyone's just scrambling around doing what they can.' We cannot say whether these more sympathetic attributions (and the lessened perceptions of failure that they represented) prevented a more sizable identity re-structuring outcome in the presence of high identity threat, or whether the less-substantial identity re-structuring allowed for more sympathetic attributions. Taking the perspective of identity work scholars (Caza et al., 2018), rather than attempting to determine causal order, we argue that these phenomena interacted throughout the course of the change, as part of an ongoing process of identity revision.

The sense of disbelief and subsequent identity revision attempts coloured the emotional and behavioural elements of the narratives in this group of employees. They reported some awareness about the change and thus expressed scepticism about the implementation of these changes. Michael, for example, described reading meeting minutes in which the new faculty structure was proposed, thinking that it seemed 'silly', but then 'thinking it seemed a bit unlikely that it would come to pass at that point'. However, once he realised that it would, in fact, come to pass, Michael's narrative became negative, as he transitioned from recalling feeling 'weird' about how the change had unfolded, to describing feelings of 'powerlessness', and feeling 'dismal' and 'hopeless' when reflecting on what the change experience meant for the value and meaning of his professional identity. Behaviourally, Michael described how he became involved in the consultation during the organisational change after realising its potential significance, but that he ended up leaving the organisation. Michael remained within his profession by moving to a new university.

Identity Affirmation Narrative. Employees in this group described engaging in minor identity revision as a result of the way in which their interpretations of the change and its failure was congruent with the motivation underlying their existing self-concept. Their interpretations of the change affirmed the existing centrality of their professional identity, and their desire to continue to distance themselves from the organisational identity (i.e., affirming, and perhaps accelerating, a change in identity importance, cf. Petriglieri, 2011). Employees in this trajectory recalled having a strong professional identity and a weak organisational identity prior to the organisational re-structuring – a pattern that has been observed previously in studies of academics (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). For example, Chris, a junior academic, reflected: 'most of the time I think of myself as almost like a freelancer who works here. But then there's like occasional times where I'm representing [the university]… that I feel like I'm an employee. But 90 percent of the time I feel just like I'm a freelancer who's currently working at [the university] 'cause I know when I leave, eventually, all my publications come with me.' Instead of identity threat-related judgements about the failure of the Process and Product aspects of the change, Chris described being unconcerned as the change unfolded, and how he remembered that he 'couldn't really see the point' of the heated discussions that others were having about the change. In addition to concurring with the Process failure, Identity Affirmation employees made judgements of constituent failure – and the causes of the Product and Process failure – towards the People. Specifically, they made two types of failure-related attributions (Fiske et al., 2002) about the change agents: (1) internal, competence attributions – 'my suspicion is they don't really appreciate the uniqueness of School X' – and (2) situational attributions – 'they would have received a lot of input that they just had to ignore'. Ultimately, Identity Affirmation employees' sensemaking about the nature of the change failure held no challenging implications for their understanding of their identity. Their experience of the organisational change affirmed their

pre-existing distance from their organisational identity, and reinforced the subjective importance and meaning of their professional identity. As Chris explained: 'So like has my identity, professional identity changed? Not really. I guess it is changing just because I'm new to this, so I'm just sort of adapting. So, it is evolving a little bit. I cannot say that it is too much due to the university. Apart from maybe, I am getting more and more a sense of independence and being almost kind of autonomous within this larger structure. That's probably been forced in by the [organisational change] rather than go the other way.'

The sense of neutrality coloured the affective and behavioural aspects of these narratives. Specifically, their cognitions were characterised by a state of consistently neutral, low-arousal, which was also mirrored in their descriptions of a general lack of behavioural engagement during the change (i.e., emotional and behavioural passivity). Specifically, Richard, a senior academic, explicitly espoused a lack of interest in learning more about the planned changes, repeatedly indicated that he did not worry or think about them often. He described feeling relatively calm and indifferent throughout and after the change Process. These individuals' descriptions of their post-change behaviour showed slightly more activity. However it involved no significant deviation from their pre-change behavioural trajectory; they increased the intensity of their engagement in their professional work, and continued to eschew their organisational identity ('I just shifted to worrying about... I knew what class I was going to teach. What papers I had to write. I just focused on that.').

Identity Resilience Narrative. This narrative corresponds with the least revision of individuals' central work identity, and was a rarer narrative in the data. Although employees described grappling with experiences of loss of their non-central identities, their central – organisational – identity ultimately remained intact. They portrayed strong pre-change identification with the organisation, describing it as their central identity. For example, Laura, a professional employee described always thinking of herself as a '[University X] employee

before anything else'. Having had experience in a centralised services model before, Laura's narrative had no undertones of identity threat, and she was largely positive about the change Product (i.e., no judgements of Product failure); she described being puzzled by how worried her colleagues were about the implementation of the change Product ('like they were forecasting…the end of the world'). Despite no indication of any significant experience of identity threat, Laura did perceive a degree of failure in the change Process– in the lack of clear communication given about what employees should expect from the new structure, and the lack of attention that had been given to setting up organisational 'processes. These perceptions likely stem from her secondary identity as a leader, and associated cognitions surrounding what 'good leaders' should do. As a result of the change, Laura was relocated to a new school, which she described as the 'loss of my family'. Yet, following some 'struggles', Laura's 'new family is accepting me more…they are getting used to me. They're starting to trust me.' Ultimately, despite these struggles and experience of loss, Laura's organisational identity remained in-tact, and she reflected on the change as 'tough', but an ultimate success: 'What I'm hearing is that [the university] is now the standout model for change…I'm quite proud of our braveness, the fact that we did just get in there and do it.' In sum, Laura showed resilience in that she did not experience substantial change-related identity threat, and was able to reclaimed her central pre-change organisational identity.

Reflecting a pattern of post-traumatic growth (Maitlis, 2012), the Identity Resilience narrative captured how employees described an experience of loss of one their non-central identities. Their narratives of the change ended with a positive affective tone, wherein they remained engaged in the post-change organisation. The decline in this tone occurred alongside the challenges common to most organisational change, of being in an uncertainty- and conflict-filled organisational context, which included feelings of sadness and loss (e.g., 'The hardness of [the new faculty] is the loss of four faculties, and the grief associated with

that and creating a new faculty.'). Aligning with Petriglieri's (2011) model of responses to identity threat, the affective tone became more positive towards the end of the change, when the negative environment dissipated. Employees concluded their narratives with optimism, describing feelings of pride (e.g., 'I'm quite proud of our braveness, the fact that we did just get in there and do it'). They expressed excitement for the future (e.g., 'and that's what was the excitement for me…the changing structure, and the building of something that's new and exciting and challenging') and feelings of joy (e.g., 'now I'm starting to see the benefits, so it's getting quite joyful again'). Their positive feelings allowed them to discuss the projects they were involved in to continue to develop their organisation in the wake of the change.

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INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE
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Discussion

Our study contributes to the literature on organisational change failure by highlighting its subjective and multi-faceted nature, and the role of identity in employees' interpretations of change failure. Although our interviewees experienced the same organisation change, they perceived, and made sense of, its failure differently. We found that, within the particularly uncertain and immensely challenging context of change failure, employees' work-related identities were an especially salient lens through which they came to understand and retrospectively interpret failure across the People, Process, and Product of the change.

Our study revealed how employees' reactions to the change product may be implicitly or explicitly moulded by the threat to the meaning, value, or enactment (cf. Petriglieri, 2011) of their central work identity, which is associated with the re-allocation of resources (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) to identity-related social groups during organisational re-structuring. As such, employees' narratives and attributions of change failure varied based depending on the centrality of their organisational, occupational, or work-group identity. For individuals' whose organisational identity generated expectations of

participation, feeling as though they had little influence over the consultation generated identity threat that led to interpretations of the change as a 'bad imitation of consultation' – a failure. Our findings regarding how employees' experience of product and process threat related to their negative attributions of the change people's intentions – and perceptions of failure on their behalf – sheds light on the role of classic attribution processes (Fiske et al., 2002) under the conditions of threat and uncertainty that colours sensemaking of organisational change failure. These findings also mirror studies about how employees are less likely to construct growth-based denied promotion stories if they use external reasons to explain their failed promotions (Vough and Caza, 2017).

Our research also contributes to scholarship on organisational change failure and identity by illuminating change failure as a context rife with identity restructuring. While identity scholars have begun to pay attention to the identity revisions that may occur as a consequence of identity threat (i.e. Petriglieri, 2011), this endeavour has been mostly theoretical. Our narrative analysis builds on Petriglieri's (2011) theoretical model by empirically exploring the specific identity-restructuring outcomes that may emerge in the event of change that involves organisational re-structuring and perceived failure. The *Identity Loss* narrative, in which employees psychologically and/or behaviourally exited from their previously-central work identity, translates findings of identity loss in studies of work role transitions (e.g., Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014) and job loss (Shepherd and Williams, 2018) to the specific context of identity threat during organisational change failure. We showed that organisational re-structuring may encourage change recipients to conceive of the 'new' organisation as incongruent with their self-definitions, thus leading to dis-identification and identity exit. It further validates scholars' assertions that trauma, sense-making, identity (Maitlis, 2009), crises, and organisational change (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) are inherently intertwined. The *Identity Revision* narrative, in which professional identity threat

led employees to revise the meaning of their professional identity, represents the uniting of Petriglieri's (2011) 'meaning change' identity-restructuring outcome and the concept of identity work (Caza et al., 2018). These findings also complement Petriglieri's (2011) model by describing two identity-restructuring narratives that unfolded in the absence of identity threat, *Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Resilience*, which align with similar phenomena that have observed in the identity literature (Elsbach, 2009), and in the literature on post-traumatic growth (Maitlis, 2009), respectively. These narratives show the potential variety and positivity in individual responses to organisational change failure.

Finally, the current study also bridges the qualitative literature on employee sensemaking during organisational change (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2005) with the largely-quantitative literature on employee resistance and generally react to change (Oreg et al., 2011), through the application of Oreg's (2006) conceptualisation of these reactions as containing cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Scholars highlighted the complexity of employee reactions to change (Oreg and Berson, 2011), concluding that 'researchers may have been misinterpreting employees' reactions to change, neglecting the possibility that some may simultaneously hold strong, yet conflicting, views about the change' (Oreg and Sverdlick, 2011: 337). We examined employees' identity-related cognitions, emotions, and behaviours within their sensemaking about organisational change failure and demonstrated how individuals can hold ambivalent views about change.

Consequently, we make a much-needed (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) contribution to the identity literature: an insight into the emotional aspects of identity and identification processes. Our research confirms identity scholars' ideas about the inherent interconnectedness between emotion and identity construction – including the particularly salient emotions of grief and tragedy tied to identity loss or exit (Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), which may be amplified further by the loss of hope and

optimism previously held in the early stages of a change failure (cf. the Identity Loss trajectory that we observed). Further, we advance the richness of the identity literature by exploring *multiple* work identities – organisational, occupational, and work-group. Our findings elucidate the interplay between identity threat strength and the presence of alternative identities in leading to identity-importance change or identity exit, and the emotional reactions accompanying this identity re-structuring (cf. Petriglieri's [2011] model). Our findings highlighted the interplay between emotion and identity in the context of employees' multiple work identities and their narratives of organisational change failure.

Limitations and future research directions

In discussing the limitations of our study, we offer future research directions. First, we interviewed our participants once, and thus did not capture how their identities changed over real time (Ship and Cole, 2015). Due to the stress and negativity associated with organisational changes studied here, our participants were reluctant to be interviewed multiple times. Further, examining identities' change over time was not a focus of our study. Yet, we encourage future research to utilise a longitudinal design to answer these questions. Will individuals try to alleviate their identity loss by building a new one, similar to trauma growth, wherein people are able to find new positive meaning after a tragedy (Maitlis, 2009)? Do the organisational and personal factors that contribute to constructive coping with identity loss after job loss (cf. Shepherd and Williams, 2018) also apply to identity loss after failed organisational change? What is the timeframe of these changes?

Second, future research could examine the extent to which our four narrative archetypes emerge in the context of other organisational changes. For example, a study of the implementation of new technology that automated some aspects of work was found to have unintended consequences for professional identities, wherein employees' expertise and personal contacts were no longer needed and, consequently, employees felt a sense of loss

(Eriksson-Zetterquist, Lindberg, and Styhre, 2009). Future research could examine how new technologies may affect multiple work-related identities. Studying non-university organisations that have different numbers, types, and intra-organisation distributions of professions would provide insights into the effects of elements such as the pre-change organisational structure, professional values and norms, inter-professional interactions, and the salience of professional boundaries on the identity narratives.

Third, we employed a qualitative methodology. A quantitative approach could serve to explain some of the patterns of pre-change identification across the narratives; such as why the *Identity Revision* only entailed revision to professional identity, and why the *Identity Loss* only entailed the loss of individuals' work-group or organisational identity. It is possible that the same organisational re-structuring elicited subjective perceptions of identity threat across these different work identities – and this degree of threat could be more precisely explored with a quantitative approach. Furthermore, quantification would serve as a bridge between the current qualitative study and the predominantly quantitative literature on employee reactions to organisational change (Oreg et al., 2011), allowing them to be more seamlessly integrated (cf. the call made by Bouckenooghe, 2010).Future quantitative studies could compare the identity narratives in different groups, to further unpack the effect of elements in the work-group context.

Finally, we interviewed both academic and professional employees, who may have different identities, and thus may perceive organisational change failure differently (Cordiner et al., 2018; Simpson and Fitzgerald, 2014). Some of our participants held management responsibilities, which may have formed a part of their professional identity. Future research could explore whether academic and professional identities employ different identity narratives when making sense of organisational change failure, and the role of managerial or leadership identities or identity content in shaping these narratives.

Implications for practice

Our study suggests that change agents could benefit from anticipating how both the Process and Product of organisational re-structuring can threaten employees' work-related identities. Our findings indicated that a misalignment between employees' experience of the change process, and the expectations they had developed of this experience – guided by their professional or organisational identity – may elicit perceptions of Process failure. As such, we suggest that change agents should endeavour to set transparent expectations about the change process prior to its unfolding. This includes being clear about when and how employee input will be taken into consideration and, equally as importantly, when it will not. Identity threat that is associated with the proposed change Product could be mitigated by: (1) adjusting the proposed re-structuring to lessen this threat (e.g., lessening the loss of resources to the threatened group), or by (2) ensuring that the aspect of the identity that is threatened (e.g. autonomy) is nurtured (e.g., through the provision of autonomy in other areas).

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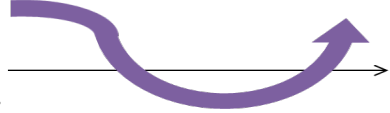Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (Vol. 3). London: Sage.

MS Word Figures and Tables

Table 1. The cognitive component of the narrative trajectories.

	Cognitive component			
	Beginning ————————————————————➤ *End of change*			
Trajectory	**Central and salient identity[3]**	**Identity threat**	**Perceptions of failure**	**Identity outcome**
1 – Identity Loss	Organisational	High – *threat to meaning*	Process: Superficial People: Warmth attributions Product: Bureaucratic, inefficient	**Identity Loss:** Loss of organisational identity
	Work-group	High – *threat to value and enactment*		**Identity Loss:** Loss of work-group identity
2 – Identity Revision	Professional	High – *threat to value and meaning*	Process: Superficial; ineffective People: Competence and situational attributions Product: 'silly', illogical	**Identity Revision:** Change to meaning and value of professional identity
3 – Identity Affirmation	Professional	Low – *irrelevant and unaffected*	Process: Ruthless, inefficient People: Competence and situational attributions Product: Indifferent	**Identity Affirmation**: Professional identity affirmed; Org. identity further weakened
4 – Identity Resilience	Organisational	Low – *identity congruent*	Process: 'Tough'; challenging Product (+): Optimistic	**Identity Resilience**: Shift in work-group identity, but org. identity maintained

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[3] For all other identities (i.e. organisational, professional, work-group – other than the salient identity mentioned), identification was weak.

Table 2. The affective and behavioural components of the narrative trajectories.

Trajectory	Affective component[4] Beginning ⟶ End of change	Behavioural component During change Participation	After change Engagement / turnover
1 – Identity Loss	High activation, positive valence (hopeful) → Negative valence ('loss', 'tragedy')	High	Actual *or* psychological exit
2 – Identity Revision	Low activation →High activation, negative valence ('hopeless', 'dismal')	Initially passive, then gradually more involved	Actual organisational exit; stayed within the profession
3 – Identity Affirmation	Consistently low activation	Low – passive	Increased engagement in professional activities
4 – Identity Resilience	High activation, positive valence (optimistic, excited) → Negative valence ('tough') → Recovery (i.e. back to positive valence)	High	Remained engaged in organisational activities

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[4] The (+) and (-) signs represent the pleasantness dimension, and the distance between the purple arrow (i.e. the affective trajectory) and the black arrow (i.e. the axis) represents the activation dimension. Here, the pleasantness dimension is represented as categorical (i.e. emotions are either + or -). We have done this for simplicity, as well as due to the fact that this study was not designed to measure emotions in a detailed or comprehensive fashion – and so we chose not to represent it in this way and thus overstate our findings.