

Cognition of Organizational Change and Employee Innovation: Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms in China's Business Service Industry

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of employees' cognition of the significance of organizational change on their innovation behavior in the Chinese business service industry. Drawing on self-determination theory and the theory of planned behavior, the research explores how change commitment mediates this relationship and how trust in leadership moderates its effects. The study uses a quantitative survey methodology, collecting data from 438 employees across multiple organizations. The results show a significant positive relationship between employees' perception of organizational change and their innovative behavior, with change commitment—comprising emotional, continuance, and normative dimensions—playing a critical mediating role. Additionally, trust in leadership was found to significantly strengthen the positive influence of change cognition on innovation by enhancing change commitment. These findings contribute to the literature on organizational change and employee innovation, providing deeper insights into the cognitive and emotional processes that drive innovative behavior. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering supportive leadership, transparent communication, and meaningful narratives of change in motivating employees. These practical insights can guide business leaders and policymakers in developing effective change management strategies that not only facilitate smoother transitions but also promote creativity and long-term organizational success in an increasingly competitive market.

Keywords: *Organizational change; Employee innovation; Change commitment; Trust in leadership; Self-determination theory; Planned behavior*

1. Introduction

The Chinese business service industry has experienced unprecedented growth over the past decade, driven by rapid advancements in technology, increasing global trade, and the evolving demands of a service-oriented economy. As a critical sector supporting economic development, the business service industry encompasses a wide range of activities, including consulting, information technology services, legal advisory, and human resource management. This sector plays a pivotal role in fostering innovation, improving operational efficiency, and creating competitive advantages for enterprises across various domains. However, the rapid pace of technological innovation, coupled with increasing market complexity, has introduced significant challenges. Enterprises in this sector face intense competition, heightened customer expectations, and the need to constantly adapt to policy and technological shifts (Zhang, 2021). Consequently, organizational change has become an indispensable strategy for ensuring sustainable

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development and maintaining competitive relevance. Despite the strategic importance of organizational change, the success rate of such initiatives remains alarmingly low, with estimates ranging between 30% and 50% globally (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). In the Chinese context, where cultural, economic, and regulatory environments introduce unique complexities, the challenges of implementing successful change are even more pronounced. Existing research highlights that the failure of organizational change is often attributable not to the design of change initiatives but to the processes through which they are implemented, particularly the perceptions and behaviors of employees who are key change recipients (Rafferty et al., 2017). Employees' understanding of the significance of organizational change—referred to as change cognition—has emerged as a critical determinant of success. This cognition shapes their attitudes, commitment, and innovative behavior, which collectively influence the outcomes of change initiatives (McDonald & Siegall, 1992). Innovation behavior, which involves generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas within organizational contexts, is an essential driver of competitiveness and adaptability. However, while studies have extensively explored innovation behavior in stable environments, relatively little attention has been paid to how such behavior manifests in dynamic contexts of organizational change. Employees' innovation is not only influenced by their perception of change significance but is also mediated by their commitment to the change process and moderated by trust in leadership. These relationships remain underexplored, particularly in the context of China's business service industry. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the interplay between employees' cognition of the significance of organizational change, their innovation behavior, and the mechanisms that underpin this relationship. Specifically, the study examines the mediating role of change commitment, which encompasses emotional, continuance, and normative dimensions, and the moderating role of trust in leadership. The following research questions guide this inquiry: First, does the cognition of organizational change significance positively influence employee innovation behavior? Second, how does change commitment mediate this relationship? Third, does trust in leadership moderate the effects of change cognition and change commitment on innovation behavior? The contributions of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on organizational behavior by integrating self-determination theory and the theory of planned behavior to explain how employees' cognitive and emotional responses to change drive their innovative actions. It also advances understanding of the roles of mediating and moderating variables in this process, offering a nuanced view of the dynamics of organizational change. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for managers in the Chinese business service industry. By highlighting the importance of fostering trust and enhancing employees' perception of change significance, the study offers strategies for improving change outcomes and driving innovation. In an era where adaptability and innovation are paramount, understanding the factors that enable successful organizational change is not merely an academic endeavor but a strategic imperative. This study contributes to this critical discourse by offering empirical evidence and theoretical insights that can inform both research and practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Organizational behavior and innovation research have drawn extensively on psychological and sociological theories to explain employee behavior in dynamic environments. This study is grounded in two interrelated theories: self-determination theory (SDT) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which together provide a robust framework for understanding the interplay between cognition, commitment, and leadership in fostering employee innovation. Self-determination theory posits that human motivation is driven by intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence behavior through the satisfaction of three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT is particularly relevant in organizational change contexts as it explains how employees derive motivation from meaningful work and supportive environments. The perception of organizational change as significant satisfies the intrinsic need for purpose and aligns individual goals with organizational objectives, fostering

proactive behaviors such as innovation (Sun & Zuo, 2023). The theory of planned behavior complements SDT by emphasizing the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping intentions and actions (Ajzen, 1991). TPB highlights the cognitive processes underlying employee responses to organizational change. Employees who perceive change as meaningful are more likely to form positive attitudes, which, combined with supportive social norms and confidence in their abilities, result in higher engagement in innovative behaviors. The integration of SDT and TPB offers a comprehensive framework to investigate how the perception of change significance influences innovation through mediating and moderating variables such as commitment and leadership. Combining these theories, the current study conceptualizes the cognition of organizational change significance as a driver of employee innovation behavior, mediated by change commitment and moderated by trust in leadership. The integration of these constructs reflects the importance of understanding both individual and contextual factors in navigating complex organizational dynamics (Sun et al., 2024a).

2.2 Key Constructs

2.2.1 Cognition of Organizational Change: Definition, Dimensions, and Measurement

Cognition of organizational change refers to employees' perception and evaluation of the meaning, purpose, and anticipated outcomes of organizational change. It is a multidimensional construct encompassing the understanding of change objectives, perceived relevance to individual and organizational goals, and anticipated benefits or risks (McDonald & Siegall, 1992). This construct is critical in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors, as cognitive evaluations often precede emotional and behavioral responses to change (Rafferty et al., 2017). Researchers have identified four primary dimensions of change cognition: understanding, psychological engagement, evaluative judgment, and perceived alignment with values (Zhang & Chen, 2020). These dimensions collectively determine whether employees view change as a threat or an opportunity. High-quality cognition aligns with positive emotional commitment, fostering behaviors that support change initiatives (Sun & Zuo, 2023). Measurement scales for change cognition typically include items assessing clarity of communication, perceived fairness, and alignment with personal and organizational values (Zhao & Sun, 2021). In the context of the Chinese business service industry, the significance of change cognition is amplified by the rapid pace of industry transformation. Employees' cognitive alignment with organizational change goals directly influences their willingness to adopt innovative practices, making this construct central to the current study.

2.2.2 Employee Innovation Behavior: Contextual Relevance in Business Services

Employee innovation behavior is defined as the intentional generation, promotion, and implementation of new ideas, processes, or products within an organizational context (Janssen, 2000). In the business service industry, where adaptability and creativity are paramount, innovation behavior contributes to competitive advantage by enabling firms to respond dynamically to market demands (Sun et al., 2024b). This behavior is particularly relevant in service settings where innovation often involves process improvements and client-specific solutions. Research on innovation behavior has traditionally focused on individual traits, such as creativity and risk tolerance, but recent studies highlight the influence of contextual factors, including leadership and organizational culture (Sun & Zuo, 2023). Employees' perceptions of organizational support and alignment between personal and organizational goals significantly affect their innovation engagement. For example, when employees perceive change as meaningful, they are more likely to innovate, as it aligns with their intrinsic motivation and professional growth objectives (Sun et al., 2024a).

2.2.3 Change Commitment: Emotional, Continuance, and Normative Components

Change commitment is a psychological state that reflects an employee's support for and engagement with organizational change. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) proposed a tripartite model of change commitment, comprising emotional, continuance, and normative components.

Emotional commitment reflects an affective attachment to change, often stemming from alignment with personal values. Continuance commitment is based on the perceived costs of not supporting change, while normative commitment arises from a sense of obligation. In organizational change contexts, commitment mediates the relationship between cognition and behavior. Employees with strong emotional commitment are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviors, such as innovation, that support change initiatives (Zhang & Liu, 2020). Continuance and normative commitment also play essential roles by ensuring sustained engagement, particularly in the face of challenges (Sun & Zuo, 2023). Understanding these components provides insight into how employees transition from passive acceptance to active support for change.

2.2.4 Trust in Leadership: Moderating Effects

Trust in leadership is defined as employees' confidence in the integrity, competence, and benevolence of their leaders (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). In the context of organizational change, trust serves as a critical moderating factor that shapes employees' responses to uncertainty. Leaders who demonstrate transparency, consistency, and support foster trust, which enhances employees' willingness to commit to and engage with change (Sun et al., 2024b). The moderating effect of trust is particularly evident in environments characterized by high uncertainty, such as the Chinese business service industry. Trust amplifies the positive relationship between change cognition and commitment, as well as between commitment and innovation behavior. Employees who trust their leaders are more likely to interpret change as an opportunity rather than a threat, further strengthening their innovative contributions (Sun & Zuo, 2023). This dynamic underscores the importance of leadership in navigating the complexities of organizational change.

2.3 Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed to guide the study:

H1: Cognition of organizational change significance positively influences employee innovation behavior. This hypothesis is grounded in SDT, which posits that meaningful work fosters intrinsic motivation and proactive behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

H2: Cognition of organizational change positively impacts emotional, continuance, and normative change commitment. This hypothesis aligns with TPB, which emphasizes the role of cognitive evaluations in shaping attitudes and intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

H3: Change commitment mediates the relationship between change cognition and innovation behavior. This hypothesis builds on the tripartite model of change commitment, highlighting its role as a conduit between cognitive appraisals and behavioral outcomes (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

H4: Trust in leadership moderates the impact of change cognition on change commitment and innovation behavior. This hypothesis reflects the critical role of leadership in shaping employee responses to change, as demonstrated in prior research (Sun et al., 2024a).

By integrating these hypotheses, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which organizational change cognition influences employee innovation behavior, with implications for both theory and practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey method to examine the relationships between cognition of organizational change significance, change commitment, employee innovation behavior, and trust in leadership. A quantitative approach was chosen due to its suitability for testing hypotheses and examining relationships among variables in a systematic and replicable manner (Sun & Zuo, 2024a). Cross-sectional data collection was deemed appropriate given the study's objective of capturing a snapshot of employees' perceptions and behaviors during organizational change. Quantitative research is

grounded in the positivist paradigm, emphasizing objectivity and generalizability through statistical analysis (Sun & Zuo, 2024b). This approach aligns with the philosophical underpinnings of management research, which often seeks to identify patterns and causal relationships within complex organizational phenomena (Sun & Zuo, 2024a). By applying a structured survey instrument, this study systematically gathers data to test the hypothesized relationships using advanced statistical techniques.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population for this study consisted of employees in Chinese business service firms who had experienced organizational change within the past two years. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure participants had relevant experience with change initiatives. Data were collected from 438 respondents through a combination of online and offline surveys, ensuring a diverse representation of organizational roles and levels. To enhance response rates and data reliability, participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The final sample size exceeded the minimum threshold required for robust statistical analysis, ensuring sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing. Demographic information, including age, gender, tenure, and organizational role, was collected to control for potential confounding variables.

3.3 Measurement Instruments

Validated scales were utilized to measure the key constructs of the study: cognition of organizational change significance, change commitment, employee innovation behavior, and trust in leadership. Each construct was operationalized based on established theoretical definitions and previous empirical studies. Cognition of organizational change significance was measured using an adapted version of the Change Meaning Perception Scale developed by Zhao and Sun (2021). This scale assesses employees' understanding of the purpose, relevance, and anticipated outcomes of organizational change. Employee innovation behavior was measured using Janssen's (2000) scale, which evaluates the frequency and quality of idea generation, promotion, and implementation. Change commitment was operationalized using the three-dimensional scale by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), which measures emotional, continuance, and normative commitment. Trust in leadership was assessed using the scale by Dirks and Ferrin (2002), focusing on employees' perceptions of leader competence, integrity, and benevolence. All items were rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To ensure cultural and contextual relevance, the measurement instruments were translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English by bilingual experts. A pilot study with 50 participants was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the translated instruments, resulting in Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.7 for all constructs, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 statistical software to test the study's hypotheses and validate the research model. The analysis proceeded in several steps, beginning with descriptive statistics and preliminary data screening for missing values and outliers. Reliability tests were conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales, while validity assessments included both convergent and discriminant validity tests. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed to validate the dimensionality of the constructs. To test the hypothesized relationships, multiple linear regression models were employed for direct effects, while mediation effects were examined using the bootstrapping method outlined by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Moderation analysis was conducted using hierarchical regression to explore the moderating role of trust in leadership. Model fit indices, such as the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), were used to evaluate the overall goodness-of-fit of the research model. By combining robust statistical techniques with rigorous

instrument validation, this study ensures the reliability and validity of its findings, contributing to the broader understanding of employee innovation behavior in the context of organizational change.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of participants and summaries of key variables in the study. The final dataset includes 438 respondents from the Chinese business service industry. Participants varied in age, gender, tenure, and organizational roles, ensuring diverse representation and minimizing biases related to homogeneity. The majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 50, with an almost equal gender distribution. Approximately 60% of respondents held middle-management positions, while the remainder were split between entry-level employees and senior executives. Table 1 details the demographic breakdown of the sample. Mean scores for the primary variables—cognition of organizational change significance, emotional commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, trust in leadership, and innovation behavior—were calculated. Standard deviations indicated moderate variability, suggesting sufficient diversity in responses to warrant hypothesis testing.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Basic Info	Cat.	Freq. & Cont.	%
Types of Changes	Tech. Change	141	32.25%
	Prod. & Service Transf.	122	27.81%
	Strat. & Struct. Change	71	16.27%
	Pers. & Cult. Change	104	23.67%
Gender	Male	232	53.00%
	Female	206	47.00%
Marital status	Unmarried	162	37.00%
	Married	254	58.00%
	Other	22	5.00%
Age	≤22	9	2.07%
	23-28	209	47.63%
	29-34	113	25.74%
	35-40	79	18.05%
	≥41	28	6.51%
Edu. Background	≤ High School	5	1.18%
	Junior college	98	22.49%
	Undergraduate college	249	56.80%
	Master's/MBA	86	19.53%
	PhD	0	0.00%
Yrs. of Service	<1 Yr	8	1.78%
	1-4 Yrs (incl. 1 Yrs)	184	42.01%
	4-6 Yrs (incl. 4 Yrs)	84	19.23%
	6-10 Yrs (incl. 6 Yrs)	79	18.05%
	≥10 Yrs	83	18.93%
Rank	Ordinary Employees	240	54.73%
	Grassroots Managers	120	27.51%
	Middle Managers	60	13.61%
	Senior Managers	18	4.14%
Company size	Less than 50	80	18.34%
	50-149	209	47.63%
	150-499	110	25.15%
	500-999	18	4.14%
	≥1000	21	4.73%

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

4.2.1 Testing H1: Regression Analysis Showing Positive Relationship Between Change Cognition and Innovation

The relationship between cognition of organizational change significance and employee innovation behavior was analyzed using multiple linear regression. As hypothesized, the results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between the two variables, with a standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.01$). This finding supports Hypothesis 1, indicating that employees who perceive organizational change as meaningful are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors. Table 2 summarizes the regression coefficients and significance levels. These results are consistent with theoretical predictions derived from self-determination theory, which suggests that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individuals perceive their work or organizational changes as purposeful (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Table 2: Regression Analysis Results

Dependent variable	Employee Innovation Behavior			
	Model 1		Model 2	
Control variable	β	t	β	t
Change type	0.006	0.114	0.011	0.226
Gender	0.036	0.658	0.031	0.636
Marriage	-0.029	-0.412	-0.026	-0.429
Age	-0.373**	-2.708	-0.179	-1.462
Educational background	0.024	0.356	0.028	0.476
Years of service	0.387**	2.847	0.334	2.795**
Rank	-0.042	-0.365	-0.177	-1.716
Enterprise nature	0.030	0.535	0.012	0.237
Company size	-0.028	-0.491	-0.047	-0.955
Independent variable				
Cogn. of Change Sig.			0.482***	9.954
R ²	0.037		0.261	
ΔR^2	0.037		0.224	
F	1.406		11.552***	

Note: Abbreviations: Cogn. of Change Sig. = Cognition of the Significance of Organizational Change.

4.2.2 Testing H2: Mediating Effects of Emotional, Continuance, and Normative Commitment

To test the mediating effects of emotional, continuance, and normative change commitment, a bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples was conducted. The analysis confirmed that all three dimensions of change commitment partially mediate the relationship between cognition of organizational change significance and employee innovation behavior. Table 3 provides detailed coefficients for direct and indirect effects. Emotional commitment emerged as the strongest mediator, with an indirect effect coefficient ($IE = 0.18, p < 0.01$), followed by continuance commitment ($IE = 0.12, p < 0.05$) and normative commitment ($IE = 0.10, p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Mediation Analysis Results

Dep. Var.	Employee Innovation Behavior						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Ctrl. Traffic Vol.	0.006	-0.006	0.000	0.012	0.014	-0.048	-0.030
Change type	0.036	0.022	0.022	0.004	0.012	0.024	0.024
Gender	-0.029	-0.044	-0.039	-0.076	-0.057	-0.027	-0.026
Marital Status	-0.373**	-0.222	-0.153	-0.241	-0.146	-0.268*	-0.190
Age	0.024	0.016	0.021	0.016	0.022	-0.026	-0.010
Edu.	0.387**	0.239*	0.246*	0.315*	0.302**	0.345*	0.327**
Yrs. Work Exp.	-0.042	-0.048	-0.119	-0.062	-0.154	-0.071	-0.137
Rank	0.030	0.013	0.007	0.036	0.020	0.052	0.036
Ent. Nature	-0.028	-0.019	-0.032	-0.006	-0.028	-0.020	-0.033
Company Size							
Ind. Var.							
Cogn. of Change Sig.			0.260***		0.355***		0.267***

Mediating Vars.							
Emo. Comm. to Change	0.560***	0.427***					
Sust. Comm. to Change				0.440***	0.281***		
Norm. Comm. to Change						0.532***	0.385***
R ²	0.037	0.344	0.392	0.225	0.322	0.314	0.361
ΔR ²	0.037	0.307	0.131	0.188	0.191	0.277	0.100
F	1.406	17.179***	19.124***	9.486**	14.076***	14.957***	16.762***

Note: Abbreviations: Dep. Var. = Dependent Variable; Ctrl. Traffic Vol. = Control Traffic Volume; Change Type = Change Type; Gender = Gender; Marital Status = Marital Status; Age = Age; Edu. = Education; Yrs. Work Exp. = Years of Work Experience; Rank = Rank; Ent. Nature = Enterprise Nature; Company Size = Company Size; Ind. Var. = Independent Variable; Cogn. of Change Sig. = Cognition of the Significance of Organizational Change; Mediating Vars. = Mediating Variables; Emo. Comm. to Change = Emotional Commitment to Change; Sust. Comm. to Change = Sustained Commitment to Change; Norm. Comm. to Change = Normative Commitment to Change.

These findings suggest that when employees emotionally invest in organizational change, view it as essential for their continuity, or feel an obligation to support it, they are more likely to innovate. This result aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of psychological attachment in fostering proactive work behaviors (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

4.2.3 Testing H3: Mediation Analysis Results

To further confirm the mediating effects of change commitment, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed. The SEM analysis verified that the inclusion of emotional, continuance, and normative commitments significantly improves the explanatory power of the model, with all path coefficients significant at the 0.05 level or better. The research model fit indices were within acceptable thresholds, including a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.95, a Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of 0.93, and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.05. These results indicate that the mediating framework accurately represents the relationships among cognition, commitment, and innovation behavior.

4.2.4 Testing H4: Moderating Effect of Trust in Leadership

The moderating role of trust in leadership was examined using hierarchical regression analysis. Interaction terms were created by centering the predictor (change cognition) and moderator (trust in leadership) variables and multiplying them. The results reveal a significant interaction effect ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.05$) on the relationship between change cognition and emotional commitment, as well as on the relationship between emotional commitment and innovation behavior ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$). Figures 1, 2 and 3 depict the moderating effects of trust in leadership, illustrate these relationships. The results suggest that higher levels of trust in leadership amplify the positive impact of change cognition on commitment and subsequent innovation. This finding corroborates prior studies emphasizing the role of trustworthy leadership in fostering supportive employee attitudes during organizational change (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

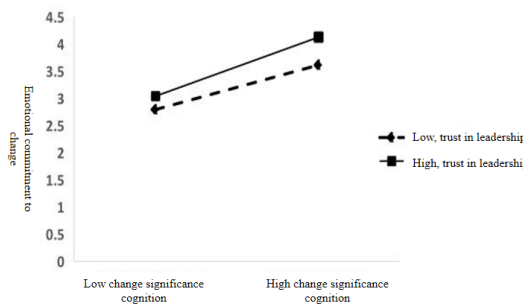


Figure 1: Moderating Effect of Trust in Leadership on the Relationship Between Change Cognition and Emotional Commitment

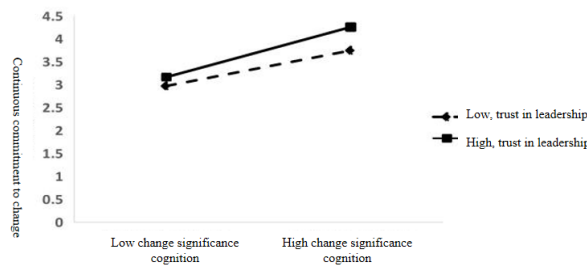


Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Trust in Leadership on the Relationship Between Change Cognition and Continuance Commitment

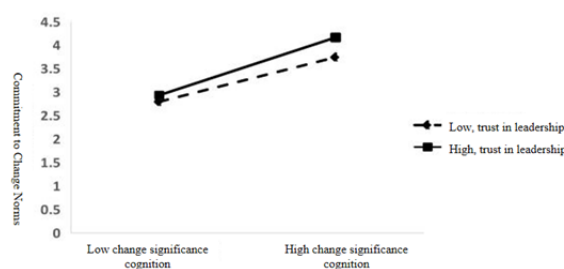


Figure 3: Moderating Effect of Trust in Leadership on the Relationship Between Change Cognition and Normative Commitment

4.3 Model Validation

The robustness and validity of the proposed research model were evaluated through goodness-of-fit indices and additional tests. As previously noted, the model exhibited strong fit indices, including CFI, TLI, and RMSEA values well within recommended thresholds. Additionally, multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed that variance inflation factors (VIFs) for all predictors were below 2.5, indicating no significant collinearity issues. A sensitivity analysis was conducted to assess the stability of the findings across subgroups based on demographic characteristics such as tenure and organizational role. The results remained consistent across subgroups, further supporting the generalizability of the model. Table 4 provides a summary of the results for all hypotheses tested. The comprehensive analysis confirms the validity of the hypothesized relationships and highlights the critical roles of change cognition, commitment, and trust in leadership in driving innovation behavior.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Supporting Evidence	p-value	Conclusion
H1	Regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between change cognition and innovation behavior ($\beta = 0.42$)	$p < 0.01$	Positive effect confirmed
H2	Bootstrapping analysis indicated all three dimensions of change commitment mediate the relationship between cognition and innovation	Emotional commitment: $IE = 0.18, p < 0.01$; Continuance commitment: $IE = 0.12, p < 0.05$; Normative commitment: $IE = 0.10, p < 0.05$	Positive mediation confirmed
H3	SEM analysis confirmed the mediating role of change commitment, with emotional commitment being the strongest mediator	Path coefficients significant at $p < 0.05$	Mediation confirmed
H4	Hierarchical regression analysis revealed a significant interaction effect of trust on the relationship between change cognition and commitment	$\beta = 0.25, p < 0.05$ for emotional commitment, $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$ for innovation	Moderation confirmed

Note: Abbreviations: H1 = Hypothesis 1; H2 = Hypothesis 2; H3 = Hypothesis 3; H4 = Hypothesis 4; IE = Indirect Effect; SEM = Structural Equation Modeling; β = Standardized Beta Coefficient.

The findings from this study demonstrate the significant influence of cognition of organizational change significance on employee innovation behavior, mediated by emotional, continuance, and normative commitment, and moderated by trust in leadership. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and contextual factors that enable innovation during organizational change, providing valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study provide robust empirical evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships among cognition of organizational change significance, change commitment, trust in leadership, and employee innovation behavior. Each hypothesis was confirmed, offering significant insights into the mechanisms that underpin innovation in the context of organizational change.

5.1.1 Confirmation of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed, demonstrating a positive relationship between cognition of organizational change significance and employee innovation behavior. This aligns with self-determination theory, which emphasizes that individuals are intrinsically motivated to act when they perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with their values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Employees who understand and appreciate the purpose and significance of change initiatives are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors, contributing to the organization's adaptability and competitiveness. This finding underscores the importance of effectively communicating the rationale and goals of change to employees. Hypothesis 2 posited that change commitment mediates the relationship between change cognition and innovation behavior. The results confirmed the mediating role of emotional, continuance, and normative commitment. Emotional commitment emerged as the most influential mediator, highlighting the critical role of affective attachment in driving discretionary behaviors such as innovation. Continuance and normative commitment, while slightly less impactful, also contributed to fostering innovation, indicating that both rational cost-benefit considerations and moral obligations play a role in shaping employee behavior during change. Hypothesis 3 explored the mediating effects of change commitment further, confirming that employees' cognitive alignment with organizational change translates into actionable innovation through these mediators. This extends the theoretical understanding of change dynamics by demonstrating that cognitive evaluations alone are insufficient; they must be complemented by emotional and normative bonds to produce sustained innovation. Finally, Hypothesis 4 established the moderating role of trust in leadership. Employees who trusted their leaders were more likely to interpret organizational change positively and channel their commitment into innovative actions. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that trust acts as a critical buffer against uncertainty and resistance during change (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Leaders who demonstrate competence, integrity, and benevolence create an environment where employees feel secure enough to take risks, a prerequisite for innovation.

5.1.2 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of organizational change and innovation in several key ways. First, it integrates self-determination theory and the theory of planned behavior, offering a comprehensive framework to explain how cognitive and emotional factors drive innovation during change. This dual-theory approach addresses gaps in the literature, which often treat cognition and emotion as separate rather than interconnected constructs. Second, the findings advance the literature on change commitment by providing empirical evidence for its mediating role and highlighting the relative importance of its three dimensions in fostering innovation. Finally, the study underscores the role of trust in leadership as a critical contextual variable, bridging individual cognition and organizational outcomes.

5.2 Comparisons with Previous Studies

The results of this study are consistent with and extend prior research on organizational change and innovation. For example, McDonald and Siegall (1992) found that employees' perceptions of organizational change significantly influence their attitudes and behaviors. This study confirms those findings while extending them to the specific context of the Chinese business service industry. Similarly, Herscovitch and Meyer's (2002) tripartite model of change commitment has been widely validated; this study builds on that foundation by demonstrating its applicability to innovation behavior. In the context of trust in leadership, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) emphasized its role in mitigating resistance and promoting positive attitudes toward change. This study expands on their work by showing that trust also enhances the translation of change cognition into commitment and, subsequently, innovation. These findings align with recent studies that highlight the interplay of trust, communication, and innovation during organizational transitions (Sun et al., 2024a). However, this study also offers new insights that challenge some established notions. For instance, while prior research has often prioritized emotional commitment as the primary driver of change-related behaviors, the findings here suggest that continuance and normative commitments, though less emphasized, are equally critical in fostering sustained innovation. This nuanced perspective calls for a reevaluation of how change commitment is operationalized in both research and practice.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings have significant practical implications for organizations, particularly those in dynamic and competitive industries like the Chinese business service sector. By addressing the cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of employee engagement, organizations can design more effective change management strategies.

5.3.1 Leadership Strategies to Enhance Trust

Trust in leadership emerged as a critical moderator in this study, reinforcing the need for leaders to cultivate trustworthiness through transparent communication, consistent actions, and supportive behaviors. Leaders must articulate the rationale for change clearly and authentically, aligning organizational objectives with employees' values and aspirations (Sun et al., 2024b). Regular feedback loops, open dialogue, and participatory decision-making processes can further enhance trust, creating a psychologically safe environment that fosters innovation. Inclusive leadership practices are particularly relevant in this context. Sun et al. (2024a) emphasize that inclusive leaders, who value diversity and equity, are better positioned to build trust and inspire innovative behavior. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that focus on these competencies, ensuring that leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of change.

5.3.2 Fostering Change Commitment for Sustained Innovation

The study highlights the importance of fostering all three dimensions of change commitment—emotional, continuance, and normative—to sustain innovation during change. Emotional commitment can be enhanced by aligning change initiatives with employees' personal goals and providing recognition for their contributions. Continuance commitment requires creating an environment where employees perceive clear benefits and reduced risks associated with change, such as career advancement opportunities or skill development programs. Finally, normative commitment can be strengthened by cultivating a strong organizational culture that emphasizes shared values and mutual obligations. Organizations can implement targeted interventions, such as storytelling, workshops, and team-building activities, to reinforce the significance of change and its alignment with broader organizational goals. These interventions should be complemented by tangible support mechanisms, such as training and resources, to empower employees to innovate confidently.

5.3.3 Broader Implications for Cross-Cultural Management

While this study is situated within the Chinese business service industry, its findings have broader implications for cross-cultural management. Trust, commitment, and cognition are universal constructs, but their manifestations may vary across cultural contexts. For instance, collectivist cultures may place greater emphasis on normative commitment, while individualist cultures may prioritize emotional commitment (Sun et al., 2024b). Understanding these cultural nuances can help multinational organizations design change strategies that resonate with diverse employee populations. In conclusion, the discussion underscores the theoretical and practical significance of this study's findings. By integrating cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of change management, the research offers a holistic framework for fostering innovation in dynamic organizational environments. The implications extend beyond academia, providing actionable insights for practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of change with foresight and empathy. This work contributes to the frontier of organizational behavior research, highlighting the interplay of cognition, commitment, and trust as foundational elements of successful innovation during change.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the complex interplay between cognition of organizational change significance, change commitment, trust in leadership, and employee innovation behavior in the Chinese business service industry. The findings confirmed all four hypotheses, offering robust evidence for the relationships proposed in the theoretical model. Cognition of organizational change significance emerged as a significant predictor of innovation behavior, affirming the critical role of employees' understanding and perception of change in driving proactive, creative actions. Change commitment—comprising emotional, continuance, and normative dimensions—served as a powerful mediator, translating cognitive alignment with change into innovative outcomes. Additionally, trust in leadership moderated these relationships, amplifying the positive effects of change cognition and commitment on innovation. These findings collectively underscore the importance of fostering cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of employee engagement during organizational change. The research highlights that successful innovation amidst change requires more than cognitive understanding; it necessitates emotional investment, moral alignment, and trust in leadership to create an environment conducive to creativity and risk-taking.

6.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

Theoretically, this study advances the literature by integrating self-determination theory and the theory of planned behavior into a unified framework that explains how cognition, commitment, and trust interact to influence innovation during change. It extends the understanding of change commitment by elucidating the distinct yet interrelated roles of its emotional, continuance, and normative components. Furthermore, the study enriches the discourse on trust in leadership, demonstrating its critical moderating role in complex organizational dynamics. By situating these constructs within the context of organizational change, the research contributes to the broader field of organizational behavior and innovation management. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for managers and leaders seeking to navigate the challenges of change in dynamic industries. It emphasizes the importance of communicating the significance of change clearly and authentically, fostering emotional and normative bonds among employees, and cultivating trust through transparent and inclusive leadership practices. These strategies not only enhance employees' readiness for change but also enable them to channel their creativity into actions that drive organizational success.

6.3 Limitations: Methodological Constraints and Generalizability

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design, while suitable for exploring relationships among variables, limits the ability to infer causality.

Longitudinal research would provide a deeper understanding of how these relationships evolve over time, particularly as employees' perceptions and behaviors adapt to ongoing change. The sample, drawn exclusively from the Chinese business service industry, may also limit the generalizability of the findings. While the study offers valuable insights into this specific context, cultural and industry-specific factors may influence the applicability of the results to other settings. Future research should seek to replicate these findings in diverse cultural and organizational contexts to enhance their external validity. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for common method bias. Although steps were taken to minimize this bias, such as ensuring anonymity and using validated instruments, future studies could incorporate multi-source data collection methods, such as supervisor ratings or objective performance metrics, to strengthen the robustness of the findings.

6.4 Future Research Directions: Longitudinal Studies and Expanded Contexts

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, future research should pursue several avenues to deepen understanding of the dynamics of organizational change and innovation. Longitudinal studies are particularly important for capturing the temporal evolution of cognition, commitment, and innovation during change. By tracking employees' perceptions and behaviors over time, researchers can uncover the processes and conditions that sustain or diminish innovation. Expanding the context of research is another critical direction. Comparative studies across industries, cultural contexts, and organizational types would provide valuable insights into how contextual variables influence the relationships examined in this study. For instance, examining collectivist versus individualist cultures could reveal differences in the relative importance of emotional, continuance, and normative commitment. Finally, exploring additional mediators and moderators could enrich the theoretical framework. Variables such as organizational climate, employee resilience, and digital transformation may play significant roles in shaping the outcomes of change initiatives. Investigating these factors would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive successful innovation during change. In conclusion, this study offers significant contributions to the fields of organizational behavior and innovation management, providing both theoretical advancements and practical guidance. By integrating cognitive, emotional, and relational dimensions of employee engagement, the research underscores the multifaceted nature of innovation during organizational change. Its findings pave the way for future exploration and application, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on how organizations can thrive in dynamic and uncertain environments.

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