Resistance to organisational change can take many forms, such as blind, ideological, and political (Hambrick & Cannella, 1989) resistance. More particularly, many theories of change (e.g. see Lewin, 1951; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Kotter, 1995; Burke, 2002) have been put forward as a means to manage these various forms of resistance. Among these theories is The Self-Based Psychological Theory of Change, SBPTC (Dirks, Cummings & Pierce, 1996), which is based on the idea that the relationship between an individual’s feelings of ownership and inclination for an object (e.g. job, department, organisation) and her or his degree of support or resistance toward change in that object varies under three different dichotomous types of change; namely, (1) self-initiated and imposed change, (2) evolutionary and revolutionary change, and (3) additive and subtractive change (Dirks et al., 1996). This theory is important to managers because it avoids an employee-blaming approach to change (Paterson & Härtel, 2002; Burke, 2005). Using this theory, managers can better understand the situation and conditions under which individuals would promote or resist change (Kiefer, 2002; Walker, Armenakis & Bernerth, 2007). This will help to facilitate communication (Ayoko & Härtel, 2003), reduce process conflicts (Jehn, 1997) and increase problem solving between managers and employees in implementing change effectively (Glick, Miller & Huber, 1993). Despite this importance, limited research has been conducted to date to test the propositions of this theory and no empirical study to date has operationalised and investigated key concepts of the theory.

Moreover, the theory addresses only one contextual variable; psychological ownership, defined as the possessive feeling of ownership of an object (or some aspect of it) (Pierce, Kostova & Dirks, 2001; 2003) and, with few exceptions (e.g. Porras & Robertson, 1992), most change theories have ignored, unexamined, or merely assumed the environment and physical work settings as part of the context (Sack, 1983; Brown, Lawrence & Robinson, 2005; Hall, 1959). Moreover, there has been little consideration for the role of territoriality; that is, individuals’ behavioural expressions of their feelings of ownership (Brown et al., 2005; Altman, 1975) and the relationship between territoriality
and individuals’ possession, ownership (Altman, 1975; Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950) and disposition toward change in their possessions (Dirks et al., 1996).

Therefore, the purpose of our conceptual paper is threefold: (1) to examine explicitly some of the propositions of the self-based psychological theory of change; (2) to extend the theory by exploring the role of territoriality and (3) to investigate the relationship between territoriality and individuals’ disposition toward change. To achieve our purpose, we review primarily theory and research on organisational change, emphasising work published on employees’ responses to change since the publication of the SBPTC, 1996-2012. This is because the SBPTC is about the individual and her or his relationship to the target of change (Dirks et al., 1996) and other important aspects of organisational change (e.g. see Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller & Glick, 1993) such as strategy, structure, performance and technology were beyond the scope of this paper.

**The Self-Based Psychological Theory of Change**

In the SBPTC, Dirks et al. (1996) propose that “the relationship between an individual’s psychological ownership of an object and his or her disposition toward changing that object is moderated by three different dichotomous types of change” (p.1). Moreover, depending on the type of change, Dirks and his colleagues propose that employees’ basic needs of their sense of self will be fulfilled or frustrated (Dirks et al., 1996). A further component is psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001, 2003), which is seen as a key construct that influences individuals’ attitudes and behaviours toward change. In this respect, research has demonstrated that psychological ownership is related to work attitudes such as organisational commitment, satisfaction and involvement (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004; Pendleton, Wilson & Wright, 1998), and organisational citizenship behaviours (VandeWalle, Van Dyne & Kostova, 1995; Van Dyne et al., 2004). Unlike the specific attitudes and behaviours (e.g. commitment and extra-role behaviours) identified in these empirical studies, however, SBPTC deals with attitudes such as inclination to possess and control object of ownership (Dirks et al., 1996) and degree of support for or resistance to change in target (i.e. behaviours).

On the other hand, commitment to change, which is also an attitude, has been shown by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) to correlate with behavioural support for change including compliance,
cooperation, and championing change efforts. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated positive relationships between commitment and psychological ownership (Van Dyne et al., 2004; Pierce, Rubenfeld & Morgan, 1991; VandeWalle et al., 1995), territoriality (Brown, 2005), and behavioural support for change (Herscovitch et al., 2002). Therefore, in our model, we operationalise dispositions toward change as commitment (i.e. commitment to the object of ownership and commitment to change) and behavioural intentions to change (i.e. promoting or resisting change).

In summary, the SBPTC helps us to understand why individuals both promote and resist change efforts (Dirks et al., 1996). The theory does this by enabling researchers to explore the relationship between psychological ownership and individuals’ dispositions toward change. We argue however that few measures exist for disposition toward change (i.e. inclination to possess and control object of ownership). Therefore, we operationalise disposition towards change in our theorising as and individuals’ commitment toward behavioural intentions to promote or resist change. Moreover, we argue that psychological ownership is limited (Dirk et al., 1996) in explaining the complex organisational dynamics (Amburgey, Kelly, & Barnett, 1993) that exist in the work environments and physical settings (Porras & Robertson 1992; Taylor, 1988). We are also aware that both psychological ownership and territoriality are related (Brown, 2005) because they are motivated by similar needs of efficacy, identity and having a sense of place of one’s own (Pierce et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2005) . Given the foregoing, we explore the link between psychological ownership and territoriality. We propose that understanding the link between psychological ownership and territoriality will further deepen our understanding of the link between psychological ownership and organisational change. It will also assist in elucidating the connection between the physical work environment (e.g. open plan offices) and the workplace physical settings (e.g. office layout) which can affect work efficiency, job satisfaction, personal health and organisational performance (Danielsson & Bodin, 2008; Sundstrom, Burt & Kamp, 1980). In the next section, we discuss the role of territoriality in change management.

The Role of Territoriality in Managing Change in Organisations

Territoriality is a social behavioural phenomenon where individuals express behaviourally their feelings of ownership toward a physical or social object (Brown et al., 2005). This object might
be the individual employee’s job, department and organisation (Dirks et al., 1996); or ideas, relationships or possessions (Altman, 1975). We argue that these objects are likely to come under threat during organisational change. This is because the individual’s psychological ownership for these objects (Pierce et al., 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2004) and employees’ identities as expressed in these objects and their territories (Brown et al., 2005) are disrupted. For example, in one study Nathan (2002) reported that employees, upon losing their territory (e.g. workspace) after an office redesign became aggressive and displayed dysfunctional behaviours such as taking over clients’ rooms, barring doors, and hiding workplace equipment (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). These behaviours are possible “red flag” to change; signalling that something has gone wrong in the change program (Lawrence, 1969). If managers ignore these signals, change implementation could result in lack of communication and relational difficulties (Ayoko & Härtel, 2003) including process conflicts (Jehn, 1997); cynicism about change (Reichers, Wanous & Austin, 1997); apathy (Burke, 2005) and managers blaming employees for resisting (Paterson et al., 2002) change efforts.

Furthermore, we expect these behaviours to vary under different conditions of organisational change. For instance, in the SBPTC, Dirks et al. (1996) argue that individuals will promote change efforts under conditions that fulfil their basic needs of self (i.e. self-enhancement, self-continuity and/or control and efficacy) and when change is self-initiated, additive and evolutionary. On the other hand, individuals will resist change efforts that frustrate their basic human needs when change is imposed, subtractive, and/or revolutionary. This dichotomy of change has, however, been challenged by other researchers (e.g. Dunphy & Stace, 1988) who argued that all of the approaches to change (i.e., evolutionary vs. revolutionary; self-initiated vs. imposed; subtractive vs. additive) should be seen as legitimate components of a differentiated contingency strategies of change. In other words, instead of seeing the approaches as either/or, change management strategies should have a place for revolutionary as well as evolutionary; self-initiated as well as imposed; and additive as well as subtractive (Dunphy & Stace, 1988).

A corollary of this is that there is a need to understand change as complementary rather than dichotomous. Thus, in this paper, we refer to all of the approaches to change but under the typologies of types of organisational change such as developmental, transitional and transformational (Ackerman
Anderson, 1986) and conditions of change (i.e. positive vs. negative change). We argue that self-initiated vs. imposed change and additive vs. subtractive change (Dirks et al., 1996) should be classified as conditions of change because they occur under the three types of change but at varying rate. Furthermore, we expect that employees’ attitudes and behaviours to change should vary under these different conditions (i.e. positive or negative change) and types of organisational change (e.g. developmental, transitional or transformational). For instance, in SBPTC Dirks et al. (1996) argue that individuals will promote change efforts under conditions that fulfil their basic needs of self (i.e. self-enhancement, self-continuity and/or control and efficacy) and will resist change efforts that frustrate these needs.

In other words, change that satisfies the individual’s self-needs and is additive, evolutionary and self-initiated should serve to enhance her or his relationship with the target of change and, consequently, the degree of psychological ownership for the object (Dirks et al., 1996). On the other hand, change that frustrates the individual’s self-needs and is subtractive, imposed and revolutionary is likely to affect negatively her or his relationship to the object as well as the individual’s sense of self. In this way, we argue that individuals should be positively disposed toward change that they promote and negatively disposed toward change that they resist under varying conditions of types of changes (Dirks et al., 1996). It is important to note that our conceptualisation of types of change (i.e. subtractive, imposed and revolutionary) as negative is based on individual’s perceptions of change (Dirks et al., 1996; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001). However, some researchers have called for a more comprehensive approach that considers multiple perspectives (i.e. employees and managers) and multi-dimensional view (i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioural responses) to change (Oreg, 2006; Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia & Irmer, 2007).

Extending the previous arguments and emphasising the role of territoriality, we propose that individuals will promote change efforts when their territories are also enhanced and preserved (Brown, 1987; Brown et al. 2005) and when change is perceived to be positive. That is, the change is additive and the individual has some control in initiating the change efforts (Dirks et al., 1996). Such change will allow individuals to maintain their psychological ownership with an object and this will fulfil their basic human needs for a sense of place and an expression of their identities (Pierce et al.,
In this respect, Dirks et al. (1996) and Belk (1988) have argued that having high feelings of ownership for an object means a fusion of the object and self; although the individual and the object are distinct entities.

Therefore, organisational change that preserved or enhanced individuals existing relationships with an object (i.e. psychological ownership) will also allow employees to establish, communicate and express behaviourally (i.e. territorially, Brown et al., 2005) this feeling of ownership.

Consequently, individuals should promote and champion the implementation of change efforts (Herscovitch et al., 2002) because the change has preserved or enhanced their possessions which are their ‘extended selves’ and met their needs for place and identities (Pierce et al., 2001; James, 1890). On the other hand, we expect individuals to resist change efforts when their territories are threatened and disrupted (Brown et al., 2005), because their possessions will be affected and in some cases, these objects are taken away (as in the case of revolutionary change) and never preserved. Consequently, this disruption of the change may impact the individuals’ needs for sense of place, self-identity (Pierce et al., 2003) and their control over their possessions, their self-esteem and sense of continuity (Dirks et al., 1996). Based on these arguments, we propose:

**Proposition 1:** Individuals are positively disposed to promote change efforts under conditions where their psychological ownership and territoriality for an object are enhanced and preserved.

**Proposition 2:** Individuals are negatively disposed to resist change efforts under conditions where their psychological ownership and territoriality for an object are threatened and disrupted.

### The Moderating Role of Organisational Change Type

**Conditions of organisational change**

Dirks et al. (1996) argue that the relationship between individuals’ psychological ownership for an object and their subsequent disposition toward changing that object is moderated by three different dichotomous types of change. That is, when change is self-initiated, evolutionary and additive, individuals’ psychological ownership will be positively related to their disposition toward
change; conversely, when change is imposed, revolutionary and subtractive, individuals’ psychological ownership will be negatively related to their disposition toward change (Pierce et al., 2001; Dirks et al., 1996). As discussed previously, in this research, type of change is defined as developmental, transitional, and transformational (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001; Porras & Robertson, 1992) and conditions of change could be positive (i.e. additive and self-imitated) or negative (i.e. subtractive and imposed). For example, a manager may request training (developmental change, imposed, and additive change) for an employee whose performance is below standard. Alternatively, the employee may take the initiatives (Frese, Garst & Fay, 2007) to enrol in extra studies for the purposes of acquiring new skills, improving their working processes or upgrading existing skills (self-initiated, additive and developmental change) in order to accomplish current or future goals (Anderson et al., 2001). It is important to note here that our discussion of change conditions as positive or negative is based on the SBPTC, which emphasises that, contingent on the types of change, individuals’ basic needs of self should be fulfilled or frustrated (Dirks et al., 1996). In other words, change that is self-initiated, additive and evolutionary (positive change) should fulfil the individual basic needs of control, self-esteem and sense of continuity, identity and having a sense of place.

Consequently, individuals under such positive change condition would be expected to promote and initiate efforts to change and develop their organisations (Dirks et al., 1996; Herscovitch et al., 2002). On the other hand, organisational change such as subtractive, imposed, and revolutionary would be classified as negative because these changes threaten the individual’s needs and, in some cases; can be seen to invade the individual’s territory (i.e., take away her or his possessions). We therefore argue that, under negative change conditions, individuals are likely to resist change efforts.

Moreover, while on the one hand individuals are likely to resist negative change, there can be instances on the other hand where this change condition (positive or negative) may be seen to be complementary (Dunphy et al., 1988; French & Bell, 1999). For example, an organisation may implement change such as mergers, acquisitions, divestures, office relocations or closures and reengineering (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005) that could threaten individuals’ psychological ownership with the object of change (Dirks et al. 1996) and disrupt their territory. We argue that such changes
will be perceived as negative by employees in the short run because their basic human needs would be frustrated. However, over time, the individuals would tend to develop new relationship with the object of change and, when they see positive benefits of the change that materialise in the long run, their perceptions are likely to change from negative to positive.

This example illustrates that change has many facets; including short term vs. long term; fast vs. slow; and new state of affairs vs. modifications on existing system (see also French et al., 1999). We therefore argue that considering change as conditions (i.e. positive vs. negative) will encompass all the various forms and types of change (Gersick, 1991). Consequently, in this paper we discuss two conditions of change (i.e. positive change vs. negative change) and three types of change (i.e. developmental, transitional and transformational) that moderates the relationship between individuals’ ownership and territoriality for objects and their dispositions toward changing that object. In addition, we focus on the dominant features of each change. That is, developmental change is largely positive in nature because it is additive, self-initiated, and evolutionary (Anderson et al., 2001; Dirks et al., 1996); although at times it can be perceived as negative when it is imposed (James, 1890). On the other hand transitional and transformational change (Porras et al., 1992) will be largely negative in nature because they are subtractive, imposed and revolutionary (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Dunphy et al., 1988). Finally, our discussion will focus on the individual’s perspective of the impact of change because change conditions (i.e. positive or negative) may vary at different levels of change. For instance, change may be positive for the organisation because it improves organisational outcomes such as market share and performance (Porras et al., 1992) and negative for the individual because it disrupts their territories and psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2005). Accordingly, we propose:

*Proposition 3a:* Under positive change condition that is self-initiated, additive, and developmental, psychological ownership and territoriality are positively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.

*Proposition 3b:* Under negative change condition that is subtractive, imposed, transitional, and transformational, psychological ownership and territoriality are negatively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.
Types of organisational change

Developmental change refers to improvements of skills, knowledge, method or performance standards (Anderson et al., 2001) and could take the form of modifications in individual or system characteristics without any major shift in beliefs or fundamental assumptions about organisational relationships (Porras et al., 1992). We argue that, under this type of change, individuals having psychological ownership and territoriality for an object will promote change efforts by engaging in self-initiated acts to develop their organisation (Frese et al., 2007; Dirks et al., 1996) or extra-role behaviours (Organ, 1988; VandeWalle et al., 1995) to ensure the successful implementation of the change initiatives (Herscovitch et al., 2002). This is because developmental change as discussed in the previous section, generally, is additive and less threatening (Anderson et al., 2001).

Therefore, on the one hand, developmental change is likely to enhance and to preserve the individuals’ psychological relationships (i.e. territoriality and psychological ownership) to their object; as well as to meet the individuals’ needs for self-esteem, feelings of competence and sense of continuity, identity, and having a place of one’s own (Dirks et al., 1996; Pierce et al., 2001). On the other hand, when developmental change is imposed or the individual feels a sense of loss as a result of the change (Dirks et al., 1996), the possible outcomes of such change efforts may be compliance to change (Herscovitch et al., 2002) or resistance to change because the individuals’ level of territoriality and psychological ownership for the target of change may be high and this might affect their sense of control over the object (Dirks et al., 1996). Although developmental change can be negative, our research focuses only on its dominant condition (i.e. positive). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 4: When developmental change is self-initiated and additive, psychological ownership and territoriality will be positively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.

Unlike developmental change, we propose a negative relationship between an individual’s psychological ownership and territoriality for an object and their subsequent disposition toward change in that object under transitional and transformational changes. These types of change differ from developmental change in that they replace the object of change with something completely different (Anderson et al., 2001). Indeed, this new object that the individual does not own
psychologically replaces the old object that the individual was psychologically tied to (Pierce et al., 2001). For example, organisational changes such as reorganisation, mergers, and acquisitions will require managers to dismantle and to depart emotionally from the old ways of operating (Anderson et al., 2001), and employees will also have to let go psychologically of the object of change, which in turn could affect their sense of continuity and control over the object (Dirks et al., 1996).

Consequently, employees’ level of commitment and satisfaction (Pierce & Dunham, 1987) with the change are likely to reduce and their resistance to change will increase because of the high level of psychological ownership they had for the old object which has been replaced with the new one. Accordingly, we propose:

*Proposition 5a: Under transitional change, psychological ownership will be negatively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.*

Similarly, transitional change such as plant and office relocations or reengineering of workflow can disrupt individuals’ territories and identities because individuals in the organisation will be required to “redraw territorial boundaries and reinterpret the meanings attached to a variety of organisational spaces, relationships, roles and possessions” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 589). We argue that, under this type of change, individuals can be expected to react negatively because their psychological relationship (i.e. ownership, sense of control and identity) to the object is threatened. This will in turn result in varying degree of reactions including voice (e.g., discussion or pleading), passive resistance, and compliance (Herscovitch et al., 2002) and actual aggressive behaviours (Lyman & Scott, 1967; Goffman, 1971; Altman, 1975) in order to defend their territory as in the case of the angry workers in the office redesign project (Nathan, 2002). Thus, we propose:

*Proposition 5b: Under transitional change, territoriality will be negatively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.*

Finally, whilst human and cultural issues are present in transitional change, they are not the key drivers as in transformational change where a radical shift is required in culture, behaviour, and mindset (Anderson et al., 2001). This type of change has all of the characteristics that make change unattractive to employees. For instance, it threatens individuals’ sense of control, self-continuity, and their object of attachment because it is often imposed, subtractive and revolutionary in nature (Dirks
et al., 1996; Pierce et al., 2001). We expect individuals to relate negatively under this type of change by displaying varying forms of rational or irrational behaviours ranging from sabotage, withdrawal and contributing minimally, to reduce work output (Strauss, 1963). In addition, this type of change is likely to meet resistance from employees because, as we mentioned earlier, the major differentiator between transformational change and transitional change is the “degree of focus required for the human and cultural” (Anderson et al., 2001, p.37) issues. Consequently, we propose:

Proposition 6: Under transformational change, psychological ownership and territoriality will be negatively related to an individual’s disposition toward change.

In summary, the three types of change have impact on individuals’ psychological ownership and territoriality for their possessions and objects in the workplace. Depending on the degree and depth of impact (Anderson et al., 2001) of the change, individuals’ disposition to change will vary from initiating efforts to support the change (Herscovitch et al., 2002) to resisting efforts directed at organisational change; thereby resulting in different degrees of fulfilment or frustration of the individuals’ basic human needs (Dirks et al., 1996). In addition, we argue that all the conditions of change (i.e. positive vs. negative) and types of change (i.e. developmental, transitional and transformation) can have implications for organisational and individual outcomes (Porras et al., 1992).

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed a conceptual model based on the Self-Based Psychological Theory of Change, and derived series of testable propositions regarding the role of psychological ownership and territoriality in change. Specifically, our theoretical model extends the SBPTC by exploring the role of territoriality (Brown et al., 2005) and examining its relationship to an individual’s dispositions toward changes in his or her possessions (Dirks et al., 1996) during organisational change.

We acknowledge, however, that our model has a number of limitations. Firstly, our discussion of territoriality in this paper was limited to behaviours (Altman, 1975; Brown et al., 2005). Although we acknowledged the multifunctional nature of territoriality (Brown, 1987) and avoided operationalising the construct in terms of active defence (Edney, 1976) our research did not address
other important facets of territoriality such as territorial cognitions and affect (Russell & Ward, 1982; Brown, 1987). While beyond the scope of our paper, including these elements holds potential to increase further our understanding of the different components of territoriality. This is because major reviews of territoriality (Altman, 1975; Edney, 1974; Brown, 1987; Taylor, 1988; Brown et al., 2005) have suggested that the study of territoriality has progressed from the biological approach to the social approach to an emergent psychosocial approach where psychological processes such as cognitions and affects are emphasised (Brown, 1987).

A second limitation is that we operationalised disposition toward change in this research as “commitment to the organisation and commitment to change” (Herscovitch et al., 2002, p.476) and behavioural intentions (i.e. promoting or resisting change). This is in contrast to the “inclination to possess and control whatever is the object of ownership” (Dirks et al., 1996, p.14) and behavioural intentions originally proposed by Dirks and his colleagues. In particular, their theory assumes that the basic human needs of self-continuity, self-enhancement, sense of control and efficacy could influence psychological ownership. Exploring these needs as antecedents of psychological ownership should open up avenues for future research in understanding the psychology of possession (Furby, 1980) in organisations.

In conclusion, SBPTC can help us understand why individuals will promote and resist change efforts in organisations (Dirks et al., 1996). We have developed in this paper a conceptual model that extends this basic idea of the theory. In particular, we explored the role of territoriality in strengthening psychological ownership as independent variables and we operationalised the dependent variable of disposition toward change and the moderator, types of change in the theory. We anticipate future research to build on our model and to test the propositions derived from the model in organisational settings.
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Extending the Self-based Psychological Theory of Change:
The Role of Territoriality in Managing Change in Organisations

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ABSTRACT

In this conceptual paper, we argue that the Self-based Psychological Theory of Change (SBPTC) can help explain why individuals will promote and resist change efforts in organisations. In particular, we develop a conceptual model that explores the role of a relatively new concept, organisational territoriality, as a means to understand the independent variable (psychological ownership) within the theory. We also operationalise the dependent variable, disposition toward change, as commitment to organisation and commitment to change. Finally, we propose that types of change (i.e. developmental, transitional and transformational) and conditions of change (i.e. positive or negative change) moderate the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Keywords: territoriality, psychological ownership, types of organisational change, theories of change, change management, resisting change.