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Effective Leadership in Change Management: Ensuring Success in Organizational Transformation

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Abstract

Organisational change is an intricate and often challenging process that requires careful planning and execution. As organisations attempt to implement change, many encounter difficulties in achieving their intended objectives. In some cases, the costs associated with change—whether financial, operational, or emotional—can outweigh the anticipated benefits, leading to resistance and setbacks. Despite these obstacles, the need for organisational change has become more pressing than ever. In today's fast-paced and constantly evolving business environment, driven largely by technological advancements, organisations that fail to adapt risk becoming obsolete. To survive and thrive, organisations must embrace change as an essential part of their strategic agenda. This research aimed to investigate the role of leadership in managing organisational change. Leadership has long been recognised as a critical factor in determining the success or failure of change initiatives. The findings of this study underscore the centrality of effective leadership in navigating the complexities of organisational transformation. Leaders are not only responsible for guiding the organisation through the technicalities of change but also for managing the human and emotional aspects of the transition. The study identified several key roles that leaders must take on during a change process. First and foremost, leaders must be able to motivate employees, ensuring that they remain engaged and committed to the change initiative. This involves not only inspiring employees to embrace change but also addressing their concerns and uncertainties through open communication. Leaders also need to develop and communicate a clear vision for change that aligns with the organisation's overall goals. This vision serves as a roadmap for the transformation, helping employees understand the reasons behind the change and how it will benefit both the organisation and themselves. Effective communication is vital to the success of any change initiative. Leaders must ensure that they communicate change in a way that is transparent, timely, and consistent. This includes clearly outlining what will change, why it is necessary, and how it will affect employees at all levels. In addition to communication, leaders must be adept at planning for change by anticipating potential challenges and preparing the organisation for the transition. This requires strategic thinking, resource allocation, and the ability to manage both short-term disruptions and long-term goals. Creating a conducive environment for change is another important responsibility of leaders. This includes fostering a culture of flexibility and innovation, where employees feel supported and empowered to embrace new ways of working. A positive organisational culture, underpinned by trust and collaboration, can significantly enhance the success of change efforts. Additionally, leaders must focus on getting employees' buy-in. Without the support and commitment of employees, even the best-planned change initiatives can falter. Leaders must engage employees in the process, encouraging participation and feedback to ensure that the change is seen as a collective effort rather than a top-down mandate. Finally, leading by example is an essential component of successful change management. Leaders must embody the values and behaviours they wish to see in their employees, demonstrating commitment to the change process through their actions. When leaders visibly embrace change and exhibit resilience in the face of challenges, they set a powerful example for others to follow. The findings of this study reinforce the critical role of leadership in managing organisational change. Effective leadership is a multifaceted responsibility that requires a combination of vision, communication, motivation, strategic planning, and personal example. Organisations that invest in strong, capable leaders will be better positioned to navigate the complexities of change and achieve sustainable success in an increasingly dynamic business environment.

Keywords: Organizational Change, Leadership, Change Management, Employee Engagement, Strategic Planning

JEL Codes: M12, M14, L20, O15

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of global economic and technological shifts has compelled financial institutions to rethink and redesign their business models to reduce costs and better serve their customers. The organisation under study, as a financial entity, has been actively adapting to these ongoing changes within its market. In response to evolving business conditions, the company undertook a fundamental shift in its business model, focusing on developing a more customer-centric approach. According to van Dierendonck and Sousa (2016), global competition and a turbulent business environment have driven organisations to rapidly adjust, creating significant uncertainty that affects their workforce. The primary aim of organisational change is often to enhance overall performance (Carter et al., 2013), yet the catalysts for continuous change in today's business

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environment are multifaceted. İkinci (2014) identifies several key factors—such as mergers, downsizing, and acquisitions—that compel organisations to evolve. These changes often create an atmosphere of anxiety among employees, leading to resistance and a sense of vulnerability (van Dierendonck and Sousa, 2016).

Organisational change, while essential, is a complex and challenging undertaking. Many organisations that initiate change efforts fail to achieve their desired outcomes, and some experience significant losses in the process. Ganta and Manukonda (2017) highlight that around 70% of organisational change initiatives fail to deliver their expected results. Despite these challenges, embracing change has become more crucial than ever for organisations seeking to remain competitive and succeed in an increasingly volatile business environment. The accelerating pace of technological innovation worldwide has heightened the urgency of change, with organisations adopting new digital technologies to stay ahead. As Mikołajczyk (2022) observes, the speed of change has increased dramatically, influencing not only individual industries but the global economy as a whole. A key driver of this transformation is digitalisation, which is inextricably linked to the fourth industrial revolution (Kaputa, Loučanová, & Tejerina-Gaite, 2022). Digital transformation is compelling organisations to overhaul their traditional business models, integrate new technologies to improve operational efficiency, and increase profitability. The role of leadership in managing organisational change has been widely recognised as critical. Taylor, Cornelius, and Colvin (2013) argue that effective leadership is vital for ensuring the successful implementation of change. Leaders provide the necessary guidance, support, and direction that help organisations navigate the complexities of transformation and achieve their desired future outcomes. As businesses increasingly rely on technological solutions, leadership becomes even more significant in managing the rapid pace of change. This study aims to identify the key leadership roles and strategies that can enhance the success of organisational change, especially in an environment marked by technological advancements and the fast-evolving demands of the market.

While organisational change presents significant challenges, it is an essential response to the dynamic forces shaping the modern business landscape. For organisations, particularly in the financial sector, to survive and thrive, adapting to technological change and embracing new business models is no longer optional but a necessity. Strong leadership plays a pivotal role in steering these efforts, ensuring that change is not only accepted but embraced, and that its implementation results in sustained organisational success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership is a process of influencing individuals to act in ways that help achieve the collective goals of a group (Paais et al., 2020). Effective leaders inspire staff, foster confidence, and build trust within their teams (Ghavifekr et al., 2019). In today's dynamic and complex business landscape, organisations need leaders who understand the challenges posed by rapid change (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2014). Leadership styles are varied, with no single set of universal skills and approaches, as every situation may demand different leadership behaviours (Tourish, 2014). However, leadership is especially critical during times of change, as it provides the guidance and support necessary to implement successful transitions and steer the organisation toward its future goals (Asbari et al., 2021). Burnes et al. (2016) argue that leadership and change are fundamentally interconnected; they cannot be viewed separately. This view is echoed by Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015), who assert that leadership is essential for organisations to respond effectively and promptly to shifts in the business environment. These authors also highlight that leaders recognise the importance of change, as it can be vital for an organisation's survival. Despite the complexities of change, leaders embrace it because they believe it will ultimately improve organisational performance (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). While much research on change management has focused on managing the process itself, Van den Heuvel et al. (2014) note that many organisations still struggle to achieve their change goals. As organisations constantly evolve through practices like re-engineering and innovation, it is increasingly crucial for employees to adapt, particularly by adjusting their behaviour to maintain a competitive edge (Van den Heuvel et al., 2014). The success of restructuring efforts often hinges on how well organisations coordinate their information technology (Njuguna & Wanjohi, 2021). Despite the abundant literature on change, there remains a gap in understanding how employees' behaviours impact the success of these transitions (Van den Heuvel et al., 2014).

Dominguez et al. (2015) highlight the paradox of change: organisations strive for stability while simultaneously needing to evolve in response to a constantly changing environment. Change may be necessary for survival, yet changes that challenge a firm's existing values and culture can be seen as illegitimate by employees (Perrigino et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial for organisations to align change initiatives with their vision and long-term goals. Factors such as market competition, government regulations, and ecological pressures often drive firms to change. Despite various recommended strategies, change initiatives still face high failure rates (Dominguez et al., 2015). For change to succeed, both the organisation and its employees must be ready to embrace it. Employee readiness to change has been identified as a key factor in preventing failure (Engida et al., 2022). The speed with which an organisation learns and adapts in a dynamic environment can significantly enhance its chances of survival. Zafar and Naveed (2014) further assert that communication plays a critical role in reducing resistance to change. Key messages that need to be communicated to employees during transitions include the potential impact of change on their current roles, how it aligns with the organisation's core values, and how it will ultimately benefit both the organisation and its staff (Men et al., 2020). A lack of communication is frequently cited as a primary reason for change failures. Moreover, Van den Heuvel et al. (2014) point out that organisations often fail in their change efforts if the transformation threatens employees' sense of identity within the organisation. This concept is known

as organisational identification, and it plays a critical role in how employees respond to change. Organisational leaders have a pivotal role to play during change, particularly when responding to external pressures (Taylor et al., 2014). The failure of organisational change can manifest in various ways, ranging from minor technical errors to more significant breakdowns and large-scale failures resulting from transformational strategies or mistakes made during incremental changes (Schwarz et al., 2021). Servant leadership is a style that emphasizes serving others and helping followers develop a strong sense of service and commitment to the organisation. Leaders who adopt this approach focus on empowering their team members and providing them with the support, training, and resources they need to succeed. By acting as role models, servant leaders inspire employees to adopt the same values of service and integrity, encouraging them to become more selfless, empathetic, and service-oriented in their roles (Bauer et al., 2019). This leadership style fosters trust and collaboration, making it particularly effective in environments where teamwork and employee development are crucial. Through their actions, servant leaders instill a sense of community and shared purpose, enabling employees to feel more connected to the organisation's mission and values (Lemoine et al., 2019). In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on motivating and inspiring employees to exceed their own expectations and strive for higher levels of performance. Transformational leaders are known for their ability to foster creativity and innovation within their teams. Their leadership style is particularly effective in identifying new opportunities for growth and helping organisations develop their core competencies to stay competitive in a rapidly changing market (Shafi et al., 2020). Research has shown that transformational leaders encourage their employees to take risks, embrace new ideas, and take ownership of their work, all of which stimulate creativity and innovation. By promoting a culture of continuous improvement, transformational leaders help employees see change as an opportunity rather than a threat, empowering them to think outside the box and contribute to the organisation's growth (Shafi et al., 2020). Additionally, transformational leaders actively support the personal and professional development of their followers, helping them unlock their full potential and achieve higher levels of performance.

The relationship between leadership style and employee performance has been widely studied, with evidence suggesting that transformational leadership is particularly effective in improving employee performance (Nugroho et al., 2020). This is because transformational leaders create an environment where employees feel motivated and empowered to go above and beyond their job requirements. Unlike transactional leadership, which is primarily focused on monitoring employee behaviour and rewarding them based on their performance (Baig et al., 2021), transformational leadership inspires employees to pursue higher goals and embrace challenges that lead to innovation and progress. The transformational approach fosters an intrinsic motivation to perform at higher levels, as employees are inspired by their leaders' vision and commitment to personal growth. While transactional leadership focuses on the exchange of rewards for performance, it plays an important role in organisations that require structure, discipline, and clear performance expectations. Transactional leaders focus on monitoring and correcting employee behaviour, using contingent rewards or punishments to reinforce desired actions (Baig et al., 2021). While this leadership style can effectively maintain order and productivity, it may not be as effective in environments where creativity, innovation, and employee engagement are key drivers of success.

Transformational leaders, on the other hand, have a profound impact on employee engagement. By inspiring employees with a compelling vision and aligning them with the organisation's long-term goals, transformational leaders help foster a deep sense of commitment to the organisation. Penava and Šehić (2014) assert that leaders are in the ideal position to guide employees through organisational change. A well-articulated vision and clear communication from leadership can help reduce resistance to change, as employees are more likely to embrace change when they understand its necessity and alignment with the company's goals. However, without effective communication and leadership support, employees may become resistant to change, especially if they do not perceive it as beneficial or if it threatens their sense of identity within the organisation. This is why employee engagement is essential for successful organisational change. Magsaysay and Hechanova (2017) stress that engaging employees throughout the change process is critical. When employees feel involved in the decision-making process and understand how the change aligns with the company's vision, they are more likely to support and participate in the change. Leadership must not only communicate the reasons for change but also actively involve employees in shaping the process. This inclusive approach ensures that employees feel valued and are more willing to adapt to new practices or systems that are being introduced. Moreover, transformational leaders play a key role in managing the emotional aspect of change. Employees are often apprehensive about the unknown, and leadership is responsible for alleviating these fears by providing clear, transparent, and consistent communication. Leaders must be able to empathize with their employees' concerns and offer reassurance, support, and practical resources to help them navigate the change. By addressing employees' emotional and practical needs, transformational leaders create an environment of trust and cooperation, which makes it easier to implement change smoothly and successfully.

Leadership also plays an instrumental role in shaping employees' perceptions of the change. As Penava and Šehić (2014) suggest, when employees fail to understand the importance or benefits of a change, they are more likely to resist it. Leaders must make a compelling case for the change, illustrating how it fits into the larger vision and strategic direction of the organisation. Additionally, leaders should ensure that employees have the necessary resources and support to transition effectively, whether through training, new tools, or a supportive work culture. Leadership is a critical factor in managing organisational change. Both transformational and servant leadership styles can contribute to successful change initiatives, though they do so in different ways. While servant leaders focus on serving and empowering their followers, transformational leaders inspire creativity, innovation, and commitment to a shared vision. For change to be successful, leaders must not only

provide a clear and compelling vision but also engage employees at every step of the process, addressing their emotional, psychological, and practical needs. By doing so, leaders can create an environment that encourages employees to embrace change and work together to achieve the organisation's goals.

Organisational change is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon, and addressing the challenges it presents requires a systematic and coordinated approach. Due to the intricate nature of change, leaders are expected to provide critical support and guidance throughout the process. The effectiveness of leadership plays a central role in managing this change and ensuring the achievement of desired organisational goals (Jacobs et al., 2013). Effective leadership ensures not only the successful execution of change but also mitigates potential negative outcomes. It is essential that employees, who are primarily responsible for the execution of change, are seen as key players in the transformation process. Organisations that recognise this are more likely to succeed in implementing meaningful and lasting change (Hussain et al., 2018). Leadership, however, is a multifaceted concept that demands various competencies and roles. Leaders are expected to fulfil a range of functions, from shaping employees' understanding of tasks and setting performance goals to providing motivation and conducting evaluations. These tasks require different skills and approaches, which makes leadership especially complex (Van Wart, 2013). During periods of organisational change, the role of the leader becomes even more critical. Leaders are not only expected to fulfil traditional managerial roles, such as setting goals and motivating employees, but they must also guide employees through the often uncertain and challenging terrain of change. This involves providing emotional support, maintaining effective communication, and ensuring that employees remain focused and motivated despite potential disruptions (Hussain et al., 2018).

An effective leader is one who can anticipate and prevent the negative impacts of organisational change. This ability to foresee challenges and address them proactively is crucial for maintaining employee morale and productivity (Jacobs et al., 2013). Many scholars suggest that transformational leadership is particularly suited to environments where change is constant, as it promotes inclusivity and encourages employee involvement in the change process (Lewa et al., 2022). Transformational leadership fosters an atmosphere where employees feel empowered to contribute ideas, embrace innovation, and work collaboratively toward achieving organisational objectives. This approach, characterised by a focus on motivation, creativity, and vision, is highly effective in managing dynamic and complex changes. In fact, some scholars argue that a charismatic-transformational leadership style, which combines both transformational and charismatic elements, can be even more effective in driving change (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Leaders who demonstrate genuine care for their employees, treat them with respect, and take their needs into consideration tend to foster higher levels of engagement, performance, and commitment from their teams (Yasin Ghadi et al., 2013).

To ensure the success of organisational change, leadership must undertake a variety of responsibilities. These include communicating the scope and significance of the change to employees, providing ongoing feedback, and ensuring that employees have the necessary resources to adapt. Leaders must also be proactive in recognising and rewarding employee efforts, as these actions not only motivate employees but also reinforce their commitment to the change process (Hartge et al., 2015). Another crucial aspect is the ability of leaders to evaluate available resources and assess employees' needs. Effective leaders must communicate clear and compelling goals, build trust, and offer reassurance to employees throughout the change process. By doing so, they create an environment where employees feel secure and supported, which enhances the likelihood of successful change implementation (Adil, 2014). Leadership qualities that promote effective change are not limited to just communication and motivation. Trust and credibility also play a significant role in the success of the transformation process. Leaders must demonstrate honesty, openness, and integrity to gain and maintain the confidence of their employees (Caulfield & Senger, 2017). When employees trust their leaders, they are more likely to buy into the change process and actively support it. Furthermore, the competence of leaders in executing the change is critical. Leaders who are well-informed, skilled, and experienced are better equipped to navigate the complexities of change and guide their teams through challenging transitions. Competent leaders are able to provide clear direction, ensure that tasks are executed efficiently, and make informed decisions that benefit the organisation (Van Wart, 2013).

An important aspect of leadership during change is the ability to include employees in the process. Leaders must create a sense of ownership among employees by involving them in decision-making and ensuring they understand the value and purpose of the change (Caulfield & Senger, 2017). By encouraging inclusivity, leaders can increase employee commitment and support for the change initiative. Respecting employees and treating them with dignity is also essential for building trust and fostering a positive organisational culture. When employees feel valued and respected by their leaders, they are more likely to embrace change and actively participate in the transformation process (Van Dierendonck & Sousa, 2016). Another key element of effective leadership during organisational change is decision-making. Leaders must often make difficult decisions, especially when facing complex challenges or resistance from employees. The ability to make timely and informed decisions can help guide the organisation through uncertainty and ensure that change efforts stay on track. This decision-making process requires leaders to balance short-term challenges with long-term objectives, while also considering the potential impact on employees, resources, and overall organisational health (Hartge et al., 2015).

Empathy is another crucial characteristic of leadership during change. Effective leaders must be able to understand and address the emotional and psychological needs of their employees. During periods of change, employees often experience uncertainty, anxiety, and fear about the future. Leaders who demonstrate empathy and provide reassurance can help alleviate these concerns, creating a supportive environment that enables employees to remain engaged and focused on their tasks (Van Dierendonck & Sousa, 2016). Additionally, leaders who are empathetic are better able to provide tailored support to individuals, which can be

especially important in large-scale organisational changes that affect employees differently. Leadership plays a pivotal role in navigating the challenges of organisational change. The effectiveness of leaders in managing change depends on their ability to fulfil a wide range of roles and responsibilities, including communication, motivation, decision-making, and empathy. Transformational and charismatic leadership styles, in particular, are effective in fostering employee engagement and supporting the change process. Leaders must not only provide a clear vision and guidance but also involve employees in the change process, address their emotional needs, and provide ongoing support. By demonstrating competence, empathy, and inclusivity, leaders can ensure that organisational change is not only successfully implemented but also embraced by employees, leading to long-term organisational growth and success (Lemoine, Hartnell & Leroy, 2019; Shafi et al., 2020; Gilley et al., 2009). The process of implementing organisational change is often viewed as complex, requiring a careful, well-planned, and coordinated approach. Baesu and Bejinaru (2014) propose a five-stage change process, which is considered effective for guiding organisations through this intricate transformation. Each stage has its own set of leadership actions that can significantly influence the overall success of the change. The first stage, called the *commanding style*, involves a results-oriented leadership approach where leaders encourage employees to learn through direct action. In the *logical style* phase, leaders focus on innovation, prudently managing the change process, and continuously gathering information to adapt and improve the approach. The *inspirational style* encourages leaders to build trust with employees and identify opportunities for change, while the *supportive style* involves providing ongoing support to employees and ensuring their active participation in the change process.

Leaders, according to these stages, are seen as individuals who hold power and authority, using their influence to make decisions and implement change effectively. Their role is crucial, both directly and indirectly, in influencing employees' commitment to change. Effective leadership promotes readiness to change, which in turn fosters a sense of commitment to the change process (Hussain et al., 2018). Packard (2013) further emphasizes the necessity of leaders planning and designing systems that create an infrastructure for change, ensuring its smooth implementation. This dual role—where leaders manage through authority and guide through personal influence—helps leaders balance managerial responsibilities with entrepreneurial skills, making the entrepreneurial leadership style particularly valuable during change (Sandybayev, 2019). Implementing change is not a routine task; it requires a leadership style that goes beyond traditional management functions. Magsaysay and Hechanova (2017) highlight that leadership must oversee the entire change process, guiding it to success by adapting to the dynamic nature of change. Krapfl and Kruja (2015) identify three crucial yet often overlooked characteristics of effective leadership communication during change. First, leaders must provide employees with a comprehensive understanding of the work that needs to be accomplished, creating a holistic picture of the change. Second, leaders should communicate clearly and provide all necessary information to employees to minimize confusion and resistance. Third, active listening is essential as it allows leaders to gauge employees' understanding and address any concerns or confusion they may have.

In addition to the communication strategies outlined, Baesu and Bejinaru (2014) propose a model that includes five key stages of change: planning, enabling, launching, catalysing, and maintaining. Each stage requires different leadership actions. The *planning stage* involves leaders explaining the change, identifying opportunities, and preparing the workforce. The *enabling stage* focuses on influencing and empowering employees, helping them adapt to the changes. The *launching stage* involves executing the change plan to achieve the set goals, while the *catalyst stage* is about motivating employees, offering support, and stimulating commitment. Finally, the *maintaining stage* requires leaders to provide ongoing guidance, ensuring the change is sustained over time. Resistance from employees is often a challenge during organisational change, and leadership plays a critical role in overcoming this resistance. By motivating followers, creating a supportive environment, maintaining clear communication, and resolving employees' issues, leaders can alleviate concerns and build trust (Khan et al., 2016). Li, Sun, Tao, and Lee (2021) stress that effective communication is crucial in helping employees understand the necessity of change and encouraging their support for the process. Leaders who succeed in creating a strong leader-member exchange, characterised by open two-way communication, are better positioned to drive successful change initiatives (van den Heuvel et al., 2014). Some scholars even advocate for sustainable leadership, which focuses on long-term success by balancing environmental, business, and social values through strategic decision-making (Du & Yan, 2022).

Korbi (2015) identifies several leadership aspects essential for successfully implementing change. First, leaders must provide a strategic vision that aligns the organisation's goals with the broader external environment. This vision helps employees understand how the change will be implemented. Leaders should also identify the need for change, find strategic responses, and communicate the rationale behind the new strategy. Overcoming resistance is another crucial task, with leaders needing to build political support and develop influence within the organisation. Leaders must delegate tasks, engage employees, and encourage dialogue to create a commitment to change (Korbi, 2015). Employees' readiness for change is another key element in the success of change initiatives. As Asbari, Hidayat, and Purwanto (2021) explain, readiness for change is built upon employees' acceptance of change plans and their ability to reflect on the context, content, and individual attributes of the changes being introduced. Leaders must foster an environment where employees not only understand but also embrace the upcoming changes, allowing for smoother implementation. Acknowledging employees for their contributions during the change process is an important leadership action. Jones and Harris (2014) argue that recognizing milestones fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among employees, which accelerates the overall change process. Johannsdottir et al. (2015) further suggest that leadership must demonstrate commitment and integrity by acting as role models, aligning their actions

with the change they advocate for. This alignment between words and actions is essential for gaining employees' trust and ensuring that change is successfully realised. The successful implementation of organisational change depends significantly on the leadership style and behaviours exhibited throughout the process. Leaders who provide clear communication, strategic vision, and support, while also addressing resistance and fostering employee commitment, are more likely to achieve successful outcomes. The five-stage model of change, which includes stages such as planning, enabling, launching, catalysing, and maintaining, provides a structured approach for leaders to guide organisations through change. Furthermore, effective leadership during change is characterised by proactive decision-making, strategic thinking, and a focus on empowering employees, ultimately leading to a sustainable and successful transformation (Baesu & Bejinaru, 2014; Magsaysay & Hechanova, 2017; Korbi, 2015; Johannsdottir et al., 2015). Appelbaum et al. (2015) highlight that, despite the initiatives and efforts made by organisational leadership to drive and lead change, the actual implementation of change occurs at various levels within the organisation. This underscores the importance of leaders understanding the sources of resistance and the reasons why employees may reject change (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020). By identifying these obstacles, leaders can adjust the change plan, remove barriers, and encourage employees to embrace the transformation. Leadership, therefore, plays a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to change by honestly communicating information related to the change process and setting a clear direction for the future of the firm (Appelbaum et al., 2015).

Van der Voet et al. (2014) argue that change leadership is fundamentally concerned with the leader's commitment to change. The primary responsibility of change leadership is to inspire followers to adopt a positive attitude towards the change process, which is essential for achieving the goals set for the transformation. Furthermore, the influence of leadership extends beyond direct interaction with employees; it also enhances the quality of communication and fosters subordinate participation, both of which are critical to the successful execution of organisational change (Van der Voet et al., 2014). This view aligns with Rogiest et al. (2015), who assert that the quality of communication plays a pivotal role in reducing uncertainty and anxiety among employees, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in the change process. Appelbaum et al. (2015) also stress that leadership must not only endorse the values aligned with the change but actively practice and promote these values to create a supportive and empowering environment for the change to take root.

The positive reaction of employees to change is often seen as a crucial indicator of successful change implementation (Agote et al., 2016). When employees feel that they are well-informed, respected, and supported, their engagement with the change process increases, thus improving the likelihood of success. To facilitate this, Appelbaum et al. (2015) argue that leadership must work to cultivate a conducive environment for change. This involves articulating a clear strategic direction for the organisation and ensuring that feedback from employees is gathered throughout the change process. Involving middle managers at the early stages of the change initiative is essential, as they can provide valuable input and, subsequently, influence the broader workforce. By empowering middle managers and encouraging their involvement, leaders can better mobilise the entire organisation to support the change (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Kin et al. (2014) offer a framework for leadership competency, outlining four critical elements necessary for the successful implementation of change: reducing resistance and conflict, capacity building, institutionalisation, and goal framing. These competencies enable leaders to address the challenges of change more effectively and ensure that the transformation is sustainable. The level of trust employees place in their leaders significantly impacts their emotional response to the change process, which in turn influences the overall success of the initiative (Agote et al., 2016). Leadership that fosters trust, demonstrates empathy, and maintains open lines of communication can create an environment where employees are more likely to accept and engage with the change process.

Ferguson et al. (2015) discuss three essential leadership levels during change implementation: initiators, managers, and responders. Leaders as *initiators* are responsible for formulating long-term, clear policies with a well-defined intent for change. As *managers*, they focus on controlling resources, managing budgets, and putting the necessary procedures in place to support the change process. Finally, as *responders*, leaders take into account the views and concerns of subordinates, ensuring that their input is heard and addressed. This multi-level approach to leadership ensures that the change process is well-coordinated, supported, and responsive to the needs of employees at all levels of the organisation. The successful implementation of organisational change requires leaders to adopt a comprehensive approach that combines strategic foresight, effective communication, and an understanding of the factors that influence employee behavior. Leaders must recognise the importance of addressing resistance, promoting trust, and involving employees in the change process. By applying these leadership principles, organisations can increase their chances of successfully navigating the challenges of change and achieving the desired outcomes. The work of scholars such as Appelbaum et al. (2015), Van der Voet et al. (2014), and Ferguson et al. (2015) provides valuable insights into the critical leadership actions needed to guide organisations through periods of transformation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews to collect data from participants. This method allowed for the use of probing questions, which facilitated the gathering of rich and detailed information. The research was exploratory in nature, enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Saunders et al. (2016), exploratory studies are valuable when there is limited prior knowledge or insight into the topic, allowing the researcher to uncover new perspectives and develop a comprehensive

understanding of the issue at hand. Such studies often employ various data collection methods, including interviews and literature reviews, to explore the subject matter thoroughly. In this study, open-ended questions were used to facilitate the discovery of underlying issues, helping to generate a nuanced understanding of the topic. As Saunders et al. (2016) suggest, exploratory research typically involves asking broad, open-ended questions that encourage participants to express their views and experiences, thereby providing the researcher with in-depth knowledge of the research problem. For participant selection, purposive homogeneous sampling was chosen as the most appropriate strategy. This sampling method enabled the researcher to focus on individuals with specific characteristics that aligned with the study's objectives. The participants were selected based on their roles as heads of department managers who actively engage in leadership functions during organisational change. This ensured that the sample consisted of individuals who were directly involved in the leadership and management of change processes, providing valuable insights into the research topic. The data collection process involved conducting telephone interviews, which were tape-recorded for accuracy and later transcribed for analysis. In addition to the recordings, the researcher took notes during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues and additional details that might be relevant to the study. This approach allowed for a comprehensive and systematic collection of data, ensuring that the insights gained were both reliable and rich in content.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study emphasize the critical role of communication in the successful implementation of organizational change. While other elements such as planning and implementation are important, the majority of participants agreed that effective communication, particularly explaining the reasons behind change to employees, is essential for reducing resistance and securing employee buy-in. Respondent A's perspective encapsulates the importance of clear communication in the organization during times of change. He explained how the company ensures that employees understand the necessity of change, which significantly reduces apprehension and fosters a more positive attitude towards the transition. The study revealed that the organization under investigation adopts an open-door policy that promotes open communication both from the top down and bottom up. This approach encourages employees to voice their opinions and provide feedback on the change initiatives. This inclusive communication approach indicates that leadership understands the significance of maintaining continuous engagement with employees throughout the change process. The majority of the participants in the study concurred that meetings, both formal and informal, are the primary platforms for communicating change. Informal communication, such as casual discussions, was also mentioned as an important means of fostering understanding and reducing resistance.

The findings align with the work of Christensen (2014), who emphasizes that the effective communication of change, including the dissemination of relevant information, is crucial for its success. Communication during change should be seen as a two-way process, where management not only disseminates information but also actively seeks feedback from employees. This reciprocal communication ensures that employees feel involved and heard, which can significantly enhance their willingness to embrace the change. In support of these findings, Berjon et al. (2015) highlight the growing use of instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, in organizational communication. WhatsApp was mentioned in the study as a cost-effective tool that allows for instant and widespread dissemination of information, making it an ideal platform for maintaining communication during change processes. Malgas and Henrie (2017) also argue that effective communication is vital for promoting planned change initiatives and fostering employee participation. They suggest that leadership should not only communicate clearly but also engage in two-way dialogue, providing timely responses to concerns and promoting active participation. This approach helps build a consensus, even when there are areas of disagreement, and ensures that employees feel included in the decision-making process.

Further support for the significance of communication during change comes from Petrou et al. (2018), who affirm that communication is one of the most effective strategies for enhancing employee adjustment to change. Their study suggests that a well-articulated communication strategy can help employees understand the reasons behind the change and encourage them to embrace the new direction. Similarly, Krapfl and Kruja (2015) emphasize the importance of leadership in providing necessary information to subordinates and ensuring that communication is clear and effective throughout the change process. The findings from this study also suggest that leadership empowers employees by giving them the autonomy to make decisions and actively participate in the change process. This approach reflects a modern trend in organizational leadership, where employees are more involved in strategic planning and decision-making, as opposed to the traditional top-down approach (Zafar and Naveed, 2014). The findings align with the conclusions of Russ (2009), who highlighted that lack of decision-making authority and access to resources can significantly challenge employees during organizational change. In line with van der Heuvel et al. (2014), the study found that supportive leadership and the provision of personal resources were essential for employees' adjustment to change. Communication from management is also key to fostering employee readiness for change, as it helps reduce uncertainty and builds trust in the leadership.

The study's findings also indicate that leadership plays a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of change to ensure its success. Louw and Venter (2013) support this by suggesting that leadership is responsible for managing and controlling the implementation of strategy. Effective leadership involves translating strategic goals into performance measures that employees can understand and follow. Furthermore, the leadership role extends beyond monitoring; it also involves actively engaging employees to maintain their commitment and motivation throughout the change process. This aligns with Nyström

et al. (2013), who argue that the change process includes planning, implementation, and continuous monitoring to ensure that the organization stays on track. Baesu and Bejinaru's (2014) change process model is reflected in the findings of this study. This model includes stages such as planning, enabling, launching, catalyzing, and maintaining change. The study's findings suggest that leadership plays an instrumental role in each of these stages: from providing clear explanations during the planning phase to empowering employees during the enabling stage, executing the change during the launching phase, motivating and supporting employees during the catalyst stage, and ensuring sustainability during the maintaining stage. The study also corroborates Lewin's (1947) "Refreezing" stage, where the change is reinforced and incorporated into the organization's culture, ensuring that employees do not revert to previous ways of doing things. Lewin (1958) further emphasizes the importance of knowledge sharing and the leadership role during change, both of which were evident in the findings of this study. The findings of this study underscore the essential role of leadership in guiding and supporting employees throughout the organizational change process. Effective communication, employee engagement, and continuous monitoring are critical factors in ensuring the success of change initiatives. Leadership that empowers employees, encourages participation, and fosters open communication is crucial in overcoming resistance and ensuring that the change is embraced by the workforce.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The literature reviewed emphasizes that leadership plays a pivotal role in the successful management of organizational change. Effective leadership is not just a catalyst but a necessity in ensuring that change initiatives are properly planned, implemented, and sustained. Key leadership qualities identified for managing change include strong communication skills, unwavering management support, commitment to the change process, the ability to set compelling and clear goals, and leading. These leadership attributes were found to be instrumental in driving the success of change initiatives within the organization under study. The findings from this study indicate that the organization understands the importance of leadership and communication in navigating the change process. A key aspect of this is the organization's use of WhatsApp as a communication tool, which facilitates meetings and discussions in an inclusive manner. The open-door policy and the ability for employees to provide feedback through both formal and informal communication platforms contribute to a strong sense of employee engagement and commitment to the change process. This inclusive communication strategy not only ensures that employees are well-informed but also reduces resistance by allowing for two-way communication, where employees feel heard and valued.

The leadership's commitment to achieving buy-in from employees is another vital factor identified in the study. Ensuring that everyone is on board with the change initiatives appears to be a successful strategy for reducing resistance and fostering a cooperative atmosphere for change. However, while the organization has demonstrated success in its approach to leadership during change, there are areas for improvement. The study suggests that the leadership should consider expanding its communication strategies by incorporating new technologies such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. These platforms would further enhance virtual communication, especially given the increasing reliance on digital tools in the modern workplace, especially in the context of remote work and hybrid work models. Moreover, in the face of rapid technological advancements and the increasing digital transformation of businesses, it is essential that both leadership and the entire workforce upskill to keep pace with these changes. The digital age demands leaders who can effectively manage not only the technical aspects of change but also the cultural and organizational shifts that accompany it. Leaders need to stay abreast of new technologies and develop the skills necessary to lead in a digitally transformed environment. This includes fostering digital literacy among employees and preparing them to manage new tasks, workflows, and challenges that arise as a result of digital transformation. Upskilling will also contribute to employees' readiness for change, ensuring they feel competent and confident in navigating the evolving technological landscape.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the essential role of leadership and communication in the successful implementation of organizational change. While the organization under study has shown a commitment to involving employees in the change process through inclusive communication strategies, further integration of digital tools and continuous upskilling of both leadership and staff are recommended. This approach will ensure that the organization is well-equipped to navigate future changes and technological advancements, fostering a culture of agility, innovation, and resilience in the face of ongoing transformation.

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