Overcoming employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, organisational changes have become a norm because of factors such as globalisation, innovation, and rapid technological changes. Organisations must be flexible to be sustainable and gain competitive advantage. The recent COVID-19 outbreak has also necessitated organisations to restructure the way they do business to respond to the negative impact that the pandemic brought to businesses. Despite organisational changes becoming common, the implementation of change initiatives in organisations are said to be mostly unsuccessful. These failures cost organisations large amounts of money. One of the known reasons why organisational changes fail is employee resistance to organisational changes. Employees are key in the implementation of organisational changes and their buy-in is crucial for the successful implementation of internally driven organisational changes.

The objective of this research was to explore ways in which leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organisational changes. A qualitative study was done which focused on employees in the professional accounting and consulting sector in South Africa. The data was collected from fourteen employees using semi-structured interviews.

The study revealed that employee resistance can be a product of various factors such as lack of, or poor communication, exclusion of employees from the change process, perceived negative impact of the change to employees, fear of job losses and perceived benefit of the changes to the organisation. Furthermore, the study revealed that social identity plays a crucial role in encouraging employees to enthusiastically adopt organisational changes. Employees who felt like the needs of their social groups were considered during the implementation of organisational changes did not resist the changes. Lastly, the findings showed that leaders play an important role in influencing employee attitudes for internally driven organisational changes.

KEYWORDS

Employee resistance to change, organisational changes, internally driven organisational changes, rational adaptation approach.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Jager et al. (2021) suggest that internally driven organisational changes are usually initiated internally by the organisation's leaders. These changes, according to Jager et al. (2021) are planned and this planning is usually in response to perceived or anticipated external changes. According to Appelbaum et al. (1998), internal organisational changes are triggered by the need to implement a new corporate vision and mission in response to a number of other changes affecting the organisation.

Because the need to implement a new corporate vision and mission to "pursue an idealized future" is first perceived by leaders who then trigger the process for change (Paliokaitė, et al., 2014), the need for such changes is not apparent to employees affected by such changes and can lead to resistance for such changes. Failure to overcome such changes can often lead to increased costs of change both in time and money. This research seeks to establish how organisational leaders can overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes within professional accounting and finance consulting firms.

In the context of South Africa, internally driven organisational changes have often been met with fierce employee resistance. Two examples to these are Lonmin Mine (Heiberg & Shabalala, 2019) and South African Airways (Sguazzin, 2022). Organisational strife at Lonmin resulted in that company being sold to Sibanye Stillwater (Heiberg & Shabalala, 2019) while 51% of South African Airways was ultimately sold to the Takatso consortium to turnaround the entity (Sguazzin, 2022). All this amidst fierce resistance from employees.

Such disruptions are detrimental to the entities in question as well as the economy in general. Given that organisational leaders are usually presumed to work for the advancement of the interest of organisational members, it can equally be presumed that if their decisions are not met with resistance, the overall outcome of the changes would be beneficial to the entities concerned. It is therefore necessary to understand why employees resist changes so that ways of overcoming resistance to changes can be found. This qualitative study seeks to establish the reasons behind employee

resistance within the professional accounting and consulting firms, with the aim of finding ways to overcome them.

1.2 Background

Employee resistance to change can be referred to as unfavourable response of employees to change (Samal & Chatterjee,2020). Employee resistance to change indicates that employees do not support the changes envisaged (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). The constant changes in technology and the COVID-19 pandemic have made organisational changes to be a norm. For example, employees are currently finding themselves in a state where they work in a hybrid environment. Some employees will resist the change if they perceive it to be a systematic attempt to cause instability in their lives and ruin their routines. This makes it paramount for organisational leaders to continuously seek tools that will overcome the resistance to change.

Professional accounting and consulting firms play an important role in the South African economy by ensuring that organisations meet their statutory requirements and stay in business. For example, according to Section 65 of the *Municipal Finance Management Act 2003*, municipalities in South Africa cannot make payments to service providers that are not tax compliant. Non-compliance with tax results in heavy penalties in a form of additional taxes and interest. Failure to comply negatively affect the cash flows of organisations, and ultimately threatens their sustainability. Professional consulting firms get appointed by organisations to advise them on how to design processes that respond to the applicable legislation. Tax consultants become important in ensuring that organisations remain tax compliant.

Moreover, according to s.90 of the *Companies Act 2008*, companies that are listed in the stock exchange must be audited by a firm that is registered by the Independent Regulatory Board for Auditors. Professional consulting firms get hired by organisations to ensure that this requirement in fulfilled and that the negative consequences due to non-compliance are avoided. Failure by organisations to produce audited financial statements hinder investment and may result to the organisation being delisted from the stock exchange.

Investors make decisions based on results that have been signed off by consulting firms. For example, it is a common business practice to conduct a due diligence

exercise before a merger and/or acquisition can be concluded. This task involves the valuation of assets and liabilities of the acquisition or merger target to ensure that what the selling entity has presented to the buying entity is verified   by an independent consulting firm.

The consequences of producing incorrect reports can result in dire consequences for both the consultants and the organisations. For example, according to Janse van Vuuren (2022), by 2017 KPMG South Africa was still recovering from an incorrect audit opinion they gave to one of their clients. In addition to reputational damage to the client, the opinion cost the firm millions of rands in the loss of clients who no longer sought their services. Another example relates to a decision made by a South African audit firm, Nkonki Inc, to sell a controlling stake to a Gupta linked individual (Whitfield, 2018). This resulted in 180 employees losing their jobs and the closure of the audit firm because of the loss of public sector clients (Whitfield, 2018).

After these events, investors lost trust in the Gupta linked companies that are operating in South Africa. Most of them did not have enough cash flows to operate in the foreseeable future. This was evident from the applications that the companies filed for business rescue with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission in 2018 ("More Gupta-Owned Companies Apply For Business Rescue", 2018). The companies that filed for business rescue are Tegeta Exploration (Pty) Ltd, VR Laser Services (Pty) Ltd, Shiva Uranium (Pty) Ltd, Optimum Coal Mine (Pty) Ltd, Optimum Coal Terminal (Pty) Ltd and Koornfontein Mine (Pty) Ltd ("More Gupta-Owned Companies Apply for Business Rescue", 2018).

Another scandal which knocked the South African economy because of the failure of professional consultants (KPMG Inc and Nkonki Inc) to give sound advice to their municipality clients relates to VBS (Venda Business Society) mutual bank (Evans, 2022). Municipalities invested their money at VBS in contravention of s.13 of the *Municipal Finance Management Act* which stipulates that municipal funds must be invested in institutions that are registered under the banks Act (Evans, 2022). Individuals, who were mostly pensioners, and businesses in the lost their monies that they invested at VBS because VBS discontinued its operations.

Organisations are operating in environments where new technologies are constantly being introduced and innovation is being used as a competitive advantage (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020; Amarantou et al., 2018). Managing the ever-changing business environment has, accordingly, become one of the competencies and skills required from leaders in organisations (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). Organisations that do not respond to the rapid changes in the environment run a risk of lagging behind in implementing technologies necessary to keep their organisations sustainable. As such, companies must always be ready to change.

The implementation of these changes has a direct impact on consulting firms as they service organisations across different sectors. Therefore, processes and procedures need to be responsive to the changing environment in which they operate. This means that consulting firms have to be more agile in perceiving changes that would affect their clients and implement such changes in their own organisations to be ready to effectively serve their clients. Because they provide knowledge work and their key instruments are their employees, the support of their employees for organisational changes is critical. Therefore, being up to speed with technological changes is paramount for consulting firms.

1.3 Research Problem

Organisations are operating in a complex and volatile environment and must adapt to remain competitive and sustainable. Organisational changes are rapid and fluid. Organisational changes are a result of factors such as globalisation, technological changes, and innovation (Doeze Jager et al., 2022; Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Stouten et al., 2018).

Recently, organisations have had to deal with what Boshoff (2021, p.112) refers to as the "extreme exogenous shock to the economic system" with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the fourth industrial revolution. Boshoff (2021) points out that extreme exogenous shocks to economic systems such as wars and natural disasters result in economic disruption. Right on the hills of the COVID-19 pandemic, the breakout of the war between Russia and Ukraine led to more exogenous shocks to economic systems all over the world. These events highlight that organisations

need to be agile and adapt to externally driven changes more rapidly than has been the case in the past.

Failure to establish ways of overcoming employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes can result in consulting firms failing to service their clients effectively. Such failure can lead to incorrect oversight provided by consulting firms resulting in disastrous economic outcomes. If the solution to employee resistance to change is not found, consulting firms will struggle to effectively implement solutions that are required for the success of the South African economy. While research has been conducted on employee resistance to change (Brett et al., 2016), not much has focused specifically on consulting firms in the South African context

For both internally driven and externally driven organisational changes, employees are a crucial part in the success of the implementation of such changes (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020). Having employees supporting the change process is one of the key drivers for organisations to successfully implement changes.

1.4 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to establish how to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes by uncovering how organisational leaders can ensure employee support for changes.

To meet this objective, this research was guided by the following research question: How can organizational leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organizational changes?

1.5 Benefits of the research

1.5.1 Benefits for business

This research contributes to the existing literature on employee resistance to change and will help organisations in the consulting industry in South Africa with tools that can be used to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

The significance of this research emanates from the fact that, more than ever, it has become important for businesses to implement some sort of changes to respond or prepare for the ever-changing business environment. Moreover, externally driven

changes are likely to induce organisational leaders to implement changes internally as a response. For example, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke, the requirement to reduce contact with people meant that production would be reduced for businesses across different sectors. Businesses had to restructure their internal processes to respond to those requirements.

According to Arndt et al. (2020), in South Africa, the alcohol and tobacco industries were hit the most by the pandemic with a decline in revenue of more than 60%. South Africa imposed a ban on all tobacco and vape sales between March 2020 and August 2020 to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Filby, et al., 2021). Because of the ban, cigarette smokers purchased the cigarettes through informal markets at a rate that was about 250% more than the price that they paid before the ban was imposed (Filby, et al.,2021). This meant that the South African economy was losing millions of rands to the informal economy.

The results of this study will help businesses to overcome the difficulties that they face during the change implementation process because of employee resistance. The results of this study will help businesses to reduce the financial losses that are caused by employees refusing to participate in the change implementation process and ensure that businesses remain sustainable after implementing the changes.

1.5.2 Benefits to scholars and academics

Organisations across all industries are subject to a changing environment. Even though the phenomenon of organisational change has been explored extensively by scholars, there is consensus amongst scholars that organisational change initiatives are generally unsuccessful (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Scholars have flagged employee resistance to organisational changes as one of the major reasons for the failure of organisational change initiatives (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). Further research has been done on employee resistance to change as it impacts employee well-being (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017). This research adds to the body of knowledge by focusing on the consulting firms in an emerging market context.

This research contributes to the existing literature on employee resistance to change and will help organisations in the consulting industry in South Africa with tools that can be used to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

1.6 Scope of the Research

The study focuses on overcoming employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes within the finance and accounting consulting firms in South Africa. The professional consulting environment is highly technologically driven, and consulting organisations need to keep up with technological changes to effectively resolve their client's challenges.

1.7 Structure of the Report

Chapter 1 of the research introduced the research problem that the study seeks to resolve as well as the benefits of the research to business and academia. The chapter also introduced the rationale for the research as well as the context. In Chapter 2, literature related to the subject being studied will be reviewed. The literature reviewed will provide context of where the study fits in the body of knowledge in respect to this subject. Chapter 3 will outline the research questions to be answered by this research. Chapter 4 maps the methodology followed in conducting the research, highlighting the quality controls applied and the limitations encountered in the research process. Chapter 5 presents the results of the research while chapter 6 discusses the findings of the research in detail. Lastly, chapter 7 will provide conclusions drawn from the results and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of literature review is to set the basis of the research by reporting the claims made in existing literature, identifying what is known and what is not known and synthesising the literature in a manner that allows a new perspective (Boote & Beile, 2005). This chapter will provide an understanding of the research available and the debates taking place on the tools that leaders use to overcome employee resistance to change.

Firstly, the chapter introduces the theoretical underpinning that the study is based on. Secondly, the researcher presents the discussions that exist in organisational change literature focusing on leadership role in organisational changes, role of social identity leadership and internally driven organisational changes. Thirdly, literature on resistance to change is reviewed and the existing arguments are presented.

2.2 Theoretical underpinning of the study

Packard & Shih (2014, p. 500) suggest that rational adaptation approach to organisational changes can serve as a basis in which leaders can "discover effective change strategies and tactics that can be proactively used by administrators and consultants". The rational adaptation approach to organisational changes suggests that leaders can use their human agency to respond to internal and external forces for change (Packard & Shih, 2014). In line with the suggestion of Packard and Shih, this research followed that leaders as the agents of organisational change initiatives need to come up with tools that are aimed at responding to employee resistance to organisational changes.

2.3 Organisational Changes

Schmid (2010) sees organisational changes as referring to the performance gap between the current situation of an organisation and that which its leaders aspire it to be. In defining the term, Schmid (2010, p. 668) says organisational change is a process imposed on an organisation as a result of internal pressures "that cause alterations and modifications" in its "core activity, goals, strategies and programmes". Change initiatives usually involve a process where employees must shift from their routines to an unpredictable state of doing things (Srivastava &

Agrawal, 2020). Even though the definition by Schmid views organisational changes as they impact the vision of the organisation while the definition by Srivastava & Agrawal views the changes as they impact the way employees do things, both definitions prove that organisational changes will always have an impact on employees.

Organisations are faced with different kinds of changes that they need to adapt to. According to Doeze Jager (2022), "A major distinction researchers have made is the difference between organizational change as something that can be planned and as something that occurs unplanned". Whether planned or unplanned, organisations are changing constantly, and organisational leaders need to ensure that the changes are implemented successfully.

2.3.1   Leadership role in organisational changes

The approach of the leader in implementing organisational changes is critical as it may influence the attitudes of employees towards the changes. According to Arifin (2019, p.188), employee attitudes towards organisational changes are "a psychological tendency of employees based on evaluative assessments of changes, both positive and negative assessments". One of the factors that affect employee attitudes towards organisational changes is the engagement between the leader and its followers (Arifin, 2019). In line with Arifin, Georgalis et al (2015) suggests that a good relationship between the leaders and employees have a positive effect on employee attitudes towards the changes made by the leaders. Even though scholars agree that leaders have an impact on employee attitudes towards organisational changes, there is still no consensus on what leaders can do to encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt organisational changes. Leaders do not only initiate the change initiatives, but they also facilitate the change process, and the success or failure of organisational changes can be associated with their performance. It is therefore critical that they overcome employee resistance to changes.

2.3.2   Role of social identity of leadership

Social identity theory is premised on how individuals categorise themselves as belonging to certain groups and these group memberships define who they show up as in society (Trepte & Loy, 2017). South Africa has a diverse workforce which is mainly categorised by race, gender, ethnicity, and language (Booysen, 2007). It is

inevitable in the South African context that people will associate with different groups based on these categories. These different societal groups make it important for South African leaders to use social identity leadership procedures for successful implementation of organisational changes. According to Hogg (2009, p.9), "Social identity leadership procedures facilitate successful leadership; however, it is heavily dependent on members identifying as a single, united group with a leader who is prototypical and representative of the group." Similarly, Steffens et al., (2014) suggests that leaders who demonstrate excellent performance are viewed as role models by their followers and as such, followers want to mimic the characteristics of those leaders. What is unclear from the literature is whether the leader prototypicality plays a role in overcoming resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

2.3.3 Internally driven organisational changes

Stouten et al., (2018) defines internally driven organisational changes as planned changes which aim to move the organisation from the current state to the desired future state. Internally driven organisational changes have been necessitated in recent years by a range of factors such as technological advancements, revolving workforce, innovation, and globalisation (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020; Packard & Shih, 2014; Hartley et al., 1997). These changes impact employees the most as they may shift them from performing their jobs following a routine that they are accustomed to (Oreg,2018).

According to Packard & Shih (2014, p. 500) "planned organizational change involves leadership and the mobilizing of staff in such alterations and modifications, to move the organization to a desired future state, using change processes which involve both human and technical aspects of the organization".

Planned organisational changes are significant changes that are brought about by management (Doeze Jager, 2022). This paper focuses on planned changes that are implemented by organisational leaders which include mergers and acquisitions, change of leadership, discontinuing operations expanding the products and/or services, amongst others.

Even though employees may go through the similar changes, their responses to the change may differ significantly (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017). Some employees may exhibit resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

This is more applicable in the South African context where the country has a diverse population and a history of inequality in its workforce (Mayer et al., 2019). This diversity has a potential of creating subjective responses to internally driven organisational changes based on different social identities of employees. Different social identity groups may perceive the change initiatives differently and thus having highly subjective perceptions of the change. Social identity theory states that people tend to categorise themselves by certain social groups such as gender, race, religion sexual orientation, political affiliation, and age group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In the South African context, it is important that leaders take into cognisance the different social groups and respond to their attitudes to internally driven organisational changes.

According to Higgs & Rowland (2011), efforts to implement organisational changes are mostly unsuccessful. Georgalis, et al. (2015) and Smollan (2011) assert that although there is a variety of potential reasons why organisational changes have failed, it is widely recognised that employee resistance is one of the major contributors to this issue. Abrell-Vogel & Rowold (2014) also subscribe to this perspective. This study seeks to establish how organisational leaders could encourage employee support for internally driven organisational changes.

2.3.4 Role of organisational groups and identity

Lewin (1947) acknowledged the criticalness of taking groups into consideration in implementing changes. According to Lewin (1947, p. 32) "for changing a social equilibrium, too, one has to consider… the groups and subgroups involved, their relations, their value systems, etc". In line with Lewin, Jones et al., (2008), views organisations as "intergroup entities in which people identify with specific departments, units or hierarchical levels". Jones et al (2008), further notes that individual employees partly experience the change process as a member of a group. Hay et al (2021), also notes that organisational changes may threaten the organisational identity and thereby requiring employees to re-establish their identities in the organisation after the change has taken place. According to Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans (2013) people normally strive for and benefit from

positive social identities associated with their groups. All these assertions indicate that social identity groups are an important factor that need to be considered during a change process.

2.3.5 Organisational change process

A change process involves a series of steps to be taken to achieve the desired organisational changes (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). One of the widely recognised change process models is Kotter's eight stage model which recommends the following steps to be followed in implementing major changes in organisations:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.
2. Create the guiding coalition.
3. Create a vision to direct the change effort and develop strategies to achieve that vision.
4. Communicate the change vision using every vehicle possible.
5. Empower broad-based action.
6. Generate short-term wins.
7. Consolidate gains and produce more change.
8. Anchor new approaches in the organization's culture (Kotter, 2012).

The model has been criticised by scholars for various reasons including its lack of detail on how the model can be applied in different situations (Appelbaum et al.,2012). This research follows that planned organisational changes are unique to each organisation and as such there is no set change process that can be followed for successful implementation of organisational changes. However, Kotter's model can be useful as a guide. On the other hand, Lewin (1947, p. 34), model for planned organisational changes involve three steps "unfreezing", "Moving" and "Refreezing". The unfreezing stage involves removing the forces that encourage maintenance of the status quo (Kaminski, 2011). Secondly, the moving stage involves convincing the relevant stakeholders that the current way of doing things is better than the old one (Kaminski, 2011). Lastly, the refreezing stage involves making the new way of doing things a habit (Kaminski, 2011). Lewin's change process is useful for planned changes and is applicable in different industries and therefore, this research will view the process as most relevant for planned organisational changes.

2.4 Resistance to change

Grama & Todericiu (2016) define resistance to change as "any opposition to the alteration of a certain situation and represents a regular reaction to change". Georgalis et al., (2015) on the other hand defines resistance to change as 'any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to it. Lasty, Oreg (2018) defines resistance as "the active and passive application of force to counter the change". All these definitions seem to suggest that the status of the current situation is favourable to those opposing the change. Although there is no generally accepted definition for resistance to change, existing literature reveal that resistance to change occurs to protect individuals from the negative impact of the changes (Amarantou et al., 2017). When employees have been in an organisation and doing a particular job for a while, they tend to be accustomed to a routine way of doing things and a change that disrupts that routine may trigger resistance. The urge to hold on to that routine can lead to employee resistance to change.

Employees can express their opposition to change in a variety of ways. Employees usually resist these changes because they perceive them to have been created by the system, and that employees have no other choice but to accept them (Oreg, 2018; Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). According to Darmawan & Azizah (2020) employee resistance to change can be through strikes, expression of opposing views, refusing to participate in implementing the changes, or employees leaving the organisation as well as passive resistance to change (Smollan,2011). According to Smollan (2011), passive resistance to change come in a form of actions such as agreeing to do something but end up not doing it, doing the bare minimum, withholding important information and failure to implement the change.

In the South African context, the types of resistance to change identified by Darmawan and Azizah (2020) and Smollan (2011) can typically apply to two different kinds of employees. The type of resistance described by Darmawan and Azizah (2020) apply in situations where employees act as a collective and where they act as individuals by leaving the organisation for example. Smollan (2011) on the other hand provides a case of resistance from an individual perspective. A decision on the choice of strategy employees use to resist change could be based on their perceived efficacy of their actions.

2.4.1.1 Resistance to Change as a Collective Action

In South Africa, collective bargaining is enshrined in law in the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. These give employees the power to form unions as the instrument for collective bargaining. The protection and power bestowed upon employees by these two statutes makes making changes a negotiated process where employees can take collective action including strikes (Darmawan & Azizah, 2020). In addition to using the unions for collective bargaining, Chapter five of the Labour Relations Act provides employees with an option to form workplace forums where collective decision making may be done.

According to s.84 of the *Labour Relations Act 1995*, these workplace forums are specifically designed to address issues that relate to internally driven organisational changes such as introduction of new technology, mergers and changes in ownership, employee dismissals based on operational requirements and product development plans. Despite the availability of the workplace forums, most South African employees are not aware of its existence and do not usually use this platform to address the issues that arise with the introduction of new changes. Moreover, the workplace forums are only applicable where the employees are allowed to be part of unions. Professional accountant and consultants are not allowed to be part of unions and as such have limitations in using collective bargaining.

2.4.1.2 Resistance to Change as an individual process

Despite laws to protect employees against potential abuse of power by employers (Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act), there are categories of employees who are not unionised and therefore do not engage in collective bargaining processes. For example, the financial services sector is characterised by the white-collar workers who do not typically participate in strikes, and thus, their responses to change initiatives would not be apparent. This sector is not unionised, and employees use their own influence to participate in the change process. Their feeling towards the change initiative would be communicated using the existing processes, or they would disengage if they do not agree with the change initiative. According to Grama & Todericiu (2016), such employees could display what they refer to as change specific cynicism upon awareness of proposed organisational changes. Grama & Todericiu (2016) define change specific cynicism

as "the belief of employees that the organization in which they work lacks integrity" (p. 47).

For white collar employees who are not unionised, such cynicism could manifest itself in individual acts of resistance such as "activity slow-down, activity drawl, delays of launching the change process, delayed and inefficient actions during the change process" (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2013, p. 127). Similarly, Georgalis et al., (2015); Darmawan & Azizah, (2020) noted that there is an individualistic nature in responding to the change process and employees use logic to assess whether the change initiatives would be beneficial to them or not. This paper followed that employees in the professional accounting industry would follow a passive resistance approach to show their opposition to organisational changes.

2.5 Addressing Employee Resistance to Change

Employees are a central part of the successful implementation of organisational changes. Abrell-Vogel & Rowold (2014) see leaders playing a greater part in reducing resistance to change amongst individual employees and groups of employees. Graetz (2000), suggest that some resistance to change by senior and middle management was due to the lack of involvement from senior executives. Furthermore, leaders need to implement mechanisms that will strengthen and institutionalise organisational changes (Graetz,2000). To successfully overcome employee resistance to organisational changes, leaders must respond to the root causes of such resistance.

2.5.1 Exclusion

Samal & Chatterjee (2020) suggest that leaders of organisations should acknowledge the importance of involving employees during the organisational change process as part of the organisational change strategy. Kaminski (2011) also notes that the more transparent and inclusive the change process is, the more the employees will be willing to move towards the change. García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández (2015) agrees that employee participation is important for preventing resistance to change. Employee inclusion reduces the employees' feeling of fear that the implementation of organisational changes will result in negative outcomes (García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández 2015). Arifin (2019), suggests that employee resistance to organisational changes can change

the more the employees are aware of the changes. From this literature, it can be assumed that employee inclusion can potentially result in employee enthusiastic adoption of internally driven organisational changes. However, the nature of this inclusion and how much inclusion is necessary to successfully implement organisational changes is not clear from the literature.

2.5.2 Communication

Kotter & Schlesinger (2008, p. 134) indicated that "one of the common ways to overcome resistance to change is to educate people beforehand". The format of such education could either be one-on-one discussions, presentations, memos, or reports. Kotter & Schlesinger (2008) further added that communication helps people to see the need for change and therefore accept it. According to Visagie & Steyn (2011) "Organisational change initiatives often fail because of poorly managed communication, which results in rumours, resistance to change and exaggeration of the negative aspects of the change". Similarly, García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández (2015) suggests insufficient information result in wrong early perceptions about the change and thus results in employee resistance to those changes.

This is further confirmed by Higgs & Rowland (2011) who suggested that employee communication on how employees need to adjust plays a role in reducing resistance to change. Kotter (1995) suggested that the outcome of poor or lack of communication during the change process is increased cynicism. By communication, both Kotter & Schlesinger (2008) and Higgs & Rowland (2011) seem to suggest that the communication they envisage involves telling rather than discussing. Although literature notes the positive effect of communication, communication of the negative impact of the change without outlining the mechanisms that are in place to reduce those may result in employee resistance (García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández, 2015).

2.5.3   Impact of changes to employees

In the recent research on organisational changes, scholars have noted the importance of focusing on the impact that organisational changes have on employees (Choi, 2011; Oreg et al., 2011). Vakola (2014) suggested that a key determinant of whether an employee will embrace organisational changes or not is their perception of whether the change is beneficial to them or detrimental. Visagie & Steyn (2011) further suggested that employees are less likely to be resistant to changes when they foresee some value accruing to them as a consequence of the change. Furthermore, Jones et al., (2008) noted that employees might not be resisting the change itself, but rather the perceived negative outcomes of the change. This literature suggests that the impact of the organisational changes to employees need to be understood to overcome employee resistance to the changes.

2.2 Conclusion

Despite the extensive research that has been done on employee resistance to organisational changes, there is still no conclusions amongst scholars on how this resistance can be overcome. The limitation that scholars mention is the limitations in sampling techniques, such that results cannot be confidently generalised (Oreg, 2018). Moreover, scholars have also highlighted various methodological limitations in the field of resistance to change which indicate gaps in the knowledge that exists on this subject (Amarantou et al., 2017).

The understanding of the reasons behind employees resisting organisational changes can therefore be used as a starting point in developing tools to overcome this resistance. Because of the multidimensional nature of employee resistance to change, the outcomes of the existing literature cannot be applied across different geographic areas and sectors (Elgohary & Abdelazyz, 2020; Choi, 2011). Such tools will contribute to reduce employee resistance to organisational changes.

The next chapter will present the research questions that the researcher will answer in achieving the research objectives outlined in chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, literature was reviewed to establish what is known and what still needs to be known (Boote & Beile (2005) in the context of this research. What was learned in this regard was that what still needed to be known was clarity on how leaders in organisations could encourage employee support for internally driven organisational changes. Accordingly, this research aimed to answer the question: How can organizational leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organizational changes? To answer this question, the following supporting questions, which formed the basis for the interview questions were developed.

3.1.1 Research question 1: Why do employees resist internally driven organisational changes?

The aim of research question 1 was to get insights on why employees resist internally driven organisational changes. Such insights will help leaders to come up with solutions that will encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organisational changes. This process would involve minimising the negative impact of the changes to employees and their organisation. Understanding the reasons that lead employees to resist changes is a good starting point for leaders so that they can appropriately respond to those reasons.

3.1.2 Research question 2: What is the role of social identity in employee resistance to change?

Research question 2 aims to explore the role of social identity in employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. Answers to this question will help leaders to establish whether social identity plays a role and should be considered in the successful implementation of change initiatives in their organisations. Shimoni (2017, p.261), indicated that "life in organizations, as in any other social group, is primarily a system of roles, positions, behaviours, social norms, and other structural elements". Getting answers to this question is important in South African organisations because of the diversity in its organisational settings.

3.1.3 Research question 3: What is the impact of social identity leadership in employee attitudes in planned organisational changes?

Research question number 3 seeks to understand the role of social identity leadership in influencing employees to have positive attitudes towards planned changes in their organisations. Answers to this research question will help determine whether social identity leadership can be used to influence employee attitudes when planned organisational changes take place. Employee's attitudes towards planned organisational changes play a pivotal role to the success or failure of the organisational change endeavours (Elias,2009).

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology selected to conduct this research. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), the method chosen should be appropriate to the research question. In other words, the research method should be guided by the research question. A qualitative, exploratory approach to the research design, population sampling, data collection and data analysis was identified as the suitable approach to answer the primary and secondary research questions as outlined in chapter 3.

In this chapter, the methodological choices made as well as the research design chosen, including population sampling data collection and analysis will be presented.

4.2 Choice of methodology and design

The research will follow a qualitative exploratory approach to the research design, data collection and data analysis. According to Saunders & Lewis (2018), exploratory research is about uncovering information not clearly understood by the researcher. The research design will follow a narrative approach. In qualitative studies, narrative research is about collecting details and writing narratives about experiences of individuals (Saunders & Lewis, 2018)**.** As the research seeks to understand the tools that leaders use to overcome employee resistance to changes, this approach is appropriate as participants will share their experiences regarding employee resistance to changes.

4.3 Philosophy

The philosophical approach for this study is interpretivism. Bryman (2016, p.30) states that interpretivism "usually denotes an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy that has held sway for decades". In this research, interpretivism was deemed appropriate as the aim of the study was to explore the lived experiences of employees through organisational changes in order to establish how leaders can overcome employee resistance. According to Bryman (2016, p.30), interpretivism requires the social scientist to "grasp the subjective meaning of social action".

4.4 Approach

This study took an inductive approach to theory development. Bryman (2016) indicates that the inductive strategy is typically associated with the qualitative research. Alase (2017) describes an inductive approach as a qualitative research technique that makes it possible for the researcher to analyse raw data to meet the objectives of the research.

4.5 Strategy

The research followed a narrative inquiry approach. Interviews in qualitative research can involve participants narrating stories about their experiences which are then analysed by the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This approach was deemed appropriate for this research.

4.6 Time horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was chosen for this study. In a cross-sectional study, data is collected only once, at a specific point in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A cross sectional rather than a longitudinal approach was the suitable approach for this study as the data was specific to a point in time. Moreover, the time constraints of made it impractical to collect the data at different points in time.

4.7 Proposed research design

4.7.1 Population and unit of analysis

Saunders & Lewis (2018) define population as "the complete set of group members" (p.138). Instead of using the term population, Robinson (2014, p.25) uses the term sample universe which he describes as "a way of specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria for potential participation". The population, or the sample universe for this research was identified as individual employees who work in the professional accounting and consulting organisations in South Africa excluding those in executive positions. Executives and support staff were excluded from the study because the objective of the study was to gain insights from the perspective of professional employees on how they were impacted by organisational change initiatives initiated by the executives. Employees are more appropriate for this study as they are the

implementers of decisions on organisational changes and are also impacted the most by decisions.

The unit of analysis was the individual. DeCarlo (2018) defines a unit of analysis as the entity that a researcher wishes to be able to say something about at the end of the study. In this research, the experiences of individuals are what the researcher seeks to say something about. Therefore, an individual was identified as the unit of analysis in this study.

4.7.2 Sampling method and size

According to Robinson (2014, p. 26), sampling is "the selection of cases from which data is actually collected". This research followed a non-probability purposive and snowball sampling method for data collection. Purposive sampling is defined by Saunders & Lewis (2018) as a form of non-probability sampling where the researcher uses judgement to select a sample based on several reasons while snowball sampling is defined as a method in which subsequent participants are identified by those already identified. This method was chosen because the individuals identified for the study had to have unique or important perspectives on the phenomenon being studied (Robinson, 2014).

A sample size of 14 individuals sourced through the networks of the researcher was identified. Focusing the study on the individuals as opposed to the organisations was intended to provide the researcher with different experiences.

4.8 Data collection Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is also an instrument as well as the primary mode of data collection (Cypress, 2017) in addition to the interview guide, which is presented in appendix 1, both the interview guide and the researcher acted as the data collection instruments in this study. Jacob & Furgerson (2012) refer to the interview guide as the interview protocol. According to Jacob & Furgerson (2012, p.2), "An interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions, it is also extended to the procedural level of interviewing and includes a script of what you will say at the conclusion of the interview, prompts for the interviewer to collect informed consent, and prompts to remind the interviewer the information that she or he is interested in collecting".

The interview guide was intended to get answers to the main research questions and sub-questions as presented in chapter 3. Because this is an exploratory study, the interview questions consisted of open-ended questions which allowed the researcher to gain in-depth responses about the experiences of the interviewees.

To test the suitability of the data collection instrument, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to allow the researcher to make any necessary adjustments to the interview guide before the main data collection process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The pilot interviews were also intended to help the researcher improve her interviewing skills which was important in a qualitative study. Pilot interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed using an online application called Otter.ai. The researcher edited the transcription to ensure that accuracy.

4.9 Data gathering process

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Saunders & Lewis (2018), in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer asks participants pre-determined questions. Most were to be conducted either face-to-face or using Microsoft Teams in-line with the preferences of participants. In setting up interviews, participants were contacted by email which contained the brief of what the interview was about including details of the consent form. While Microsoft Teams had a recording and transcribing ability, face- to face interviews were recorded using a cell phone.

Because of the inaccuracy in the transcribing tool, the researcher edited the transcriptions to ensure that what was transcribed reflected the audio recording. The recordings and the transcripts were stored on the researcher's computer hard drive and a backup was stored on the google drive.

4.10 Data storage

Given that the purposive and snowball sampling methods were used in this research, the names of participants were known to the researcher. Because of this, data will be stored without identifiers to protect the identity of participants as outlined in the interview guide and consent form in according with the ethical undertakings made to the university of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science. This data will be

stored for a minimum of 10 years on a computer hard drive with copies password protected on cloud storage as well as the UP (University of Pretoria) research data storage portal.

4.11   Data Analysis approach

Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 28) assert that the method of analysis "should be driven by both the research question and the broader theoretical assumptions". The research question and the broader theoretical assumptions of this research have been stated chapter 3 and the approach taken for data analysis was driven by both.

The analysis was conducted after all 14 interviews had been conducted. A thematic analysis method was used to analyse data. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and analysing direct and indirect patterns from the responses of different subjects (Guest et al., 2011). The aim of the data analysis was to point out common themes that emerged in response to each of the research questions. ATLAS.ti was used to assist the researcher with effective and efficient analysis of the data collected. The process involved reading each transcript and assigning codes that best described the participant's responses.

The process of analysing data was an iterative and involved reading the transcripts and listening to the audio recordings, coding, and grouping to ensure that data, codes categories and themes were aligned. This process helped the researcher to be familiar with the interview data.

4.12   Quality controls

According to Roulston & Shelton (2015), in qualitative studies, there is an inherent risk of researcher bias which can pose a threat to the credibility of the study. To eliminate this, two pilot interviews were conducted to help the interviewer reflect on and respond to the influence they had on the responses that the participants gave. During the interviews, the researcher re-iterated their understanding and interpretation of the participant's responses where the response could potentially have different interpretations.

Furthermore, the researcher used the same interview guide to gather data from participants to ensure that there was consistency in the way the interviews were conducted. Lastly, in transcribing the audio recordings, the researcher made no alterations to the responses received from participants. To ensure that the findings were valid, the interviews were conducted until saturation was reached.

4.13 Research Ethics

The researcher commenced the data collection process after receiving ethical clearance from the ethics committee of the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science. The consent form was sent to participants before the interviews were conducted and the researcher read out the consent form to participants before the commencement of the interviews and captured those responses on the audio recording. The consent form is presented in appendix 2 and the ethical clearance approval is presented in appendix 3.

4.14 Limitations

This study does not consider the different cultures within organisations and how it may influence employee support during a change process. It is therefore difficult to establish whether the results of the study can be generalised across the different organisations. Because individual employees were the participants in the study, the results may vary due to the different emotions at the time that the response was being given (Rosenbaum et al, 2018). Moreover, another limitation stems from the fact that the research was done on only one industry, the results obtained cannot be deemed as applicable across the different industries (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). Lastly, the researcher is not research professional and the lack of experience poses a limitation to the quality of research and interpretation of the results. To respond to this limitation, the researcher conducted pilot interviews.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research conducted to answer the research question: How can organizational leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organizational changes? The presentation will start with the description of the participants that were part of the samle. Thereafter, the chapter will present the results according to each research question and sub-questions as outlined in chapter 3. The detailed interview guide used for data collection is attached in appendix 1.

5.2 Sample Description

A total of 14 interviews were conducted. To protect the identity of participants, codes were assigned to each participant as outlined in table 1 below. These participants work in as professional accountants and/or consultants in companies based in South Africa. Participants range from junior employees to senior managers from both small and large organisations across different provinces in South Africa. Eight of the 14 participants were female while six were male. Table 1 below shows the distribution of participants. Two participants were part-time lecturers (P5 and P8). Their perspectives were of interest as it provided insights on organisational changes in the academic sector.

Figure 1: Participants Gender Distribution
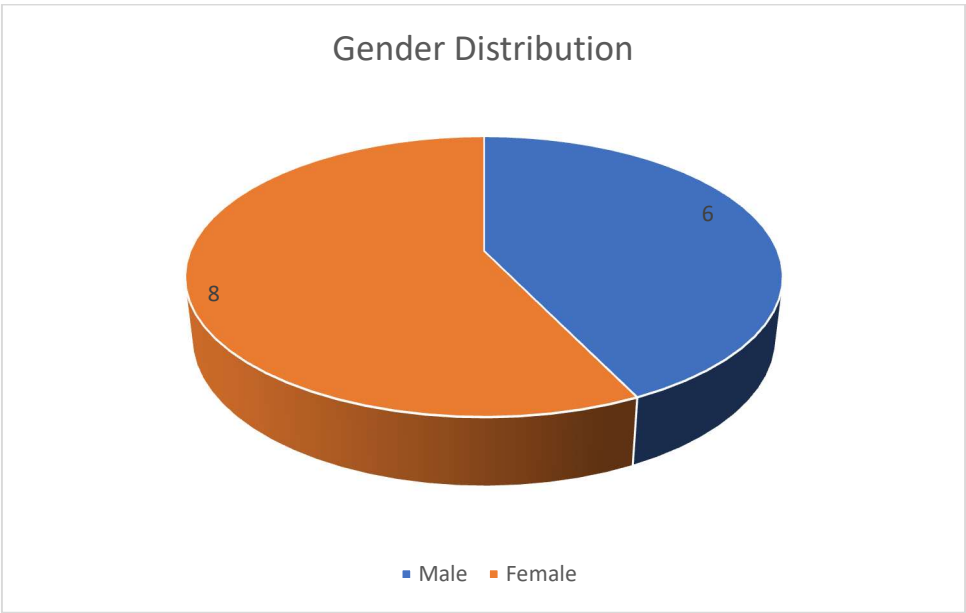
Table 1: Research study participants

Participant Code	Gender	Occupational level	Race	Province
PP1	Female	Middle Manager	Black	Gauteng
PP2	Male	Senior Manager	Black	Gauteng
P3	Male	Middle Manager	White	Gauteng
P4	Male	Senior Manager	Black	KwaZulu Natal
P5	Male	Senior Manager/Part-time lecturer	Black	Eastern Cape
P6	Female	Senior consultant	Black	Gauteng
P7	Male	Senior consultant	Black	Gauteng
P8	Male	Audit Manager/Part time lecturer	Black	Gauteng
P9	Female	Senior manager	Black	Eastern Cape
P10	Female	Senior Trainee accountant	Black	Gauteng
P11	Female	Senior Trainee	Coloured	Northern Cape
P12	Female	Junior Trainee accountant	Coloured	Eastern Cape
P13	Female	Senior Trainee accountant	White	Mpumalanga
P14	Female	Middle Manager	Black	Gauteng P

5.3 Data Collection

To test the suitability of the interview guide, as well as the appropriate mode of conducting the interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted with PP1 and PP2. These pilot interviews were conducted on the same day. The interview with PP1, who was also a friend of the researcher, was conducted face-to-face in a restaurant while the interview with PP2 was conducted over Microsoft's Ms Teams© application.

The interview with PP1 revealed that conducting an interview in a restaurant was difficult due to distractions and noise. Transcribing this interview was also difficult as the recorder also picked up other voices in the restaurant. The second lesson learnt from PP1 was that getting responses from people the researcher has a close relationship with could be difficult as the respondent tends to focus only on areas that they assume are unknown to the researcher. As a result of this, a decision was taken that close connections were to be used only as referrals for potential suitable participants who had no relations with the researcher.

The interview with PP2 revealed the need for the researcher to be proactive in guiding the direction of the interview. PP2 was excited about the topic and gave a lot of insights but also tended to spent time of issues which were not necessarily within the scope of the research. As a result, this interview lasted for more than an hour and was the longest of all the fourteen interviews. Another challenge with using an online medium was the challenges of network connection which caused audio distortions.

Following the two pilot interviews, five participants referred by colleagues were invited to participate in the study by email. In addition to explaining the rights of the potential participants in terms of the ethical undertakings outlined in Chapter4, the invitees were asked to choose their preferred mode of conducting the interview as well as suitable times. All the five participants opted to do the interviews over Microsoft's Ms Teams© application.

In addition, 35 more people were contacted to participate in the research. seven of these responded positively to the invitation. Adding the five potential interviewees

contacted earlier and the two who were part of the pilot exercise, the total sample size was 42 individuals making the response rate to be 33%.

Because there were no major adjustments that were made in the interview guide after the pilot interviews were conducted, the data collected from those pilot interviews was not discarded and is part of the data that will be analysed for purposes of this research.

5.3.1 Data Saturation

According to Fusch & Ness (2015), data saturation is the point where the data no longer produces additional themes Data saturation in a qualitative study is reached at a point where the researcher is not able to gain new additional information from participants (Fusch & Ness, 2015). From that point, any further interviews will result in little or no value to the study. Data saturation was reached by the time participant 14 was interviewed as shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Data saturation

Number of new codes
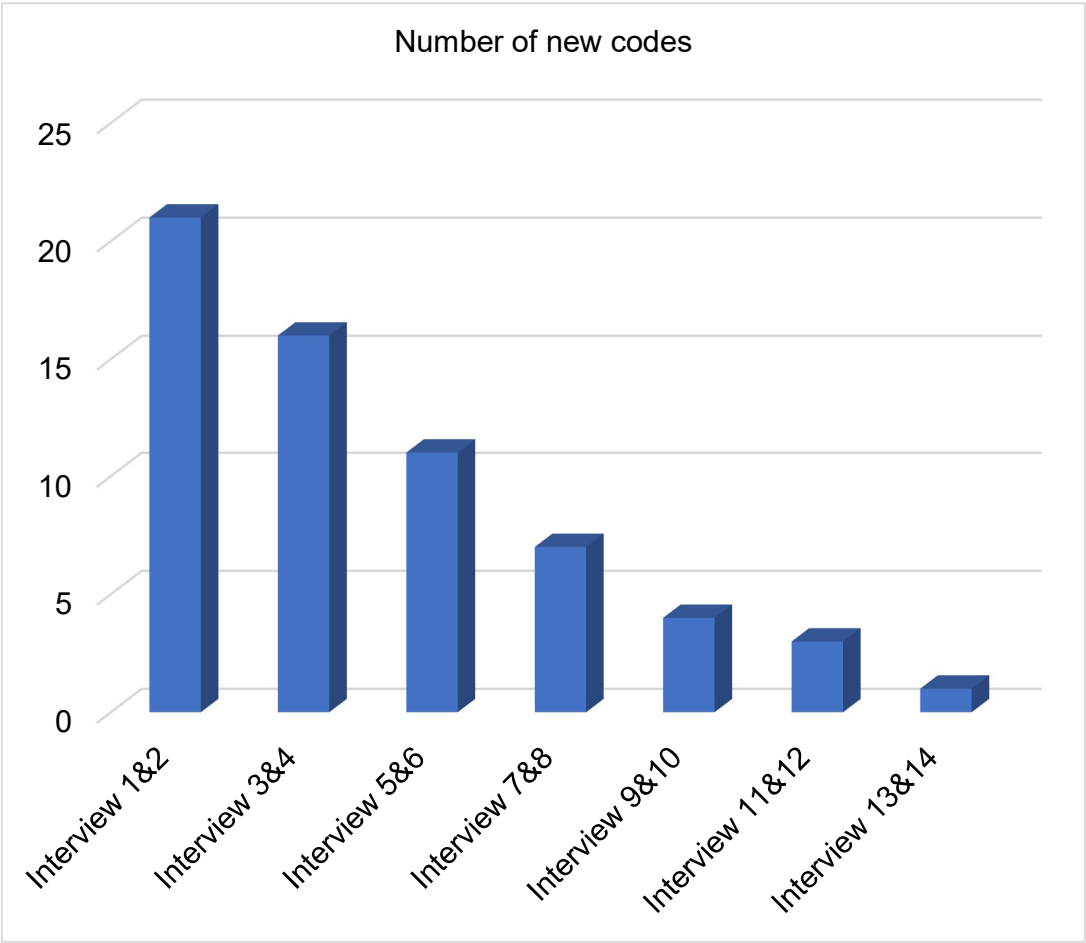
5.4 Results for research question 1

5.4.1 Why do employees resist internally driven organisational changes?

The aim of this question was to establish the reasons behind employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. As a starting point, each participant was asked to share one or two changes that had taken place in their organisation. To gain more insight into these various reasons, the researcher also approached the question in a positive way by asking participants what made them support or advocate for organisational changes. The follow up questions were linked to the specific changes mentioned which enabled participants to share real experiences and give examples when answering the questions.

All participants indicated that in the changes that had been implemented in their organisations, they had observed some resistance from some of their colleagues. Four participants said that they had been in support of those changes. Ten participants admitted to being against the changes.

5.4.1.1 Reasons for resistance

Participants shared different reason why there was resistance to changes in their organisations. The reasons for resistance included poor or lack of communication, exclusion, impact of the change to employees, Job security and benefits of the changes to the organisation.

5.4.1.1.1 Communication

Communication was the most prevalent reason given for resistance to change with 10 out of the 14 participants indicating that poor communication was the reason for their resistance. These participants indicated that employees resisted the changes because they did not understand the reasons behind them and how the changes would impact the way that they did things. Moreover, they indicated that because they did not understand the objective of the change, they deemed the changes unnecessary and therefore responded with resistance. Interestingly, some said they would have supported the change initiative if it was properly communicated to them.

P3 was one of the participants who supported the changes being implemented. According to P3:

> *"The communication is very effective and very thorough. Yeah, I can say that the communication helps in terms of the buy in and all the changes, So you'll get an e-mail chain. But even after the e-mail chain, normally our partners, they'll send an e-mail after that, just to say, listen guys, please note this, and then we have monthly meetings with the partner in each department.."* P3

Lack of proper communication also had adverse impacts to employees. According to P6:

> *"I am quite demoralised, but like. Sometimes going to work gets a bit draining because like I, I personally in my personal life love communication, if you're not gonna communicate with us, if you are coming with bossy tendencies, it's a bit of a problem, especially from top management.*

According to P6, communication alone was not enough. P6 was of the opinion that employees should not just be told about the changes but be consulted. According to P6:

> "*You cannot just come in that position, and you just have meetings with us. Some meetings are not even like a dialogue. She's just like this meeting. We don't, We're not gonna have that. You are gonna listen to me. And then. Uh. Once she's done, that's it. You leave. So how are we going to express how we feel? How are you going to know what issues we have if you conduct meetings in such a manner that you like… I'm not going to have this interaction with you guys. You're gonna listen to me. And when we're done, we're done.*" P6

Contrary to the views of P6, PP2 shared that consulting with employees during the change process results in delayed implementation of the changes. PP2 said that the communication should rather be informative and emphasised that the communication must be clear so that employees understand the reasons behind the implementation of the changes.

> *"…if you involve everyone in all these changes, change will never happen, because you'll get resistance, and you try and fix that, and you'll get some more resistance. So level of involvement sometimes doesn't necessarily*

mean people being involved from the beginning to the end of the process, level of involvement might just need to be an informed given them making them informed that there's going to be a change. And this change is this is how it's going to work. And this is what we are trying to achieve". PP2

P10 commented that the lack of communication about the changes makes the employees to not know what is going on in the organisation:

"*I feel like there's a lack of communication. I think that's the big problem. You just see things happen. They just happen.*" P10

P4 shared that the lack of communication results in employees not implementing the changes because of lack of understanding of the change process.

"Principals will come up with a vision for this change. Then people who are going to implement these visions are employees. So now if they don't understand this vision, how are they going to attend this vision?" P4

5.4.1.1.2 Exclusion

Some participants expressed lack of inclusion in the planning and implementation of the organisational changes. This exclusion made the employees to not have a full understanding of the change initiatives and as such, felt that they are not an important stakeholder for successful implementation of the changes. PP1 pointed out that she was not happy with how the change was conducted:

"If you are involved, right from the onset, when things are happening, then it's easy for you to advocate for that change. Because you understand how it came about, you understand why it's happening, as opposed to, you know, having a decision told to you that because that's how things are going to be you accepted. There's no real explanation behind it, of how we landed in this position. I feel like, should they have told us this in time, you obviously would prepare and not have certain expectations. But now you already have certain expectations. And then they come to you with the final decision. It's not a

discussion, it's a decision that has been made by the you know, execs and you are expected to just accept?"

The issue of exclusion did not seem to apply to all employees. P12 pointed out that while others are informed of the changes and how they impacted them, the interests of others may not be considered. According to P12:

"So they are not considering, OK, what does the minority group need? What would they be comfortable with? This kind of thought, OK, we just implementing this. Everyone needs to be happy with it. Almost like me shoving the decision down your throat, you know whether or not you like it, you will have, you just have to deal." P12

PP2 was part of the team that implemented a restructuring exercise in his organisation. He shared that he picked up some resistance from employees who were not included in the change process. They ignored the changes and continued to operate in the old way until they were called in and the process was explained to them.

"But another thing as well, that I see during this whole back and forth is sometimes people resist change, because in the process of implementing the change, we did not involve them in one way or the other."

P9 also viewed employee involvement as a tool that can be used by leaders to reduce employee resistance to changes. She emphasised that employees want to be part of the process and want to be aware of what is happening at all the different stages of the change process.

"Make them feel that they are part of the change and move with the change where they are involved."

5.4.1.1.3   Impact of the change to employees

The direct impact of the changes to employees came out as an important factor that participants considered in deciding whether they would support or resist organisational change initiatives. Participants indicated that they analyse the proposed changes to establish whether or not they will make things better for them or they will make things worse. All the participants that supported the organisational

changes noted they deem the changes to be beneficial to them and will improve their experiences in the organisation.

P7 had recently gone through organisational changes that included technological changes whereby employees could do things remotely and not have to come to the office. According to P7:

> "*I think in terms of efficiency as well, it's good because now you don't need to come to the office to apply for leave. And you can do it remotely. At home, if you have an emergency, you can simply log into the system and apply right. Before you had to make an arrangement. Come here to manual leave, then go back. So yeah, for me it is a very good change.*" P7

PP1's experience involved a management decision not to pay bonuses but to give employees an increase. The participant deemed this change in salary structure as detrimental to her and her colleagues in general. According to PP1:

> "*This obviously had a negative impact because we were told that there are no bonuses. Instead, we will be getting an increase.*" PP1

Some employees indicated that there were parts of the organisational changes that they perceived as beneficial, and they adopted those with enthusiasm. On the other hand, they also deemed some parts of the changes to be detrimental to them and as such, they did not support those parts of the changes. P5 noted that a restructuring that happened in his department resulted in more work for him and made it difficult for him to further his studies which is important to him as a part-time lecturer.

"So people will end up having too much workload with less compensation or stay the compensation and that doesn't allow them either to extend their studies because they have got many work commitment load or to do other businesses or engage in other and other things in, in their lives." P5

In the same breath P5 also mentioned that he has benefited from the high staff turnover as it opened opportunities for him to be exposed to tasks that are ordinarily done by his leaders, which made him support that part of the change.

"Also, you're now being exposed to leadership even when you would not have ordinarily been, because of the shortage of the staff and you are deemed to be senior from an early stage than you would ordinarily be. And it helps you now with your experience". P5

5.4.1.1.4   Job security

The fear of losing their jobs following the changes was cited as one of the reasons for resisting change. This was prevalent from participants who had experienced changes that related to mergers and technology. Participants indicated that resistance in such cases was expressed through resignations after the changes had been introduced as they no longer saw how they fitted. This concern came even stronger from the participants that are in management positions. Participants indicated that the first thing that employees ask about when changes are taking place is whether their jobs will be lost as a result. Employees showed enthusiastic adoption after being given assurance that their jobs will not be lost, and their remuneration packages will remain after the changes have been implemented. As P4 explained:

> *"imagine, you are the Chief Financial Officer in an organization now. All of a sudden there are two financial officers."* P4

According to P10,

> *"Our old managers, actually the last one resigned. Now the other two have left already. Since this thing started.".*

P14 had a similar story to tell:

> *"Most of them have left. We're left with about 2 directors and also staff is leaving. Since those changes that took place."* P14

P5 also experience the same in their organisation:

> "*Hence many people have left and also the complaints were around also the leadership of the head HOD at the time or the leadership at the time."* P5

Some changes not properly communicated were interpreted by some participants as tools to get rid of some of the employees. P9 expressed it this way:

"…when you speak of automating processes, people are worried about their jobs. They feel like one or two people might lose their jobs because now you are no longer gonna need. Someone who would be dealing with filing, etcetera." P9

5.4.1.1.5　Benefit of the change to the organisation

To gain an understanding of how organisations can overcome resistance to change from employees, the researcher asked participants what would make them advocate for the changes that have taken place in their organisations. Participants mentioned that they would support changes that would benefit their organisation. In probing further on this question, it emerged that by supporting the changes that would benefit their organisation, they included benefit to employees as well.

Some participants made specific reference to the fact that, just because the change was beneficial to the organisation, it did not necessarily mean that it would be beneficial to employees. They emphasised that the benefit to the organisation should be coupled with the benefit to the employee.

In noting opposition to changes that only benefit the organisation, P5 said:

"So people will end up having too much workload with less compensation or stay the compensation and that doesn't allow them either to extend their studies because they have got many work commitment load or to do other businesses or engage in other and other things in, in their lives." P5

Noting changes that benefitted the organisation and employees, P7 said before the changes were implemented, data capturing was conducted manually. Continuing, P7 said the change was very good because:

"it improved efficiency. Apart from that, obviously there used to be a lot of findings relating to the manual process. You know, such as late capturing of leave. It's gonna be much easier, you know, because we will have to apply online and automatically it will notify the line manager to approve."

P9 is in the process of transitioning from manual to automated procedures and her organisation is removing any paper-based storage. This was following an incident

where their archive room burnt down, and the organisation lost information. P9 shared the following.

> *"I feel that the change would be beneficial to the organization. Remember, we are moving with time and we no longer need any manual systems. And when you look at any process that has too much human intervention, there's that risk regarding the mistakes and document loss as well. But if your information and processes are automated, you automatically reduce such risks."* P9

The feedback from participants seemed to indicate that by changes being beneficial to the organisation and to employees did not necessarily mean beneficial monetarily. PP2 saw the benefit in terms of reducing tedious work. According to PP2:

> *"instead of people being focused on compiling that piles and piles of paper, they could be now thinking of other things, which may lead to more opportunities within the organization, instead of focusing on the paper. Now that paper is removed, you're gonna be like, I used to do this for like an hour. But now what is it that I can do? And already you're opening up another thing that probably all of us, we overlooked that thing, but because you are having that an extra hour, you're gonna look into it, and you're gonna open so much more. And that's the reason for innovation and the reason for change in all organizations."*

In noting the changes introduced to allow employees to work in a hybrid arrangement. P13 noted the benefits of working at home and working in the office. According to P13 on having to come into the office, P13 said:

> *"I guess I think it was for the good. It was really nice seeing people again. I didn't realize how much I missed working and interacting, interacting with people. So I think that was a good thing.*

In the same breath, P13 added:

> *And because I live in Middleburg, so it's the town next to Witbank. The costs of driving there is a bit tough. So with a hybrid that we can choose either to go in or not, it helps a lot and that I don't have to go in every day and with*

that costs, so yeah, I think overall it's really good. It helps in the one part where I don't need to drive in."

5.5 Results for research question 2

What is the role of social identity in employee resistance to change?

In the south African context, inclusivity and diversity is still a big issue in the workplace. This question sought to explore the role played by social identity to employee resistance for internally driven organisational changes. The opening question was asking participants to identify social groups existing in their organisations and to indicate which ones they associated with. All the participants confirmed that there are different social identity groups which are mostly characterised by gender, race, age, and employment positions in the workplace. Two participants indicated religion and political affiliation.

Twelve participants said social identity played a big role in encouraging employee support to internally driven organisational changes. According to P7, social identity plays a crucial role:

> "*to answer your question, it plays a very crucial role, very crucial role, because obviously we come from different backgrounds, different beliefs, yeah. So if you just. Uh, imposing a change. It will affect certain people, because of their beliefs, or culture, yeah, so I would say it plays a very crucial role, hence stakeholder analysis. It's very important before you even bring upon the change, you know.*" P7

P9 also shared similar sentiments with P7 as she noted the positive impact that came about after the organisation addressed the concerns of different social groups.

> *"Yes. It really played a huge role and had a positive impact because during initiation it was very hard to get the people to explain the system development life cycle to them and they were not willing to participate until all their fears and their needs were taken care of. After that everybody was Interested in assisting and they were fully participating and it's an ongoing process."* P9

PP1 went as far as saying that she would have supported the changes if her social identity group was included in the decision-making process.

According to her:

> *"I'm sure if it was made in that way, I definitely then would support the change, because it would mean that it's very inclusive. But now it's only considering only one point of the company, whereas the company is, is made up by its human resource. So if my social group was also involved in that decision, and if it was to be for the benefit of that social, I obviously would be, you know, for that idea of change."*

Six participants said they felt like their organisations did not consider the needs of their social groups and as such they resisted changes that adversely impacted their social identity groups. Some mentioned that they showed their resistance by not participating in the implementation of the changes or only partly participating when they felt like the needs of their social groups were being considered.

In some cases, social identity became a factor in the perception of how employees saw their relationships with their managers

> *"So, it's not like, with me. She's been mean or anything towards me. But I feel like she doesn't dedicate time towards teaching me what she wants. So she'd rather give it to her people because she's comfortable with her people, because she's worked with those people because obviously she doesn't know me or maybe trust me enough."* P10

Participants also indicated that their resistance came from feeling like the changes that their organisations were implementing were designed to benefit specific social groups and were to the detriment of other social groups. The participants who felt that the changes were to the detriment of their social groups resisted the changes while those who felt that the changes were beneficial to their social groups were perceived to be advocating for the changes.

P4 saw the perceptions of changes benefitting other groups on the basis of political groupings and seemed to suggest that to be the reason they resisted changes.

> *"Yeah, they feel like they are going to be kicked out. They believe that since they are not really belonging to a certain political group, maybe they're about to be kicked out. Yeah. And again, you know that inferiority complex as well because especially the older group."*

5.6 Results for research question 3

What is the impact of social identity leadership in employee attitudes for planned organisational changes?

This question sought to explore the impact of social identity leadership in influencing employee attitudes for planned organisational changes. Leaders play an important role as initiators of organisational change initiatives and it is important to understand how they impact employee attitudes during organisational change processes. Eight participants indicated that their attitude to change was influenced by the kind of leader involved in the change process. Those who felt that they had common values with the leader supported the change initiative and they understood the reasons behind the change. According to P11 in the issue of social identity leadership the social identity of the leader can be more salient than their position in the organisation. According to P11:

> *"You know that they actually had to get a person of colour, an associate director from a different office. Basically, as a mediator."* P11

Some participants shared their experiences where a leader that a particular group of employees related to had to be called in to explain the change process, and after that, the resistance to the change was overcome. According to P14:

> *"We understand each other better from our backgrounds and stuff. So yeah, it makes it, I would say easier. It makes more relatable because yes because we are from the same background you know we understand what's the next person could be going through or is going through, things like that."* P14

Interestingly, participants noted that lack of inclusion of employees from different social backgrounds made some groups feel like those implementing changes did not understand their needs and as such, they were resistant to the changes. Participants said, even where platforms for raising concerns during a change process existed, employees were not always satisfied with the responses from their leaders. According to PP1:

"They do address the concerns. And there is always an answer for why this happened. But is it to the satisfaction of the employee? I doubt it …but then you know that this is just to hype them up, but only for nothing to materialise. So it drives you to do your work, it gives you the hope that, you know, better days are coming but really won't materialize. PP1

P6 noted that they resisted the changes that were implemented by the new executive head of department because they felt that he did not take steps to understand the team and he was not as relatable as their previous leader.

"I think they feel uncomfortable about the change because, umm, the previous leadership did things in a different way than how the current one did. He literally came in and changed everything. How you how often you report everything has to go through her. You cannot call stakeholders without her office knowing."

P6 even went as far as accusing executive management of not understanding the change that the organisation is implementing and had a negative attitude towards the change. She did not hold the leader to a high regard and as such was not willing to follow the changes that she was introducing.

"You know, unless he also doesn't understand the process of getting into a new organization with obviously different goals from the previous. What you call, the previous management, I think. If he had a chance or I don't know if she's had, like, some leadership training or how to interact with staff, and when this is happening, I don't know, that would have been better." P6

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the research to answer the main research question which is: How can organizational leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organizational changes?

Responses to research question 1 revealed that internally driven changes put employees in positions of discomfort because of the uncertainty that the change brings. Participants emphasised the importance of communicating the process and the objective of the change. Moreover, participants indicated that communication need to include details of how employees fit in the newly changed environment. The results showed that poor communication was the main reason for employee resistance to change.

Moreover, the results also revealed that employee perceptions of how they saw the impact of the change from the employee perspective and organisational perspective was one of the contributors to employee resistance to changes. There was less employee resistance to organisational changes when employees perceive the changes to positively impact both employees and their organisation. Employees resisted changes where they believed that such changes would negatively impact them and the organisation.

The results of this study also showed that employees resisted changes when they felt like the changes threatened their job security. They showed their resistance by not implementing the changes appropriately and even leaving the organisations during the implementation stage.

Research question 2 explored the role of social identity to employee resistance to changes. The results to this research question revealed that social identity played an important role in employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. Participants indicated that they resisted changes where they felt like the needs of their social groups were not catered for.

Furthermore, the results showed that employees resisted changes when they felt like the changes were designed to put the social group that they are part of in a worse off position. The social groups that were prevalent were influenced by race, gender, age, and employment positions.

Research question 3 explored the role of social identity leadership to employee attitudes for internally driven organisational changes. The results indicated that employees were supportive of change initiatives if they felt that the leader shared common values with them. Participants shared the importance of employee inclusion when implementing organisational changes.

The results also revealed that in organisations where leaders were more diverse and more employees could relate to one or more of the leaders, employee resistance was lesser than where there was a dominant social group that in leadership which was not representative of the social groups at the employee level.

The next chapter discusses the findings in detail and linking it back to the literature.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the research as presented in chapter 5 in detail. The results serve to integrate the findings of the research into the literature which was reviewed in Chapter 2. In so doing, this chapter will add to the body of knowledge by contributing what still needs to be known (Boote & Beile, 2005) as found out from the study whose results were presented in Chapter 5.

The discussion of the results in this chapter will be made in accordance with each research question as presented in chapter 3 and thereby contribute towards answering the main research question as presented in Chapter 1 and 3.

6.2 Discussion of results for research question 1

6.2.1 Why do employees resist internally driven organisational changes?

This question sought to establish the reasons behind employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes from the perspectives of employees. In establishing the reasons behind employee resistance to changes, this question sought to establish what would make employees support changes implemented in their organisations. Understanding these reasons would help organisational leaders to ensure that they eliminate the existence of those reasons when they are implementing changes. The themes that emerged from the interviews on the reasons behind employee resistance to organisational changes with respect to this question included poor or lack of communication on the envisaged changes; employee exclusion; impact of change to employees; job security; and perceived benefits of the changes to the organisation by employees. The discussion on this question will be based on these themes as presented in Chapter 5.

6.2.1.1 Communication

According to the research findings, participants identified lack of communication or poor communication regarding the change objectives and the change process as one of the reasons why they resisted organisational changes. Effective and thorough communication regarding the changes that the organisation was planning to

implement was one of the tools that were successfully used by leaders to reduce resistance to organisational changes. The findings showed that even when the communication was there, if it did not result in employees understanding the change process, there was still resistance from employees. Additionally, the findings revealed that communication during the organisational change process should be an ongoing process as opposed to just something that is done as a once off task. Participants noted that being informed about the stages where the change projects were at had helped them to understand the changes and gain interest in participating to their implementation. This is in line with Higgs & Rowland (2011) who confirmed that communication plays a positive role in facilitating employee acceptance for organisational changes.

The findings also showed that poor communication of the organisational changes resulted in employees misinterpreting the reasons behind the changes. The results showed that employees did not initiate communication with the change agents when there was something that they did not understand, instead they made assumptions based on their own interpretation of what they thought was happening. Employees also shared that they would communicate the assumptions with their peers and not their leaders. This lack of clarity caused resistance by employees. These findings are in line with Kotter (1995) who suggested that the outcome of poor or lack of communication during the change process is increased cynicism.

Visagie & Steyn (2011) also confirmed that poorly managed communication has dire consequences such as rumours, resistance to change and exaggeration of the negative areas of the change initiatives. Some employees viewed the changes that were implemented in their organisation as having been introduced as a mechanism to get rid of some employees. This view resulted in the implementation of the change initiatives taking longer to implement and in turn costing the organisation more money than anticipated. This is also supported by García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández (2015) who suggested that insufficient information result in wrong early perceptions about the change and thus results in employee resistance to those changes.

Furthermore, this research study found that while communication reduced resistance to change, something more still needed to be done to encourage employees to enthusiastically support internally driven organisational changes. The

results revealed that the communication process should involve consultation of employees and give them an opportunity to also provide their inputs regarding the changes. The findings showed that employees resisted the communicated changes where they were not given opportunities to give their input or express how they felt about the changes. The result indicated that such one-sided communication made employees feel like they had no other choice but to participate in the change process in the manner that is prescribed by the change agents. This finding supports Oreg (2018) and Srivastava & Agrawal (2020) who suggested that employees usually resist changes because they perceive them to have been created by the system, and that employees have no other choice but to accept them.

6.2.1.2 Exclusion

Another finding revealed that employee exclusion in the planning and implementation of organisational changes was a contributing factor to employee resistance to organisational changes. The lack of inclusion resulted in employees not understanding what was required from them to make the implementation of the changes to be successful. The findings revealed that there was confusion from some employees regarding what their role would be upon the completion of the change initiative. This confusion was interpreted by participants as a product of employees being excluded from some of the process and not having a bigger picture about the organisational changes. This finding supports Samal & Chatterjee (2020) who suggested that leaders of organisations should acknowledge the importance of involving employees during the organisational change process as part of the organisational change strategy. Similarly, Kaminski (2011) noted that the more transparent and inclusive the change process is, the more the employees will be willing to move towards the change.

The findings showed that resistance would be less if employees who were impacted by the changes were included from the planning to the implementation stage of the organisational change processes. This revealed that employees would adopt changes with enthusiasm if they felt that they are an integral part of the change process and that the leaders are recognising their importance through including them in all the steps of the change process. The findings are in line with García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández (2015) who noted that employee inclusion

reduces the employees' feeling of fear that the implementation of organisational changes will result in negative outcomes.

The findings showed that employees do not regard being told about the plans to implement changes as inclusion. They regarded inclusion as being consulted from the planning stage of the organisational change process. The results showed that employees regarded the exclusion as a deliberate act by their leaders to deceive employees. Because the changes involved a diversion of what was previously communicated by leaders, employees expected to be involved when there were any changes from what was previously communicated. The exclusion made the employees feel like leaders had something to hide that may impact employees negatively. This finding is in line with Arifin (2019) who suggested that employee resistance to organisational changes can change the more the employees are aware of the changes.

The findings also showed that the issue of exclusion may not be applicable to all employees in an organisation such that some employees may experience exclusion during the change process while others do not. Consequently, those who felt excluded resisted the changes while others did not. This finding is in line with Rafferty & Jimmieson (2017), who indicated that, even though employees may go through similar changes, their responses to the changes may differ significantly.

6.2.1.3 Impact of the change to employees

The findings revealed that the direct impact of organisational changes to employees played a role in their resistance to changes. Employees used resistance to cope with their perceived negative effects of the changes. This process involved their own assessment of the negative impact of the changes and the communicated benefits of the changes were viewed as leadership perspectives and not the realities of employees. This was an expected outcome as this in line with the assertions made by Srivastava & Agrawal (2020) that change initiatives usually involve a process where employees must shift from their routines to an unpredictable state of doing things. The resistance by employees then comes about when they predict that the changes that the organisation is planning to implement will shift them to an unfavourable state.

The findings also showed that employees resisted the changes even more when they perceived that they would experience financial loss as a result of the implemented changes. The negative impact that was experienced by one of the participants who felt that they would have been in a better financial position if the salary structure was not changed in their organisation came out as the biggest factor which led to them resisting the change. This is in line with Vakola (2014) who suggested that a key determinant of whether an employee will embrace organisational changes or not is their perception of whether the change is beneficial to them or detrimental. Similarly, Jones et al., (2008) further noted that employees might not be resisting the change itself, but rather the perceived negative outcomes of the change.

The results also showed that the perceptions of employees about the organisational changes can vary at different stages of the change process. The results showed that once employee perceptions change from negative to positive, they are more open to be part of the change process and their resistance gets reduced. Participants resisted the change until the point where they felt like the changes were impacting positively, after that they adopted the changes with enthusiasm. This finding supports Amarantou et al., (2017) who suggested that employees resisted changes to protect themselves from the negative impact of the changes. Visagie & Steyn (2011) further suggest that employees are less likely to be resistant to changes when they foresee some value accruing to them because of the change.

6.2.1.4 Job security

The findings from the study indicated that resistance to changes was triggered by the fear of employees losing their jobs because of the implementation of the changes. This fear was shown even more by employees whose organisations had entered in a merger and acquisition transaction. Such transactions caused discomfort for employees as they presumed that their skills might not be required after the transaction was concluded. This fear was more prevalent from participants who were in management positions. The results of the research showed that employees assumed that, upon the successful merger of the two companies, a choice would have to be made to get rid of some employees who have overlapping tasks. This is in line with García-Cabrera & García-Barba Hernández (2015) who

suggested that if job security is presented as part of the change, employees may respond by adopting the change with enthusiasm to access this benefit.

The findings further indicated that employees left their organisations after some changes were introduced to mitigate the risk of them losing their jobs. This reaction applied more in organisations where there was a new technology that was introduced which changed the way in which some or all processes are done. Change in processes required change in the way in which employees did their jobs. The fear of job losses came about because employees did not see how they fitted in the organisation after the implementation of the changes and deemed their roles redundant. This finding was not surprising as Srivastava & Agrawal (2020), indicated that change initiatives usually involved a process where employees must shift from their routines to an unpredictable state of doing things. This finding is also in line with Oreg (2018) who indicated that internally driven organisational changes impact employees the most as they may shift from performing their jobs following a routine that they were accustomed to

6.2.1.5 Benefit of the change to the organisation

Participants indicated that they supported organisational change initiatives that they perceived to be beneficial to their organisations. Interestingly, the benefits that the participants referred to did not include financial benefit to the organisation. The results showed that employees automatically assumed that if the leaders are implementing the changes, such changes will result in some financial benefits for the organisation. The benefits that they focused on included improved efficiencies, more support for the teams and better working environment. This is in line with Darmawan & Azizah, (2020) who noted that there is an individualistic nature in responding to the change process and employees use logic to assess whether the change initiatives would be beneficial to them or not.

The results also showed that employees supported changes that were also beneficial to employees, rather than those that were just beneficial to the organisation alone. It was clear that the benefits of the changes to the organisation should not be automatically assumed to flow to employees, efforts should be done to ensure that there were benefits for the employees too.

The results showed that changes that had positive benefits for the organisation at the detriment of employees resulted in employee resistance. This finding is in line with Vakola (2014) who suggested that a key determinant of whether an employee will embrace organisational changes or not is their perception of whether the change is beneficial to them or detrimental.

6.3 Discussion of results for research question 2

What is the role of social identity in employee resistance to change?

This question sought to explore the role played by social identity to employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. The results revealed that social identity played a crucial role in influencing employee resistance to changes. The results showed that employees reacted differently to changes and those differences were influenced by religion, culture, gender, race employment positions and political affiliation. These social identity groupings are in line with Booysen (2007) who indicated that South Africa had a diverse workforce which was mainly categorised by race, gender, ethnicity, and language.

Participants indicated that employees resisted organisational changes where they felt that the social groups that they identified with were not included in the decision-making process that necessitated those changes. The results suggest that it is important for leaders to analyse the impact of organisational changes to different social groups and ensure that they would all benefit from the implementation of those changes. The results are in line with Hogg (2009) who suggested that social identity leadership procedures were dependent on members identifying as a single, united group with a leader who is prototypical and representative of the group.

The results also showed that social identity became a factor in the perception of how employees viewed their relationship with their leaders. The employees who felt that leaders in their organisation did not consider the needs of their social groups in implementing the changes resisted the changes. This was more prevalent to employees who believed that the change agents had values that were completely different from the values of their groups. These results are in line with, Steffens et al. (2014) who suggested that leaders who demonstrate excellent performance were viewed as role models by their followers and as such, followers wanted to mimic the characteristics of those leaders. Employees resisted the changes where they did not

identify with the leader heading the change process. participants said they exhibited resistance by not participating in the implementation of the changes or only implementing some parts of the changes. This was an expected response for white collar employees as they did not have platforms where they could freely express their opposition to organisational changes. Bejinaru & Baesu (2013), agrees that employees show individual acts of resistance to changes through actions such as activity slow-down, activity drawl, delays in launching the change process, delayed and inefficient actions during the change process.

Lastly, participants indicated that some employee resistance came about because employees felt that the changes that the organisation was implementing were intended to benefit some social groups while they to the detriment of the other social groups that they belonged to. This is in line with Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans (2013) who believe that people normally strive for and benefit from positive social identities associated with their groups. It is therefore not surprising that employees were resistant to changes that they found to be detrimental to their social groups. Jones et al (2008), further noted that individual employees partly experience the change process as a member of a group.

6.4 Discussion of results for research question 3

What is the impact of social identity leadership in employee attitudes in planned organisational changes?

This question sought to explore the impact of social identity leadership in influencing employee attitudes for planned organisational changes. The results to this question would help in establishing whether the leaders can use their position to influence employees to have positive attitudes towards organisational changes. The results indicated that the attitudes of employees towards organisational changes were influenced by the kind of leader involved in the change process. The findings showed that employees who could relate to the leader found it easy to understand the need for the change and the implementation process and as such they had positive attitudes towards the changes. This outcome is supported by Arifin (2019) who indicated that the engagement between the leader and followers was one of the factors that affected employee attitudes towards organisational changes. Georgalis et al. (2015) also suggested that a good relationship between the leader and

employees had a positive effect on employee attitudes towards organisational changes.

The findings showed that employees who felt like they had common values with their leaders supported the changes and did not struggle to understand the reasons behind the changes and the process that needed to be followed to implement the changes. Employees who did not trust their leaders or the reasons behind their leaders implementing the changes responded with resistance to those changes. This result supports Steffens et al., (2014) who suggested that leaders who demonstrate excellent performance are viewed as role models by their followers and as such, followers want to mimic the characteristics of those leaders.

The results to this question also indicated that some employee resistance came about because employees felt like the leader did not understand the needs of their social groups and as such those needs were never appropriately responded to. These groups felt like the leaders did not consider their needs when implementing the changes and they attributed this to the leader lacking an understanding of the needs of their social groups. This is in line with Packard & Shih (2014), who suggested that leaders can use their human agency to respond to internal and external forces for change.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the results obtained through data collection and linked the existing literature. The results revealed that resistance to change was a product of many factors such as poor or lack of communication, employee or group exclusion, negative impact of the change to employees, fear of job losses and perceived negative benefits of the changes to the organisation. The findings also revealed that employees showed their resistance passively through resigning, refusing to implement the changes, and/or partly implementing the changes.

Social identity was found to be playing a critical role in employee resistance to changes. The results showed that employee resistance to organisational changes was reduced where employees felt that the changes taking place considered the needs of their social groups. Moreover, employees supported change initiatives if their social group was included in the change process.

Lastly it was established that leaders played a critical role in influencing employee attitudes in implementing planned organisational changes. Social identity leadership became important as a good relationship between the leader and a follower facilitates good employee attitudes to organisational changes. The next chapter presents conclusions reached and recommendations based on the research findings.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

Globalisation, technological changes, and innovation have been identified as some of the factors necessitating organisational changes in recent years (Doeze Jager et al., 2016; Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Stouten et al., 2018). Despite changes being common, most organisational change initiatives are generally unsuccessful (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Employee resistance to changes has been identified as one of the major reasons for the unsuccessful implementation of organisational changes (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). This research aimed to establish how organisational leaders could overcome resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

This chapter will present the conclusions reached in this study for each research question. The contribution of the study for academia and business will be presented after. These will be followed by the presentation of the limitation of this study and the suggestions for future research. The conclusion reached in this study will be presented last.

7.2 Reasons why employees resist internally driven organisational changes

The results suggest that there is no one reason that can be singled out as a contributor to employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. Several reasons for employee resistance were uncovered. These were:

- **Communication** regarding how the changes will impact employees and the adjustments that leaders leading change could make to overcome employee resistance (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).
- Employee **inclusion** during the planning and implementation of the organisational changes played a role in ensuring that employees did not feel forced to implement the changes such that they felt like they did not have any choice but to accept the changes (Oreg ,2018; Srivastava & Agrawal 2020).
- The results showed that leaders could reduce the negative **impact of the changes to the employees** as a tool to reduce employee resistance to changes (Amarantou et al., 2017).

- The unpredictable state (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020) of **job security** that organisational changes bring caused employees to resist changes as they feared that they could lose their jobs when changes were introduced.
- The perceived **benefits of the changes to the organisation** and employees were a factor in encouraging employees to support or resisting the change. Employees used logical sense to assess whether the changes were beneficial to the organisation or not (Georgalis et al. 2015; Darmawan & Azizah, 2019).

7.3 The role of social identity in employee resistance to change

- Social identity played an important role in employee resistance to organisational changes as the resistance was seen to be influenced by culture, religion, culture, gender, race employment positions and political affiliation (Booysen, 2007).
- The results showed that employees resisted organisational changes where they felt that the social groups that they associated with were not included in the decision-making processes that necessitated those changes. Employees resisted changes where they did not identify with the leader implementing the changes (Hogg, 2009).
- Individual acts of resistance were shown by employees whose social identity groups were not considered in the change process by not participating in implementing the changes or partly participating (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2013).

7.4 The role of social identity leadership in employee attitudes for planned organisational changes.

- Employees who felt like they had common values with their leaders supported the changes and they did not struggle to understand the reasons behind the changes and the processes that needed to be followed to implement the changes. A good relationship between the leaders and employees had a positive effect on employee attitudes towards the changes made (Georgalis et al., 2015).
- Some employee resistance came about because employees felt like the leader did not understand the needs of their social groups and as such those

needs were never appropriately responded to by the leaders. Engagement between the leader and followers was one of the factors that affected employee attitudes towards organisational changes (Arifin, 2019).

7.5 Academic contribution for this study

Even though scholars have agreed that employee resistance to change is one of the reasons for unsuccessful change initiatives (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014), there is still no model available that help organisational leaders to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. Moreover, the existing literature on employee resistance to change has a major limitation which relates to the lack of generalisation of the results (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). This research contributes to existing literature on employee resistance to changes and will help organisations in the professional accounting and consulting industry in South Africa with tools that can be used to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes.

7.6 Recommendations for organisations

Organisational leaders should always implement changes keeping in mind that employee resistance to changes is an inherent risk to internally driven organisational changes. Accordingly, should put plans aimed at reducing that risk in place. Because there are several reasons that could lead to employee resistance to changes, organisations must identify the reasons that are likely to be in play in their organisations and their responses should speak to those reasons.

This research has shown that leaders can respond to employee resistance through improved and efficient communication of the changes, inclusion of all social groups in the change process, eliminating or reducing negative impacts of the changes to employees, and clearly outlining the individual and organisational benefits that are brought about by the changes.

Additionally, leaders can apply social identity leadership characteristics to respond to different social identity groups that the organisation represents. In a South African context, care must be taken in addressing the needs of different social identity groups during the communication and implementation of the organisational changes.

Lastly, organisational leaders need to be able to see actions that exhibit resistance from employees as employees do not always explicitly communicate their resistance to the changes. Actions such as resignations following the changes, refusal to implement the changes and using only some features of the new systems may indicate that employees are against the changes.

7.7 Limitations

In addition to the risk of researcher bias which is inherent in qualitative research studies (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), the following limitations applied in this study.

- The research was conducted at a point in time and the responses were based on the experiences of the employees of the changes at that point in time. The responses may vary at different stages of the change implementation process.
- The research was only conducted in the professional accounting and consulting industry and the results may not be generalised across all industries in South Africa.
- The researcher is not a professional in the research field and the lack of experience poses a limitation to the quality of research and interpretation of the results. To respond to this limitation, the researcher performed the pilot interviews.

7.8 Suggestions for future research

To expand on the findings of this study, practitioners should consider:

- Conducting research on employee resistance to organisational changes at different stages of the change process. This would contribute to establishing which tools would be effective at the planning stage, implementation, and post-implementation stages of the change process.
- Quantitatively test the applicability of tools discovered in this research in a different industry in South Africa.

7.9 Conclusion

This study was aimed at uncovering tools that organisational leaders can use to overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes and improve the success of change initiatives in the professional accounting and consulting industry in South Africa. For both internally driven and externally driven organisational changes, employees are a crucial part in the success of the implementation of such changes (Darmawan & Azizah, 2019). Employee resistance to changes is one of the factors that have resulted in unsuccessful implementation of change initiatives (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). Failed change initiatives can cost organisations millions in lost revenues. The COVID-19 outbreak necessitated internally driven changes such as technology advancements, mergers and hybrid working environment in the professional accounting and consulting industry in South Africa.

This study provides useful tools that can be used to reduce employee resistance to changes. Leaders can use the findings of this study to identify actions by employees that may be indicative of resistance during organisational change processes, and appropriately respond to those.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topic: Overcoming employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes

Race:

Gender:

Age:
Organisation:

Job title:

Main research question

How can organizational leaders encourage employees to enthusiastically adopt internally driven organizational changes?

Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am interested in finding out how organisations can overcome employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes. Having this interview with you will help me understand ways in which leaders can encourage employees to support change initiatives in their organisations.

I would like to highlight that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you can withdraw from it at any point. Your responses will be completely anonymous and any information that I will quote from this interview will not have your names or the name of your organisation disclosed to anyone. The researcher is seeking to get insights from your experiences as an individual and will not associate them with the organisation that you work for. This interview will not take more than 45 minutes depending on how much we talk.

Why do employees resist internally driven organisational changes?
Please share any recent changes that have been made in your organisation recently
To what extend has the recent changes in your organisation affected you?

Would you say that the recent changes have benefited you or that they were at your detriment? please explain.

What has made you to be an advocate or to be against changes that your organisation has made?

What is the role of social identity in employee resistance to change?

Do you feel like there is a group in the organisation that you belong to? Please share the characteristics of the social group.

Would you say that the needs of your social group are considered when changes are made in the organisation?

Would you support organisational changes that you deem to be considering the needs of a social group that you identify with? Why?

What is the impact of social identity leadership in employee attitudes for planned organisational changes?

Does the leadership of the organisation consider the diverse groups in the organisation when implementing changes? How do they do that?

Do you feel that the identity of your group is threatened by the changes that the leaders have introduced? Give examples.

Do the leaders in your organisation belong to predominantly the same social group? How has that impacted the way they propose changes in the organisation.

Have you noted any social groups that have complained about the organisational changes ignoring their values? How have they responded to those changes?

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Research Title: Overcoming employee resistance to internally driven organisational changes

I am a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Sciences, and I am conducting this research as part of MBA requirements.

I, _____ confirm the following:

I understand what the research is about, and I have had an opportunity to ask questions where I do not understand.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any point for whatever reason.

I agree to the interview being recorded by audio.

I understand that the data that will be collected is confidential, and I agree to the use of anonymised quotations on publications.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor using the details below

Researcher	Supervisor
Names: Andiswa Matutu	Names: Jabu Maphalala
Email: 21919841@mygibs.co.za	Email: MaphalalaJ@gibs.co.za
Cell: 072 7166 232	Cell: 071 679 2770

Participant_____

Signature_____ Date_____

Name of researcher: Andiswa Matutu

Signature_____ Date_____

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Andiswa Matutu,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards