



**Framing change dialogically: exploring the Impact of change framing on Employee Buy-In**

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## **Abstract**

This study, a qualitative single case study, explores how leadership dialogic framing fosters employee buy-in during a digital transformational change in a culturally diverse, high-power distance, geographically dispersed multinational organisation. Drawing from 25 semi-structured interviews from across hierarchical levels, the research addresses one main question and three sub-questions: (1) how leadership framing shapes employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses to change; (2) which dialogic mechanisms most effectively foster shared understanding and engagement; and (3) how contextual factors, cultural diversity, organisational hierarchy, regional inequality, and psychological safety, moderate the effectiveness of dialogic communication.

The findings reveal that dialogic framing outweighs traditional top-down approaches in producing cognitive understanding, emotional trust, and behavioural ownership. However, their effectiveness lies in institutional, relational, and interpretive contextual conditions. Findings also reveal that geographic dispersion, cultural norms, hierarchical gatekeeping, and linguistic exclusion twist the dialogic intent. However, performative dialogue is revealed as harmful, as it causes eroded trust, deeper psychological safety destruction, and resistance than honest top-down communication.

The study contributes an empirically grounded multilevel moderator model/framework of how leadership framing interacts with dialogic mechanisms and contextual moderators to influence employee buy-in. It also extends dialogic organisation development (OD) theory to the African context and highlights performative dialogue as a critical risk factor in change management. Recommendations stress the need for sustained leadership visibility, context-sensitive mechanisms, feedback loops, and empowered middle managers. Outlined in the conclusion are directions for future quantitative, longitudinal, and interactive-based research.

## **Keywords**

Leadership framing, employee buy-in, sensemaking, dialogical organisational development, performative dialogue, sensemaking, psychological safety, psychological contract breach, change management

## Declaration

*I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Change Leadership 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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Date

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Signature

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Organisational change, in contemporary business environments, has become a defining feature that is driven by various dynamics, such as politics, technology advancements and disruptions, performance pressures, and the ever-evolving market opportunities (De Haan & Rotmans, 2018; Zhou et al., 2006). These dynamics are especially distinct in emerging economies, where institutional volatility, deep power relations, and systemic inequalities are evident in the implementation of change (Barnard & Luiz, 2018; Luiz & Barnard, 2022). Within the African context, with decades of socio-political pressures, policy shifts, and being globally integrated, organisations constantly feel heightened pressure to adapt (René, 2025).

However, while these pressures may trigger the need to change, the success of any organisational change depends on the employees' willingness to understand, interpret, and respond to it. Research has shown that how leaders frame and communicate the organisational change plays a vital role in shaping how employees react to it (Christianson & Barton, 2020; Logemann et al., 2018). Scholars like Shi et al. (2012) and Stouten et al. (2018) argue that ineffective framing may lead to employees misinterpreting, resisting, or being disengaged; in contrast, strategic and transparent it fosters emotional commitment and voluntary participation.

For a transformative change, this is particularly critical, as it involves a systemic, disruptive shift to long-held assumptions and organisational identity (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2017; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). Transformative change needs more than regular updates, but ensuring there is a collective understanding and meaning for all to engage deeply with it. In this context, leadership becomes sensegiving agents and not mere authoritative figures, as they become responsible for shaping how employees buy into the change (Harvey & Kudesia, 2023; Rafferty et al., 2013).

Yet in a culturally, linguistically, and geographically diverse organisation that presents hierarchical norms, the challenge is heightened due to the complication of how messages are understood and acted upon. In a recent study, scholars argue that framing, language use, and sensemaking are intertwined with cultural and institutional logics, which means a single narrative may not resonate with all stakeholders in all contexts (Whittle et al., 2023). Therefore, this study investigates how leadership dialogic framing fosters employee buy-in, by focusing on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of buy-in. Furthermore,

the study explores how contextual factors mediate the impact of dialogic processes, where trust and cultural diversity influence how change is received.

## 1.2. Research Problem

### 1.2.1. Relevance from a business perspective

Organisations face increased pressure to implement change because of the dynamic and competitive business environments. While strategic imperatives often drive change initiatives, scholars believe change often fails not due to its design, but rather, on how it is communicated and interpreted, and how employees respond to it (Shin et al., 2012; Stouten et al., 2018). Leadership's framing of change, which is the positioning of change, greatly influences whether employees understand why the change is necessary, including the meaning they attach to it, and whether it is valid and worth the emotional and behavioural investment (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Kaplan, 2008; van Dijke et al., 2024). However, in cases where organisations have a history of failed change, which could result in mistrust in the organisation, or structural issues are present, the credibility of the frame can be contested (Adomako et al., 2024; Barnard & Luiz, 2018; Hofstede, 2001).

The traditional top-down communication approaches overlook the employees' emotional, cultural, and institutional contexts, inducing detachment (Vaara et al., 2016; Heyden et al. 2017; Christianson & Barton, 2020). This results in resistance, less commitment to the organisation, and a decrease in organizational citizenship behavior, change implementation, and becoming a competitive edge are being hindered (van Dijke et al., 2024; Stouten et al., 2018). Dialogic framing, however, when coupled with empowering communication strategies such as workshops, inclusive forums, and open storytelling, has been found to help cognitively accept change, develop trust, or develop ownership as employees become aligned with the change objectives (Lewis & Sahay, 2019; Balogun et al., 2023; Bushe & Marshak, 2013). Despite these insights, little is currently known about the way dialogic framing can be employed to overcome contextual issues, such as cultural diversity or organizational distrust, to attain employee buy-in and maintainable conversion change outcomes.

While organisational change communication has received a fair amount of scholarly attention (Ocasio et al., 2017; Petrou et al., 2016; Stouten et al., 2018), what has not been explored is how the communication of transformational change, compounded by a context of societal and global dynamics, impacts or leads to employee buy-in. Scholars believe that

while strategic imperatives drive many of the change efforts, change often fails not due to its design, but rather, on how it is communicated and interpreted, and how employees respond to it (Shin et al., 2012; Stouten et al., 2018). Apparent organisational change boosts organizational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour with increased organizational nostalgia (van Dijke et al., 2024).

Framing is, however, not just a way of conveying information but is a powerful sense-giving strategy that determines the meaning people assign to events, the feelings of those meaning-giving, and the actions that are triggered thereafter (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). However, in cases where organisations have a history of failed change, which could result in mistrust in the organisation or structural issues present, the credibility of the frame can be contested (Adomako et al., 2024; Barnard & Luiz, 2018). Without considering these factors and solely framing a change in managerial or technical terms, one could overlook the employees' emotional cultural dynamics and institutional memory, which matter to them (Vaara et al., 2016). With this, employees' understanding and engagement can be undermined if change is communicated without taking cognizance of their values, experiences, or social realities, which could result in disengagement and eroded trust (Christianson & Barton, 2020; Van den Heuvel et al., 2013; Whittle et al., 2023). Studies suggest that high engagement with change is likely to occur when employees are invited to take part in collective sensemaking, where meaning is co-created rather than being imposed (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Vaara & Whittle, 2021). Fadzil et al. (2019) and Bebbington et al. (2007) note that organisations which encourage dialogic processes – ongoing and inclusive conversations – overcome resistance and foster ownership to change narratives. Using these approaches helps reframe employees as active participants as opposed to passive recipients of change, which therefore aligns with value co-creation theories (Keeling et al., 2020; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012) and meaningful work (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Though there is theoretical grounding to framing transformational change, the gap remains in how this framing affects employee buy-in, especially when intertwined with a history of failed change interventions (Kahn et al., 2017; Lehdonvirta et al., 2018). Furthermore, what has not been investigated is how the use of framing and dialogical engagement can be adopted as tools for adaptive sensemaking when there is uncertainty (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Jalonen et al., 2018) or how the processes of meaning-making are unfolded when these frames fail (Introna, 2018; Park, 2010).

This study, therefore, seeks to explore how the framing of transformational change impacts or affects employee buy-in within an organisation. It also seeks to explore whether participatory and dialogical framing promote buy-in as opposed to traditional messaging. By exploring the relationship between framing and employee buy-in, this research seeks to contribute to both the theoretical and practical body of change leadership, particularly in the African context.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The main research Question of this research is: How does leadership's framing of transformational change influence employee buy-in?

Based on the main question the following sub-questions arise:

- How does leadership dialogical framing influence employee buy-in during an organisational change?
- What specific dialogical mechanisms (e.g., storytelling, open forums, feedback channels) are most effective to gain employee buy-in, and how do these impact the employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions?
- How do contextual factors, such as cultural diversity and organisational hierarchy, shape how effective leadership dialogic framing influences employee buy-in?

### 1.4. Research Purpose and aim

This study's purpose is to explore how leadership dialogic framing influences employee buy-in when an organisation is going through a planned transformational change. The main focus is to understand how specific mechanisms, such as feedback channels, open forums, and storytelling, play a role, especially in the context of organisational hierarchy and cultural diversity in an organisation with a history of failed change (Bernerth et al., 2021; Hofstede, 2001; Lewis & Sahay, 2019). Using an interpretive qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the study uncovers the lived experiences of employees and leaders in a specific organisation going through a change. This will provide practical strategies to foster buy-in and provide theoretical insights into the interplay between dialogic framing, relational dynamics (Uhl-Bien, 2006), and some contextual factors.

The aim, therefore, is to thoroughly investigate the processes in which leadership dialogic framing influences employee buy-in, including the employee's cognitive acceptance, their emotional commitment, and behavioural support (Armenakis & Harris, 2002), during a change. The study aims to contribute to both change management practices and theoretical

advancement of dialogic organisational development (OD) (Bushe & Marshak, 2016), sensemaking (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Samdanis & Lee, 2019), and relational leadership frameworks (Van der Voet et al., 2016).

## 1.5. Significance of the Study

### 1.5.1. Theoretical Contribution

A study conducted by Bakari et al. (2017) highlights how employees struggle with adapting to change when the leaders fail to frame the change process. Velez and Neves (2022) and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) argue that employee buy-in is usually disregarded when communicating planned change.

Therefore, this study aims to extend Bushe and Marshak's (2016) Dialogic OD Theory by providing empirical insights into how specific dialogic framing mechanisms, e.g., feedback channels, storytelling, and open forums, influence employee buy-in. While dialogic OD highlights participatory communication, current literature does not thoroughly explore the specific mechanisms mentioned and their effects (Pircher Verdorfer & van Ginkel, 2024). By examining the lived experiences of a generic organisation, going through a transformational change, the study identifies which mechanisms effectively cause cognitive acceptance, emotional commitment, and behavioral support.

Furthermore, the study will integrate insights from organisational sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and framing theory (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014) to highlight how sensemaking mediates the relationship between dialogic framing and buy-in, especially when influenced by hierarchy and diversity (Bernerth et al., 2016). The study positions dialogic framing as a sensemaking bridge when an organisation is going through a transformational change. It, therefore, extends Langley et al.'s (2013) process theory of change that argues that framing operates as an iterative mechanism to make sense, which links the technical aspect of clarity with the emotional engagement. The two-fold framing combining message precision with dialogic inclusion enriches process-based understandings of how buy-in is cultivated during complicated changes.

The study will also refine the Relational Leadership Theory (RLT) by highlighting relational dynamics such as trust, inclusion, and emotional safety that are needed when framing change to move cognitive mechanisms to relational mechanisms (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Romansky et al., 2021; Fitzsimmons et al., 2023).

Lastly, the study will develop a conceptual model of Dialogic framing and buy-in. This model will integrate the above-mentioned mechanisms to theorise how leadership dialogic framing fosters or leads to employee buy-in using mediators such as psychological safety and trust, clarity of rationale, inclusion in meaning-making, and emotional alignment. This model will contribute towards a theoretical framework that will connect dialogic framing practices to foster employee commitment over time, which will complement and extend the sensemaking and change communication theories (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014).

### 1.5.2. Practical Contributions

Practically, this study offers insights for organisational leaders and change practitioners aiming to foster employee buy-in at a large scale during any transformational change. The highlight on dialogic framing allows employees to co-construct the meaning of change; therefore, this research positions communication as more relational and participatory as opposed to one-dimensional (Fairhurst, 2011; Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Moreover, the study offers leaders practical strategies to apply to create a psychologically safe environment with increased levels of trust, ownership, and emotional readiness for change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Stouten et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2012). Lastly, the practical contributions of this study illustrate how organisations can embed dialogic leadership practices into their existing change frameworks.

### 1.6. Research Scope

The research is centred on a generic organisation that is going through a transformational change. The organisation is a multinational, and the context of hierarchy and cultural inclusion play a vital role in ensuring employee buy to the change. The full research scope is highlighted in Chapter 4.

### 1.7. Research Paper outline

- Chapter 1: The introduction outlines the study's background, its significance, and purpose, which is to explore Leadership dialogic framing on employee buy-in. This chapter also highlights the aim, scope, and contributions, both theoretical and practical.
- Chapter 2: The Literature review chapter synthesizes the theoretical foundations of this study, such as dialogic OD, sensemaking, and relational leadership. It also

explores the mechanisms of dialogic framing and buy-in while defining the contextual moderations and addressing gaps in the existing literature.

- Chapter 3: The research questions section presents the main question being explored in this study and the three sub-questions on dialogic framing, mechanisms, and contextual factors related to the study
- Chapter 4: The methodology chapter outlines the interpretive qualitative approach, where interviews are utilized to draw a thematic analysis while ensuring ethical safeguards.
- Chapter 5: The research findings section organizes the data obtained from the research questions, highlighting patterns in framing, mechanisms, and contextual impacts. This data will be supported by quotes and visuals to outline the findings
- Chapter 6: The discussion section will interpret the findings using the literature obtained in Chapter 2 to link the theoretical frameworks and address any gaps between the literature and the findings from this study.
- Chapter 7: This is the conclusion and recommendations section, which summarises the key findings and offers recommendations to scholars and organisations for future research, such as a longitudinal study versus a case study.
- Appendices will be added at the end of the paper

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

Understanding employees' perception of change is crucial for the success of the implementation, as stated by Zhou et al. (2006), because it helps change leaders deal with any internal politics from an early stage (Zhou et al., 2006; Fadzil, 2019). Change is not merely a structural task in organisations, but is shaped by how its employees make sense, respond, and cooperate with the change. Research indicates that change initiatives often fail due to insufficient employee engagement and support (Stouten et al., 2018). This support, also known as employee buy-in, encompasses the employee's cognitive acceptance, the behavioural support, and emotional commitment, which is important to determine success, yet challenging to achieve in diverse organisations (Lewis & Sahay, 2019).

Traditional approaches to change often emphasize planning for the change, setting clear goals, action planning, having project plans and metrics, and ensuring leadership buy-in; however, recent scholars highlight the need for discursive and interpretive spheres to change processes that are central to their success or failure (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). These spheres are what theorists like Heifetz et al. (2009) and Bushe and Marshak (2016) call technical change, which encourages collective sensemaking and participatory dialogic communication. This study focuses on two overarching central concepts: Leadership framing and employee buy-in, where the literature argues that sensemaking and the dialogical process are crucial in enabling commitment and fostering engagement during change (Bushe, 2013; Fadzil, 2019).

Framing refers to how change initiatives are communicated and presented, thus influencing the cognitive and emotional lenses through which employees interpret organisational change (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Kaplan, 2008; Logemann et al., 2018). In the context of leadership's framing of change, Balogun et al. (2023) note that leadership framing of change is a participatory communication approach that influences persuasive and inclusive strategies that include transparency and credible storytelling narratives to foster trust, encouraging employee participation and perception of change. Sensemaking, which correlates with framing, is seen as the process through which employees constantly try to attribute meaning to such frames and decide how to respond (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, 2017; Kahn et al., 2017; Weick, 2020).

On the other hand, Ford and Ford (1995) interpreted buy-in as not merely a passive agreement but requires an employee to be active and psychologically invested in the change to ensure there is cognitive acceptance, emotional, and behavioural commitment. Where framing is aligned with the employees' values through dialogical processes, it creates trust; however, if the opposite occurs and framing is disconnected from the employees' realities, it creates disengagement and resistance (Banerjee, 2021; Langley et al., 2013).

The following literature review is organised into the following viewpoints to argue the standpoint of this research: (1) the theoretical foundations that integrate dialogic OD, sensemaking and relational leadership; (2) Understanding Framing and Sensemaking in Organisational Change; (3) Dialogic Leadership and the Role of Communication; (4) Employee Buy-In in Transformational Change; (5) Integrating Framing and Buy-In: A Conceptual Link; (6) Conclusion: Synthesis and identifying the research gap

## 2.2. Theoretical Foundations

### 2.2.1. Dialogical Organisation Development (OD)

Dialogic OD has developed into a modern concept to facilitate change. Rooted on the work of Bushe and Marshak (2013, 2016), this approach reframes organisational change to a co-created process that requires leaders to collaborate through storytelling, open forums, and workshops to engage employees. Empirical evidence posits that this approach can strengthen engagement, validate cultural perspectives, and minimise resistance in diverse teams (Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018; Oswick et al., 2020).

Dialogic OD shifts the focus of change from traditional hierarchical models toward a relational process where Bushe and Marshak (2016) position this approach as an evolution of traditional diagnostic OD. This prioritises collaboration through storytelling, workshops, and open forums with the relevant stakeholders of the change, which is opposite to the traditional diagnostic OD, which focuses on planned interventions (Bushe & Marshak, 2016). This process presumes that change occurs as employees participate actively in co-creating stories that align with organizational goals, triggering buy-in by connecting change to individual relevance. For example, a manager facilitating a workshop on co-designing a transformational process can enhance employees' cognitive acceptance by keeping the intent of the change transparent (Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018).

This is particularly true in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, where Bushe and Nagaishi (2018) note that in global organisations, employee engagement is increased due to persuasive storytelling, which validates different cultural perspectives. Gabriel (2005), however, argues that dialogic mechanisms promote adaptation to change as they allow employees to negotiate their meaning of change and reduce resistance.

However, there is a gap in the literature specifying which dialogic mechanism is most effective when driving buy-in across its dimensions. With organisations seeking tailored solutions to their diverse contexts, this gap becomes critical (Holten & Brenner, 2022). This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring the various mechanisms in an organisation.

### 2.2.2. Sensemaking Theory

Sensemaking, according to Jaffit (2024), is activated when people or employees perceive situations or a change as unexpected. Other scholars also see sensemaking as involving one's interpretation of a complex, unexpected, and ambiguous situation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 2020). As a theory, sensemaking is rooted in the seminal work of Weick (1995), elaborating on how employees make sense and interpret the changes they undergo. During a change, this process is critical as employees can reduce their uncertainty by seeking leadership signals to better frame their understanding (Maitlis & Christianson, 2017).

Heaphy (2016) and Maitlis and Christianson (2014) define sensemaking as a dynamic and ongoing process with cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Therefore, change efforts normally disrupt prevailing mental models and generate intense, ongoing sensemaking as people try to restore coherence (Weick, 2020).

Lewis (2019), therefore, argues that leaders can shape this process through transparency, clear and persuasive narratives that enhance buy-in by clarifying intent and addressing concerns. This strategy is crucial because how leaders behave during an organisational change plays a significant role in influencing the employees' attitudes and behaviours (Mansaray, 2019). Lewis's focus further highlights the reason why leadership approaches to change are important to ensure a successful transition and buy-in. (Haruna, 2021). Research on the COVID-19 pandemic (Christianson & Barton, 2020; Jaffit, 2024) reaffirmed the fact that sensemaking events are highly important during systemic shocks, and

employees look for cues to the impending evolution of reality from leaders, peer feedback, and the organisation.

In addition, Van Den Heuvel et al. (2013) and Vaara and Whittle (2021) argue that power dynamics shape the sensemaking process. In this case, those with power can manipulate and dictate the meanings that are accepted versus those that are not.

However, while sensemaking has a rich tradition, it has received some criticism from some scholars who feel the theory is too individualistic (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Introna, 2018). According to the researchers themselves, this calls for the consideration of more material, technological, and institutional variables that affect how sensemaking will proceed (Brown et al. 2014).

In other words, the process of sensemaking is complicated by the international norms, local culture, and organisational routines (Lehdonvirta et al., 2018; Luiz & Barnard, 2022).

### 2.2.3. Relational Leadership theory (RLT)

Besides understanding the framed change, employees need to trust that their opinions on the change are valued. Therefore, the relational theory plays a crucial role in obtaining buy-in, as Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) view it as a trust-building phenomenon rooted in empathy and credible communication, where leaders are positioned as facilitators in collaborative relationships. The RLT is grounded on the view that leadership emerges from patterns of interaction rather than only traits or actions of the individual leader (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Through this view, leadership is formed through ongoing social inclusion to create shared meaning and relational accountability (Roberson & Perry, 2022). The theory, therefore, suggests that relational processes such as inclusion, dialogue, and co-construction shape the quality of the leader-follower relationship and influence the organisation's performance (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

To foster buy-in, in the context of change, however, relational leadership requires leaders to create trust-based interactions with employees to obtain commitments, which employees use to cognitively and emotionally assess the credibility and rationale for the change, evaluate the trust and fairness of leadership (Stouten et al., 2018; Armenakis & Harris, 2019; Oreg & Berson, 2019). Orr and Bennett (2017) and Kinder et al. (2021) found that when leaders use empathetic communication, employees' behavioural support is enhanced. Logemann et al. (2019) and Fischer-Appelt and Dernbach (2023) note that narrative framing strengthens trust by supporting the employees' perspective, which is related to dialogic

framing. Through dialogic engagement, leaders help employees make sense of the change narrative, reducing uncertainty and fostering alignment between individual and organizational goals (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

## 2.3. Understanding Framing and Sensemaking in Organisational Change

### 2.3.1. Framing Theory and Leadership Communication

Framing theory provides the foundation for understanding how leaders shape the meaning of change through language, symbols, and narratives (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Leadership framing is how change initiatives are communicated and presented, thereby influencing the cognitive and emotional lenses through which employees interpret organisational change (Kaplan, 2008; Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Logemann et al., 2018). Thus, leadership communication functions as an act of sensegiving, a process that guides employees toward a particular view that aligns with the organisation's overall objective (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014)

Various researchers note that frames allow individuals to choose from a wide range of possibilities within a specific context, highlighting the aspects of their 'reality' that they find most relevant for emotional interpretation - for example, they might view change initiatives as opportunities, threats, or simply neutral shifts (Kaplan, 2008; Purdy et al., 2017). Thus, strategic framing is a critical managerial tool in guiding the cognitive-emotional responses of the employee (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Falchetti et al. (2021) note that although framing received considerable attention in political and media studies, it has now found important relevance in organisational change processes. In these processes, how leadership frames change often involves a variety of choices on what to include, what is to be excluded, and what should be emphasized (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). These choices, in turn, shape one's cognitive schemas on how change is interpreted, which Cornelissen et al. (2011) note as metaphors and analogies when framing change.

Furthermore, Ocasio et al. (2016) note that framing can be placed within attention dynamics, which is communicated and filtered through routines, power dynamics, and historical knowledge. Banerjee (2021) further extends this notion, proving that framing is relational and discursively constructed.

However, according to Schildt et al. (2019) and Whittle et al. (2023), framing literature has faced criticism for often viewing employees as passive recipients of managerial

perspectives, failing to recognize them as recipients who may oppose, reinterpret, or even reject the leader's perspective. Cornelissen et al. (2014) also argue that leadership framing should be seen as interactive and a negotiated process. Consequently, framing becomes more dialogic when the leaders invite employees to participate and provide appropriate feedback, enabling the employees to positively contribute towards the change (Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

In recent years, scholars tend to promote a more dynamic understanding of framing, as it includes controversy and reinterpretation, along with "framing contests" of competing perspectives (Kaplan, 2008; Logemann et al., 2018). Particularly in multicultural and emerging market contexts, competing frames may emerge due to varying cultural, professional, or organizational logics (Kaplan, 2008). Therefore, framing is a very powerful tool for sense-giving, but it is by no means universally accepted.

### 2.3.2. Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Change Contexts

The sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) complements framing by explaining how individuals interpret and construct meaning in uncertain or ambiguous situations. Sense-making, according to Jaffit (2024), is activated when employees perceive situations or a change as unexpected. Other scholars also see sensemaking as involving one's interpretation of a complex, unexpected, and ambiguous situation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Cameron & Green, 2019; Weick, 2020). When it comes to change, this process is critical as employees can reduce their uncertainty by building clear narratives with which they can act.

Heaphy (2016) and Maitlis and Christianson (2014) define sensemaking as a dynamic and ongoing process with cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Therefore, change efforts normally disrupt prevailing mental models and generate intense, ongoing sensemaking as people try to restore coherence (Weick, 2020).

As previously mentioned, research on the COVID-19 pandemic (Christianson & Barton, 2020; Jaffit, 2024) reaffirmed the fact that sensemaking events are highly important during systemic shocks—employees look for cues to the impending evolution of reality from leaders, peer feedback, and the organisation. In addition, Van Den Heuvel et al. (2013) and Vaara and Whittle (2021) argue that power dynamics shape the sensemaking process. In this case, those with power can manipulate and dictate the meanings that are accepted versus those that are not.

However, while sensemaking has a rich tradition, it has received some criticism from some scholars who feel the theory is too individualistic (Allard-Poesi, 2005; Introna, 2018). According to the researchers themselves, this calls for the consideration of more material, technological, and institutional variables that affect how sensemaking will proceed (Brown et al. 2014). In other words, the process of sensemaking in multinationals is complicated by the international norms, culture, and organisational routines into which an expatriate can engage (Lehdonvirta et al., 2018; Luiz & Barnard, 2022).

However, during an organisational change, employees engage in sensemaking to answer the rationale behind the change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Equally, leaders engage in sensegiving as they attempt to shape the sensemaking of others towards a preferred objective (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). The intertwining of these two processes creates a dialogic loop where understanding is created using conversation, feedback, and reflection (Raelin, 2016).

In this context, leadership framing plays an important role in fostering psychological safety and inclusion while allowing employees to find meaning and understand the organisation's goals (Edmondson, 2019). Therefore, top-down communication can create resistance and distance should leadership fail to recognize and acknowledge the employee's lived realities and responses (Ford et al., 2008; Heyden et al., 2017).

### 2.3.3. The Role of Framing in Shaping Change Readiness and Resistance

How change is framed, by leadership, affects and shapes the employees' readiness and willingness to support it (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Leadership's framing of change can activate different interpretive schemas, which Fugate et al. (2012) and Oreg et al. (2018) argue can be either positive or negative. Positive schemas indicate the employees' readiness for the change, which results in learning curiosity and engagement with the change initiative, while negative schemas indicate a resistance to the change, triggering defensiveness or fear (Fugate et al., 2012; Da'as et al., 2021). Research, therefore, indicates that employees often assess both the substance (what is communicated) and the process (how it is communicated) of framing (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Oreg et al., 2018). Mikel-Hong et al. (2024), therefore, argue that when communication is dialogic, it strengthens the fairness and legitimacy of the change and enhances readiness.

According to Weiner (2020), change readiness indicates an employee's belief in the need for change and the confidence that the change will yield a positive outcome. Shah et al. (2017)

agree with this notion, stating “the readiness concept is defined as a belief, intention, and attitude regarding the extent to which change is needed” (p.7).

Furthermore, Fugate et al. (2012) and Oreg et al. (2018) argue that when leaders frame change as a shared journey of learning, growth, and collaboration, employees are likely to show positive emotions towards the change and have a sense of ownership.

Equally, when change is narrowly framed, it triggers resistance, which is not the opposition of the change itself, but how it is communicated and understood (Oreg et al., 2018; Da’as et al., 2021). Framing, therefore, that fails to connect the change narrative to the employees’ sense of identity, values or contribution in the organisation creates a conflict between the organisation’s intentions and the employee’s meaning-making (Ford et al., 2008). This misalignment reinforces feelings of uncertainty, unfairness, and lack of agency.

In contrast, when framing integrates dialogic communication, it is characterized by openness, inquiry, and mutual sensemaking to enable employees to understand the change rationale (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Mikel-Hong et al., 2024). Dialogic framing thus becomes an important mechanism that leaders can use to influence both cognitive and emotional readiness for change. Research has indicated that when the framing process is perceived as transparent and participatory, they are likely to commit to the implementation of that change (Cornelissen et al., 2014).

## 2.4. Dialogic Leadership and the Role of Communication

### 2.4.1. Conceptualising Dialogic Leadership

Dialogic leadership is characterized by a participative and relational approach to lead, which is grounded on the belief that conversations and dialogues foster meaning, knowledge, and commitment (Raelin, 2016; Khaqan & Redondo-Sama, 2024). Despite the vast amount of research available on traditional leadership models, which favour directive communication, Mitra (2013) and Khaqan and Redondo-Sama (2024) argue that dialogic leadership’s focus is on empathy, awareness, and reflection. Mitra (2013) expands that this leadership style is not merely based on the exchange of information; however, on two forms of dialogue: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive dialogue focuses on “forum structure and voices heard in particular situations,” while descriptive dialogue focuses on “double-voicedness of discourse, or the presence of multiple strands of meanings” (Mitra, 2013, p.400)

In the context of organisational transformation, dialogic leadership works as a solution to top-down transmission-oriented communication used in many change programmes, and Raelin (2012) argues that it fosters collective sensemaking through the suspension of assumptions, deep listening, and engaging employees to construct a shared meaning of the organisational change. This concept of leadership shifts the leader's role from "telling" to "inviting" by allowing diverse voices to contribute to defining what change means and why it matters (Mitra, 2013; Khaqan & Redondo-Sama, 2024). This co-creation allows the employees to identify with the change and feel psychologically safe throughout the change process (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Dialogic leadership thus integrates both relational and discursive dimensions, which Bushe and Marshak (2015) note that it builds trust through open engagement, dialogue, and storytelling.

#### 2.4.2. Communication as a Relational Practice in Change

Communication is not just a channel for transmitting messages around the change; however, it is the process through which realities are formulated and sustained in the organisation (Fairhurst, 2007; Kuhn et al., 2011). Kuhn et al. (2011) further note that organisations are continuously enacted through their communication practices.

In their research, Fugate et al. (2020) argue that during a change, employees tend to rely on what is communicated to interpret the organisation's intentions, assess the leadership's credibility and deduce whether the proposed transformation aligns with their own values and past experiences. Therefore, when communication is dialogic, inclusive, and transparent, it tends to reinforce the legitimacy of the change process (Ford et al., 2008). On the contrary, Lewis (2011) posits that one-way communication tends to lead to ambiguity, false rumors, and heightened resistance.

Dialogic communication, therefore, is characterized by the individual's ability to voice, listen and respond appropriately (Raelin, 2016). Dialogic communication emerges as the key to allowing shared meaning under an organisational change setting. Unlike the traditional models of communication stressing clarity, consistency, and single-line, top-down dissemination, dialogic communication is, overall, reciprocal, empathetic, and open to multiple interpretations (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Fadzil et al., 2019). It includes mechanisms such as open forums, feedback channels, and reflective dialogue sessions that invite multiple interpretations into the change of conversation. These mechanisms help employees become actively involved in creating meaning, which enhances not only cognitive understanding but also emotional connection to the change (Capriotti et al., 2021). This

relational communication strengthens how employees perceive inclusion, which is to buy-in (Kuhn et al., 2011).

### 2.4.3. Dialogic Framing as a Mechanism for Inclusion and Sensemaking

Due to the emergent nature of outcomes and the high uncertainty involved in transformative change, dialogical framing permits change through flexibility and adaptability (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Fadzil et al., 2019). Langley et al. (2013) argue that change is dynamic and requires continuous negotiation of meaning, not static one-way communication. Cornelissen et al. (2014) further argue that it involves leaders being able to frame the rationale, the purpose, and the implications of this change in conversation, rather than imposing it on them. This approach will help leaders in creating a shared space where differing perspectives can be heard, negotiated, and form an alignment (Fairhurst, 2011). Leaders who engage in dialogic processes may sense issues as they emerge, change their frame of reference during the process, and inculcate a sense of belonging. This creates psychological safety and therefore fortifies the legitimacy of the change process (Raelin, 2014).

According to dialogic change supporters, it is more ethical and practically more effective than directive communication (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Fadzil et al., 2019). Dialogic framing opens spaces for conflict, questioning, and co-creation, allowing employees more freedom and innate motivation (Hardy et al., 2005; Hardyman et al., 2015). It further recognizes employees as active sense-makers who bring meaningful insights to the table and not simply passive recipients of messaging from above (Bebbington et al., 2007; Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Fadzil et al., 2019).

To ensure meaningful co-creation and sensemaking, dialogic framing unfolds across various communicative acts such as storytelling, sensegiving, feedback exchange, and reflection. Boal and Schultz (2007) note that storytelling, for instance, allows leaders to entrench organisational values and vision in a narrative that resonates with the employees' lived experiences. Feedback mechanisms, on the other hand, enable iterative refinement of meaning, which Bushe and Marshak (2015) term generative dialogue because of how conversations can create new possibilities.

However, dialogic communication is not without its limitations and criticisms. First, it requires resources and time (Bushe, 2013; Passetti et al., 2019). Implementing truly dialogic spaces may entail significant changes in the communication norms and leadership behaviors in large or hierarchical-type organizations (Carlsen, 2006; Passetti et al., 2019). There are also

criticisms that not all employees are willing or ready to engage in open-ended dialogue, especially in situations of high-stakes or unpressured change environments (Ford et al., 2008). Equally, dialogic practices superficially implemented—in cases where there is no real will to listen and adapt—may only increase distrust, as employees will regard these as mere symbols rather than substantive change efforts (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Carlsen, 2006; Passeti et al., 2019; Fadzil et al., 2019).

Hence, dialogic framing serves as both a leadership communication strategy and a relational intervention that bridges sensemaking and buy-in.

#### 2.4.4. The Interplay Between Leadership Dialogue, Trust, and Employee Voice

The Employee's voice and trust towards leadership are a critical aspect of dialogical leadership that mediates the impact of framing buy-in (Agote et al., 2016). However, Jiang and Shen (2023) and Rego et al. (2022) emphasize that trust develops when communication is transparent, consistent, and responsive. Dialogical engagement, thus, fosters such trust by reducing hierarchical distance and demonstrating respect for all employees' input (Raelin, 2012). The more the employees observe the authenticity of the leader's engagement, the more their perception of the leader's integrity strengthens (Agote et al., 2016)

Concurrently, dialogic leadership highlights employee voice, which is the extent to which employees express their ideas, concerns, and different viewpoints (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Ghani & Malik, 2023). Wilkinson and Fay (2011) note that when an organisation has open communication and encourages employees to use their voice instead of punishing them, there is better performance and acceptance of change.

#### 2.4.5. Linking Dialogic Leadership to Employee Buy-In

Linking dialogic leadership to employee buy-in requires one to understand how communication practices shape the employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses to the change. Morgeson et al. (2015) and Stouten et al. (2018) highlight that cognitively, dialogic framing increases understanding by clarifying the vision and the rationale behind the change. Emotionally, it facilitates trust and psychological safety while reducing anxiety and helping employees identify with the change (Fugate et al., 2020). Behaviourally, it encourages employees to align with the change goals while reinforcing commitment (Stouten et al., 2018)

In summary, dialogic leadership transforms change of communication into a participative, meaning-making process. Where, previously, traditional change management failed due to a

lack of engagement, dialogic framing improves the relational depth required to endure transformation (Bushe & Marshak, 2015)

## 2.5. Employee Buy-In in Transformational Change

### 2.5.1. Conceptualising Employee Buy-In

Employee buy-in is a multidimensional construct reflecting three aspects on how employees view an organisational change: acceptance, commitment, and alignment (Oreg, 2003; Lewis & Sahay, 2019). Snyder (2019) believes that it goes beyond being compliant, but employees genuinely endorse and voluntarily participate in the organisation's change efforts. Buy-in occurs when the employees understand the rationale and the necessity for the change, which helps them to emotionally invest in the success of the change (Zhou et al., 2006; Fadzil, 2019). This rationale implies that buy-in is not a once-off event, but a sensemaking process that requires thorough communication, trust, and participation (Fugate et al, 2020). Langley et al. (2013) note that when employees feel respected and included in the change and the dialogues surrounding the change, they most likely attach meaning and see the change as an opportunity to grow rather than see it as a disruption. Thus, employee buy-in requires a deep sense of ownership, where the employees not only accept the changes but also continuously advocate for and contribute to the success.

Scholars such as Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) and Petrou et al. (2018) argue that buy-in can be expressed through three components for commitment: effective commitment, which is the emotional desire to support the change; continuance commitment, which is the perceived necessity of compliance; and normative commitment, which is the individual's sense of obligation to support the change. Among these, scholars believe that effective commitment, rooted in "a sense of belonging and identification" (Rhoades et al., 2001, p. 825), is the most sustainable component as it fosters intrinsic motivation and unrestricted effort (Gao-Urhahn, 2016; Vandenberghe et al., 2017). Yet, empirical studies indicate that organisations often overstate the cognitive and normative components while neglecting the emotional and relational dynamics that maintain and sustain buy-in in the long-term (Ford et al. 2008; Gao-Urhahn, 2016).

Buy-in is also an indicator of organisational readiness, which captures the employees' beliefs on the need for and the capability to endorse the change (Rafferty et al., 2013; Weiner, 2020). Rafferty et al. (2013) also argue that when employees share a common understanding of the rationale of the change and perceive leadership to be credible, they are

more likely to be committed and adaptable to the change. Equally, when there is inconsistent, top-down, disconnected communication towards the employees' lived experiences, buy-in fails into surface-level agreement or passive resistance (Fugate et al., 2020). This implies that buy-in can be both a relational and interpretive process that is shaped by how meaning is constructed and negotiated in the organisation (Cornelissen et al., 2014).

While this concept is celebrated, it is not without critique. Some scholars argue that the concept may carry an implied managerial bias, where it positions employees as subjects needing persuasion rather than co-creators of change (Thomas et al., 2011). From a critical standpoint, buy-in discourse can mistakenly support hierarchical control by framing disagreement or questioning as a lack of alignment rather than a form of constructive resistance (Ford et al., 2008; Heyden et al., 2017).

Furthermore, when organisations associate buy-in with uncritical acceptance, they undermine crucial dialogue and suppress valuable feedback that could increase the quality of the change outcomes (Piderit, 2000; Stouten et al., 2018). This critique underlines the need to rethink buy-in not as a state to be achieved by the organisation, but as part of the dialogic process of mutual sensemaking, adaptation, and negotiation (Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

Another limitation lies in the tendency of existing models to treat buy-in as a static or measurable process rather than a fluid one. Scholars argue that buy-in evolves through constant interactions between leadership communication, the organisation's culture, and employee sensemaking (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014)

## 2.5.2. Dimensions and Mechanisms of Buy-in

According to MacRory (2011), to effectively understand buy-in during a transformational change, some factors need to be considered. These factors were previously identified in the introduction section as: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions that make up buy-in.

### 2.5.2.1. Dimensions of Employee Buy-In: Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural

- a) The Cognitive dimension: this dimension refers to how employees intellectually understand the change communicated, which entails how they understand the

rationale, the scope, and the implications of this change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Clear dialogic framing helps employees resolve any ambiguity through the linkage of change messages to their already existing schemas and organisational realities (Cornelissen et al., 2014). Using these dialogues, leaders can facilitate sensemaking conversations that allow employees to ask crucial questions and co-construct meaning, which facilitates comprehension and acceptance (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

- b) The emotional dimension: This dimension captures the employees' emotional responses such as trust, hope and anxiety (Fugate et al., 2020). Emotions, therefore, shape how employees and individuals interpret change messages. Dialogic communication can foster emotional commitment by creating a sense of psychological safety and empathy (Edmondson, 2019). When employees believe that their voices are heard and valued, they are more likely to experience a sense of belonging and optimism, which are emotional conditions for buy-in (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Ghani & Malik, 2023).
- c) The behavioural dimension: This dimension reflects the observable actions, from employees, that either support or hinder the change process (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Oreg et al., 2018). Oreg et al. (2018) argue that this dimension includes proactive problem-solving and peer support. When leaders integrate feedback and participatory decision-making, they can turn cognitive understanding and emotional identification into behavioural understanding (Oreg et al., 2011; 2018).

#### 2.5.2.2. Mechanisms of Employee Buy-In

To build buy-in, leaders also need to move beyond transactional communication to dialogic engagement, which Bushe and Marshak (2015) refer to as a process for leaders to co-construct meaning, build trust, and foster sensemaking with their employees. The following mechanisms, therefore, make up buy-in.

##### a) *Dialogic communication and sensemaking*

Although previously mentioned in the sections above, communication is one of the most powerful mechanisms to foster buy-in. Scholars argue that, unlike monologic approaches, meant to persuade and inform, dialogic communication allows for two-way conversations that allow the stakeholders to have multiple perspectives and allow collective sensemaking (Kaplan, 2008; Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Logemann et al., 2018). Whittle et al. (2016) and Schildt et al. (2019) note that through dialogue, employees

are allowed to ask questions and question assumptions, express their concerns. Through this process, psychological ownership is enhanced, and ambiguity is reduced (Ford et al., 2008).

Therefore, leaders need to create dialogic spaces, characterised by shared spaces where employees can express themselves creatively, through open dialogues and negotiate meaning to the change rather than change that is imposed (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Wegerif & Yang, 2011; Boyd & Sherry, 2024). In these spaces, leaders are facilitators rather than directors, as they help employees to link the change rationale to their lived experiences and personal values (Boyd & Sherry, 2024). This process not only strengthens the employees' cognitive understanding but also develops effective attachment to the change vision, therefore reinforcing commitment (Bartunek et al., 2006; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Stouten et al., 2018).

#### *b) Trust and relational Authenticity*

Trust is critical when trying to gain employee buy-in. Empirical studies note that trust forms the emotional structure that enables employees to accept change and maintain faith in the leadership (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; De Jong et al., 2016). Fugate et al. (2020) further note that trust develops when there is consistent, transparent communication and when leaders are open about the challenges facing the change, admitting to the limitations and showing genuine concern for employee wellbeing.

Similarly, when employees perceive communication as manipulation or a lack of honesty, trust can be eroded rapidly and turn buy-in into cynicism (De Jong et al., 2016).

#### *c) Participation and co-creation*

To cultivate buy-in, participation is both symbolic and substantive. Symbolically, it involves employees feeling respected and included in the change; substantively, employees are allowed to influence the outcomes and align strategies with their practical realities (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Lewis & Sahay, 2019; Balogun et al., 2023). When employees are invited to the change table to meaningfully contribute their ideas, identify obstacles, and propose solutions, they experience an increased sense of agency and belonging. Therefore, this participatory approach transforms the efforts made from something done to the employees into something created with them, which reinforces their intrinsic motivation and commitment (Oreg et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2011).

However, this process must be authentic rather than a performance. Tokenistic involvement, where the input is requested but ignored, can cause damage to trust and cause resistance

(Thomas et al., 2011; Childress et al., 2024). Consequently, genuine co-creation requires leaders and employees to share decision-making and to ensure feedback is provided to the employees (Childress et al., 2024). Bushe and Marshak (2015) argue that by doing the above, participation becomes a driver for empowerment, innovation, and mutual accountability.

*d) Framing and Emotional resonance*

Effectively framing a change is a mechanism that ties cognitive understanding with emotional engagement. By framing change through purpose, learning and growth, leaders can induce positive emotions on the change (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). These emotions not only enhance buy-in but can sustain resilience during uncertain times. Equally, framing change during a crisis can induce fear-based reactions that cause loss of confidence and initiative (Fugate et al., 2020).

Thus, the emotional tone of framing can determine whether employees view the change as an opportunity or a threat. Cornelissen et al. (2014), therefore, argue that when framing is combined with dialogic and participatory processes, it becomes an instrument to create a shared emotional meaning.

*e) Continuous reinforcement and feedback loops*

Lastly, Oreg et al. (2019) argue that buy-in is sustained through continuous support of mechanisms like feedback loops, recognition, and constant communication. Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) emphasize that change leaders should regularly update employees on the progress and regularly acknowledge the employees' contributions to ensure no messages are lost in transit. By so doing, the process fosters ongoing alignment between the organisation's intent and the employees' interpretation to prevent disengagement as the change unfolds (Weiner, 2020).

### 2.5.2.3. Critique of the Mechanisms

While the mechanisms mentioned above are widely endorsed by an array of researchers, they have some limitations. Some critics argue that organisations use these tools for mere compliance rather than genuine engagement, using dialogue and participation to legitimise pre-determined decisions (Thomas et al. 2011). Moreover, Ford and Ford (2010) noted that trust and participation require cultural maturity and for leaders to be humble, which could strain hierarchy and performance-driven environments. Thus, for these mechanisms to

obtain authentic and genuine buy-in, they must be rooted within a broader culture, such as transparency, respect, and shared meaning-making than being episodic.

### 2.5.3. The Role of Leadership Framing in Cultivating Buy-In

Employee buying into the change, according to Fugate et al. (2020) refers to the employee's cognitive and emotional commitment to the change that is taking place. This commitment is not merely complying and accepting change, but without it, the change initiative has the likelihood to stall or be undermined and run into employees feeling disengaged (Oreg, 2003).

Therefore, framing is critical to employee buy-in as it influences how this change is interpreted and experienced. When frames are credible, resonate emotionally and inclusive, Langley et al. (2013) note that they are likely to obtain buy-in. Cognitive anchors are initiated primarily by their frames, but employees make sense of these frames, which they can either accept, adapt, challenge, or reinterpret (Schildt et al., 2019; Whittle et al., 2016). If frames agree with an employee's current schemas and values, sensemaking may be smoother, and adaptation may be quicker (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2013).

In support of this viewpoint, some scholars call for “open framing” as it encourages dialogue as opposed to rigid messaging (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Open framing, therefore, allows employees to make sense of the change at their own pace while aligning with the organisation's strategies and goals. Banerjee (2021) also supports this view that participatory framing can deepen buy-in through connecting change to their lived experience and values.

However, assuming that framing can actively and reliably influence buy-in is not thoroughly clear and is contested. Cornelissen and Wener (2014) argue that framing can be seen as manipulative and/or superficial, particularly when there is a disconnect between the narrative and the organisation's practices.

Ocasio et al. (2016) highlight the cumulative nature of organisational discourse, where a new narrative is not accepted in a vacuum but rather filtered by employees' recollections of past experiences with change. Where an organisation has a record of unfulfilled promises or abandoned transformations, a good framing may still be greeted with distrust. To change that, good framing also has to address this historical baggage reflectively and transparently, about which it may seek to rebuild trust rather than side-step it (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2013).

The quality of framing itself, whether inclusive, participatory, and resonant emotionally, is critical to the trajectory of sensemaking as well (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

#### 2.5.4. Barriers to Buy-In

Although employee buy-in is important for the change implementation to be successful, achieving it is often hindered by a range of structural, cultural, and communicative barriers (Hofstede, 2001; Ocasio et al., 2018). Empirical studies indicate that such barriers influence how employees interpret the change message and evaluate the leadership's credibility and decide whether to engage or resist the change (Ford et al., 2008; Faupel & Süß, 2019). Understanding these barriers is important for diagnosing the organisation's readiness for change and to design an intervention that fosters authentic buy-in and commitment.

##### *a) Structural barriers: Hierarchy and Ambiguity*

Structural factors within the organisation, such as hierarchical decision-making and bureaucratic rigidity, often undermine employee buy-in. Nurmi and Koroma (2020) argue that organisations with hierarchical structures may discourage open feedback, and they may lack psychological safety, which may make employees reluctant to provide critical feedback to improve change implementation.

This is attested by studies that argue that in highly hierarchical environments, communication usually has a top-down effect, which limits any opportunity for two-way dialogues and sensemaking (Heyden et al., 2017; Stouten et al., 2018; Tarakci et al., 2023). This top-down structure can create a psychological rift between leadership and employees, where the decision feels imposed rather than collaborative. As a result, employees may perceive this change as external, which can diminish their sense of ownership and agency (Ford et al., 2008).

Moreover, when the change goals are ambiguous or the implementation plans are unclear, uncertainty is heightened and reduces confidence in leadership capabilities. Research, therefore, shows that when the change message lacks specifics or when the timelines are unrealistic, employees interpret this as inconsistency and incompetence (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Stouten et al., 2018). Additionally, heavy workload pressures during the change period can cause frustration and fatigue, leading employees to negatively view the

change initiative and view it as a burden rather than an opportunity for improvement (Oreg et al., 2011).

Thus, structural barriers not only limit communication flow but also erode psychological capacity to engage with the change meaningfully.

*b) Cultural barriers: Identity, values, and psychological safety*

Cultural dynamics, particularly those related to organisational identity and shared values, play a significant role in shaping buy-in. Studies indicate that when the change conflicts with the deeply held cultural norms or threatens existing identity narratives, employees could interpret it as a loss of who and what they are in the organisation (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Klindzic et al., 2015; Ravasi, 2016; Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020). Ravasi (2016) posits that if an identity threat is perceived this way, it provokes emotional resistance, even though the change may be justified.

Korkmaz (2022) and Shore and Chung (2021) note that psychological safety is one of the key elements of inclusive leadership and is important in enabling feedback loops to become effective in organizational change. Therefore, a lack of psychological safety causes employees to fear judgement for expressing themselves, which may result in them withholding honest feedback (Shore & Chung, 2021).

Furthermore, rooted subcultures and siloed mindsets can hinder collective sensemaking, resulting in fragmented interpretations of the change narrative (Arregle et al., 2024). Hence, fostering buy-in requires both cultural alignment and a psychologically safe space where dialogue and experiments are encouraged.

*c) Psychological barriers: Uncertainty and loss*

Inherently, change evokes uncertainty and fear of loss, such as loss of familiarity, status, competence, or belonging (Oreg, 2003; Stouten et al., 2018; Fugate, 2020). Such emotions, if unacknowledged, can manifest and cause passive resistance, disengagement, or nostalgia (Malhotra et al., 2021).

From a psychological view, responding in this manner can be understood through what Kahneman and Tversky (1979) called the loss aversion theory, which posits that people experience loss more intensely than finding pleasure in what they will gain. However, recent scholars have critiqued this viewpoint and attested that it is dependent on the context and

that sometimes gains weigh heavier than losses, which affects change positively and buy-in is quicker for those organisations (Gal & Rucker, 2018). Leaders who interpret these behaviours solely as opposition risk the underlying psychological need for reassurance (Fugate et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the experience of uncertainty can erode self-efficacy, which Etehad and Karatepe (2019) posit as the employees' belief in their own ability to influence change. Should the belief persist, employees can develop learned helplessness, causing them to view themselves as powerless in a process that is beyond their control (Chung et al., 2017). Persistence of this feeling can cause psychological disengagement in the organisation, which can prompt even more top-down control by leaders, causing the employees to be further disempowered.

## 2.6. Integrating Framing and Buy-In: A Conceptual Link

The relationship between framing and employee buy-in represents the core of transformational change processes. Framing, as both a communicative and sensemaking phenomenon, determines how employees construct meaning concerning the change initiative, while buy-in reflects the extent to which that meaning is translated into the dimensions mentioned above: cognitive, emotional and behavioural commitment (Kaplan, 2008; Cornelissen et al., 2014; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014;; Logemann et al., 2018; Fadzil et al., 2019). Understanding this is therefore important for explaining the reason why some change efforts induce enthusiasm, while others generate resistance (Ford et al., 2008; Malhotra et al., 2021).

At its core, framing involves strategically using language, symbols, and various narratives to shape collective understanding of the change, why it matters, and how the employees fit within the organisational story (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Through framing, leaders can interpret ambiguity, highlight certain aspects of reality, and construct coherence when there is uncertainty (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Kahn et al., 2017; Weick, 2020). Yet, while framing is often viewed as a leadership tool, its impact depends on how employees receive, negotiate, and co-create those dialogic engagements. Hence, framing is not a unidirectional process towards persuasion but more an interactive process between leaders and employees to negotiate meaning (Cornelissen et al., 2014).

From this view, employee buy-in is the outcome of successful framing; however, it is not linear because cause and effect also matter. Rather, Weick (2020) and Petrou et al. (2016) note that buy-in emerges through an iterative process of sensemaking, where the employee

combines framed messages and interprets them to make it their value system. Empirical research also notes that when leaders frame strategic change to connect their shared identity, moral purpose, and collective aspirations, employees tend to internalize the change message and commit to it (Balogun et al., 2015; Logemann et al., 2019; Day et al., 2023). Equally, when framing is too technical without linking to the broader meaning, employees could interpret it as managerial rhetoric, undermining trust and emotional investment (Ford et al., 2008; Logemann et al., 2019; Day et al., 2023)

### 2.6.1. Framing as a Mechanism of Sensemaking and Meaning Construction

Since framing serves as the interpretive bridge between strategy and the employees lived experience, during change, the sensemaking theory posits that employees are not passive receivers of framed messages, but they actively construct meaning through cues from the environment (Balogun et al., 2015; Logemann et al., 2019; Weick, 2020; Day et al., 2023). However, this is a social process, where sensemaking relies on conversations, framed narratives, and symbols that employees use to measure, challenge, and refine their understanding of the change (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Therefore, effectively framing change goes beyond leadership articulation, but must invite dialogue. Hence, Bushe and Marshal (2015) emphasize that dialogic framing acknowledges that employees are co-creators of meaning and not merely recipients. When leaders create communicative spaces, they enhance clarity, build ownership, and trust, which are critical for obtaining authentic buy-in (Fugate et al., 2020). Through this lens, framing acts as an enabling condition to collective sensemaking (Vaara & Whittle, 2021).

### 2.6.2. Dialogic Framing as a Catalyst for Authentic Buy-In

A growing body of literature critiques the traditional top-down framing approaches for treating communication as persuasion rather than co-creation (Thomas et al., 2011; Christianson & Barton, 2020; Banerjee, 2021). As previously mentioned, dialogic framing offers an alternative as it involves constructing a change narrative with employees through open dialogue, reflection, and participation. Bushe and Marshak (2015) argue that dialogic approaches interrupt hierarchical control and enable developing meaning, fostering authentic and psychological ownership.

This participatory process turns buy-in from an instrumental goal into a relational outcome that is grounded in trust, transparency, and shared understanding (Ford & Ford, 2010). In

such settings, framing and buy-in are equally reinforcing, where dialogic framing fosters trust and involvement, while genuine buy-in deepens the interpretive engagement that sustains change.

## 2.7. Conclusion

### 2.7.1. Synthesis and Identification of the Research Gap

The literature reviewed in this section reveals that framing and employee buy-in are essential, mutually reinforcing dynamics during a transformational change. Firstly, framing acts as the interpretive process that leaders use to shape meaning (Balogun et al., 2015; Logemann et al., 2019; Weick, 2020; Day et al., 2023). Framing also supplies interpretive cues that influence the rationale (cognitive appraisal) for the change, the legitimacy of the change, and the motivation towards buy-in and action (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Second, the sensemaking theory illustrates that meaning should not be imposed; rather, employees ought to actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist the framing process (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 2020; Day et al., 2023). Third, the dialogic leadership literature posits that leadership is most advantageous when it is coupled with conversations, is inclusive, allows co-construction, and uses dialogic practices like storytelling, feedback loops, and open forums to shape meaning and build the relational conditions that make buy-in possible (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Raelin, 2016; Edmondson, 2019). Lastly, buy-in represents the degree to which employees internalise and commit to the meaning (Oreg, 2003; Lewis & Sahay, 2019). Together, this process determines whether change initiatives address the structural, emotional, and cognitive alignment that is key to the success of the change (Stouten et al., 2018).

Some studies view framing as a top-down tool used by leaders to communicate the strategy to ensure employee alignment with the strategic objectives (Kaplan, 2008; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Heyden et al., 2017). However, it seems some scholars view framing as a relational and co-constructed process that is meant to unfold through dialogical interactions and/or mutual sensemaking (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Banerjee, 2021).

Equally, studies on employee buy-in have largely explored the understanding of the rationale behind the change and the effective outcomes; however, not much attention has been paid to the discursive and dialogic processes through which buy-in is socially negotiated (Fugate et al., 2020). Change communication is hardly one-directional; rather, it unfolds through dialogic sensemaking, involving a reciprocal exchange between leaders and employees where employees ask questions, interpret them, and sometimes resist, as previously stated.

While literature acknowledges resistance as a common response towards change (Adler & Heckscher, 2018; Stouten et al., 2018), such responses are treated as barriers, at times, rather than as elements of the sensemaking process that can enhance learning and authentic engagements.

Thus, there are still limited empirical investigations of how dialogical framing influences employees to willingly own the change rather than merely accepting it.

Furthermore, research on change readiness and buy-in adopts a rational-cognitive angle, emphasizing information transfer, a clear rationale, and leadership alignment (Rafferty et al., 2013; Weiner, 2020). Yet, other studies reveal that change is viewed as deeply affective and identity-laden (Ravasi, 2016; Cloutier & Ravasi, 2016). Psychological barriers such as uncertainty and perceived loss can erode efficacy and psychological safety, which may hinder authentic buy-in (Fugate et al., 2020). Despite this, limited research has examined how leaders' framing of change addresses these dimensions. Therefore, understanding dialogic framing practices influences buy-in offers both theoretical and practical insights into the cultural and relational dimensions of change leadership.

From this synthesis, the following gaps emerge:

Though framing and sensemaking are regarded as key to organisational change, existing literature on framing only attests this construct as leader-driven and what leaders frame. There is limited theory and empirical work that treats framing as a dialogic, co-constructive process. Moreover, the specific dialogic mechanisms that translate to leaders' frames to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of employee buy-in remain underexplored. Furthermore, what has been underexplored is how past experiences shape how the employees view current change initiatives and messages in terms of the implications for framing strategies (Ocasio et al., 2016). Therefore, this literature requires investigating how meaning is created, negotiated, and resold over time, especially in an African context where framing is underrepresented. Limited understanding of how dialogically constructed framing influences or hinders employee buy-in during transformational change

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 3.1. Introduction

This study explores how leadership dialogic framing shapes employee buy-in during a transformational change. Drawing from theories such as framing (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014), sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), dialogical organisational development (Bushe & Marshak, 2015), and relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006), to determine how leaders use dialogical mechanisms to influence buy-in and support for the change.

Therefore, this chapter defines the main question, its sub-questions, and propositions, which reflect the study's qualitative approach. All this is grounded in theoretical foundations, highlighted in the above chapters, including the Literature review in Chapter 2. These questions guide the interpretative methodology, according to Creswell (2014) and Saunders et al. (2019), to provide insights into the relationship between leadership dialogic framing of change and buy-in, with ethical considerations to ensure data integrity (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019)

### 3.2. Main Question

#### **How does leadership's framing of transformational change influence employee buy-in?**

This question investigates the relationship between how leaders frame change and how employees buy into the change, through cognitive acceptance, emotional commitment, and behavioural support (Gustafsson et al., 2021; Rafferty et al., 2013). A transformational change is characterised by a significant change within an organisation, which, as noted by Stouten et al. (2018), is often faced with resistance due to ambiguity and a lack of trust. As a sense-giving process, leadership's framing of change shapes how employees perceive it by the way they present the opportunities the change will bring to reduce uncertainty and foster engagement (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Fairhurst, 2011). Dialogic framing emphasizes co-creation through interaction, while enhancing trust and shared purpose (Bushe & Marshak, 2013). This question, therefore, sets the foundation to explore the specific mechanisms and influences in addressing gaps in qualitative depth.

**Hypothesis 1:** Leadership framing of change positively influences employee buy-in by increasing trust and reducing ambiguity. Dialogic approaches enhance emotional, cognitive and behavioural engagements when compared to traditional top-down framing.

### 3.3. Sub-Question 1

#### **How does leadership dialogic framing influence employee buy-in during organizational change?**

This question investigates the relational and communication processes involved in dialogic framing, rooted in dialogic OD to foster sensemaking through conversation (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Unlike directive framing, dialogic framing is a process that allows employees to be more vocal and voice their concerns, co-create the change narrative, and build psychological safety (Gustafsson et al., 2021).

Studies indicate that dialogic engagement can reduce resistance through the alignment of the leadership's narratives with the employees' experiences to promote emotional commitment and behavioural support (Adler & Heckscher, 2018).

**Hypothesis 2:** Dialogic framing promotes employee trust and psychological safety, facilitating a relationship between leadership communication and buy-in.

### 3.4. Sub-Question 2

#### **What specific dialogic mechanisms (e.g., storytelling, open forums, feedback channels) are most effective in gaining employee buy-in, and how do these impact on the employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions?**

This question focuses on identifying specific dialogic mechanisms and their impact on buy-in. For instance, empirical studies on storytelling argue that it engages emotions through the crafting of compelling narratives that would resonate with the employees' values (Denning, 2005; Auvinen et al., 2013; Orr & Bennett, 2017). On the other hand, open forums clarify the reason for the change and influence cognitive acceptance (Walker et al., 2024). Lastly, Feedback channels empower employees to contribute fresh ideas to foster behavioural support (Cornelissen et al., 2014).

**Hypothesis 3:** Specific dialogic mechanisms, such as storytelling, open forums, and feedback channels, enhance employee buy-in through cognitive understanding, emotional connections, and behavioural commitment.

### 3.5. Sub-Question 3

#### **How do contextual factors, such as cultural diversity and organizational hierarchy, shape the effectiveness of leadership dialogic framing in fostering employee buy-in?**

Sub-question 3 explores how certain contextual factors influence the effectiveness of dialogic framing. Cultural diversity, for instance, can influence how employees interpret the change narrative presented, which requires leadership to be culturally sensitive to ensure inclusivity (Hofstede, 2001; Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018). Due to power dynamics, organisational hierarchy can suppress open dialogue, necessitating anonymous feedback channels to be deployed (Ocasio et al., 2018).

A recent study by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2024) highlights that culturally tailored narratives can enhance buy-in, whereas hierarchical barriers can limit participation.

**Hypothesis 4:** Dialogic framing has a positive effect on employee buy-in when there is lower hierarchical distance and higher cultural inclusivity.

### 3.6. Summary

This chapter has highlighted the main research question and sub-questions with the hypotheses that are grounded in the theories previously mentioned. These questions provide a structured framework on how leadership dialogic framing fosters employee buy-in during transformational change, while focusing on the mechanisms and contextual influences. Chapter 4, therefore, outlines the methodology used to ensure these questions are answered and ethically collected.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Research the philosophy

The research or study took an interpretive approach as it explored how leadership's dialogical framing of transformative change impacts employee buy-in. Various authors attest that the use of the interpretive approach seeks to understand how people interpret the world they are in and attach meaning to it, through language and shared meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2017; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Creswell and Poth (2017) suggest that this approach is more in-depth as it expresses the participants' words verbatim. Therefore, undertaking the interpretive approach would, according to Saunders et al. (2019), add to the body of knowledge to "create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts" (p. 150). The interpretive approach, particularly, was appropriate to uncover how organisational actors (leaders and employees) construct meaning through dialogue when there was a change initiative. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) note that interpretivism "can provide in-depth understanding of certain contexts such as cross-cultural studies, factors influencing certain development through collection and interpretation of qualitative data leading to deep insight and conclusions" (p. 42).

This qualitative research required the researcher to observe, analyse, and interpret the data from the participants using an inductive research approach and ensure it was in line with the underlying theory; hence, the interpretive philosophy was appropriate.

### 4.2. Research assumptions

This study took on three approaches of interpretivism: ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

- **Ontological:** This study adopted the ontological position, which depended on the socially constructed meanings that the various stakeholders ascribe to their experiences and interpretations (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). In the context of organisational change, the positioning assumes that change is not fixed, nor is it universal; rather, there are multiple realities that could be conflicting, overlapping, or evolving in existence, which are experienced by various stakeholders in the organisation. When this organisational change is in a country shaped by a complex history and institutional inequality, framing and employee buy-in cannot be understood as objective, fixed phenomena. Rather, framing ought to be viewed as a discursive and influential practice, where leaders and employees co-construct the meaning of change initiatives through interaction, language, and symbols (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Employee buy-in, therefore, is not just a behavioral outcome but a situated and evolving response, deeply shaped by employees'

previous exposure to failed change (Ford et al., 2008; Christianson & Barton, 2020), their trust in leadership (Cropanzano et al. 2017; De Jong et al., 2016; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Oreg, 2003), and their perceptions of inclusion or marginalization (Russen & Dawson, 2023)

- **Epistemological:** The epistemological position of this study was based on the participants' subjective experiences and their interpretation of the organisational change (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The meanings that the employees assigned to the transformative change and how they interpreted how it was framed would be understood through their lens – language used, sensemaking, and dialogues. In the context characterised by deep diversity and a history of top-down impositions, an interpretivist lens was necessary to surface employee narratives that had traditionally been excluded from change discourse (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The framing of change initiatives was not accepted passively but made sense of the frames presented based on past experiences and the culture of the organisation (Banerjee, 2021; Vaara & Whittle, 2021).
- **Axiological:** The researcher understood that the participants' values would emerge as they recalled their lived experiences and interpreted their truths, such as their experience on failed change, distrust in leadership, and change fatigue, which shaped how they construct meaning and how they buy into the change (Ocasio et al., 2016). Therefore, as du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) note, it was important to “openly discuss the values that shape the research” (p. 31) as well as for the researcher to acknowledge their own biases. For this study, the researcher needed to clearly articulate the interpretive and dialogic values shaping the research design and reflect on biases to ensure objectivity, particularly when exploring trust and buy-in.

#### 4.3. Purpose of the design

The study was exploratory by design, seeking to provide a clear and philosophically aligned guide that explores how framing transformative change influences employee buy-in.

Exploratory research was appropriate when a phenomenon was not well understood and required an in-depth investigation into underlying patterns, relationships, and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Hammarberg et al., 2016). Given an interpretivist paradigm, the study sought to explore the participants' lived experiences and how they have socially constructed the change.

According to Saunders et al. (2019), exploratory research helped understand human experiences and organisational dynamics. The exploratory design, therefore, was intended

to capture the complexity and context-dependent processes of how employees made sense of how change is communicated. Moreover, Gehman et al. (2018) indicate that the exploratory approach was particularly useful when dealing with a “how” question, such as the one in this research. Framing explained how change initiatives are communicated and presented, thereby influencing the cognitive and emotional lenses through which employees interpreted organisational change (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Kaplan, 2008; Logemann et al., 2018).

Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) argue that exploratory research was important when attempting to understand social phenomena, where existing theories may not capture context-specific nuances. This study is therefore aligned with the exploratory design as it aimed to uncover in-depth, detailed, and context-based insights on how framing strategies were received and interpreted by employees.

#### 4.4. Research strategy

A case study approach was chosen as an appropriate research strategy for this study, as it explored the constructs in-depth in the context of a diverse cultural organisation. Due to the complexity and context-dependent phenomenon, Creswell and Poth (2017) and Saunders et al. (2019) note that a suitable approach for such a study was a case study, as it would appropriately describe the organisation's change processes. The single case study design was an appropriate methodological approach for exploring how the framing of change initiatives influenced employee buy-in within a real-world organizational context. Yin (2009; 2014) argues that case studies are most effective when answering “how” and “why” questions, which were relevant to this study. He also argued that a case study allowed for the intense, in-depth investigation of a complex phenomenon within its natural setting, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2017).

Given the nature of this study, a single case study would offer a rich and contextual underpinning, which was necessary to examine the framing practices that were lived along with the realities of the employees who had to make sense of these realities (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This approach, therefore, enabled the researcher to match patterns and explain the two strategies and make sense of them (Yin, 2009).

Furthermore, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) argue that case studies are useful for exploratory research as new insights may be generated into complex systems, and they could capture the participants' lived experiences.

However, this approach also had its limitations, noted by various researchers. Firstly, Yin (2009, 2014, 2017) and du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) note that case studies are context-based and results may not be able to suit all industries, Secondly, this approach could be

time-intensive which may cause challenges when accessing the organisations conversations, Lastly, the researcher could be biased, especially in studies that involve subjective meaning interpretations and dialogues. Therefore, to mitigate the forestated, triangulation, reflectivity, and transparency need to be employed (Yin, 2014)

#### 4.5. Method choice

The study used a qualitative mono-method approach for insights and to gauge its findings. A qualitative method was therefore suitable, as it enabled an exhaustive probe into the lived experiences of the participants, organisational processes, and systemic relationships central to understanding the complexity of framing and employee buy-in (Creswell & Poth, 2017, Qualitative research generated rich descriptive insight into the participants' perspectives to identify patterns, themes, and underlying meanings (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) argue that qualitative research was exceptional for an exploratory case study where one sought to fully understand a phenomenon in its setting in the real world. Thus, this study drew on semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis towards an approach that offers summative and detailed scrutiny of framing and employee buy-in.

#### 4.6. Time horizon

The use of a cross-sectional time horizon was utilized to explore this study's research question. A cross-sectional design was appropriate as it captures perceptions, experiences, and dynamics of organisations during an ongoing or recent change initiative without needing extended observation over time (Saunders et al., 2019). Bryman (2021) notes that cross-sectional studies are normally qualitative explorations into patterns and relationships, essentially at a given time, rather than tracked changes over time. This method was consistent with the exploratory design of the study, which focused on providing detailed insights into how the framing of change influenced employee buy-in. Furthermore, Bell et al. (2022) emphasized that cross-sectional studies are efficient and practical, especially in business and management contexts where extended time in organisations could be impossible. Although longitudinal studies would have given the research insights into change over time, they would have needed resourcefulness and access to long-term processes of organisational transformation, which was never going to be feasible for this research. A cross-sectional design thereby guaranteed the timely, relevant, and insightful collection of data that captures the participants' experiences during organisational change.

#### 4.7. Population

The chosen population consisted of leaders and employees within the selected organisation, which is a multinational with its head office in South Africa. This organisation went through a transformative change initiative that would affect the chosen population.

The population includes:

- Executives
- Senior and Middle Managers
- Frontline or general employees
- Change leaders/Ambassadors

This chosen population included employees who would have had direct interaction with the change initiative and the processes involved. A clear population was important in a qualitative study, according to Saunders et al. (2019). Hence, this study's population included decision-makers and employees affected by the change, allowing for a holistic exploration into how the framing of a transformative change influenced employee buy-in. For this reason, it was not the aim of the study to generalize the findings over an entire industry but to draw deep insights from strategically-theoretically relevant individuals in the chosen organisation.

#### 4.8. Target population/sample

The target population/sample for this study consisted of employees selected from an organisation that went through organisational changes. To understand framing and buy-in, a sample of 25 actors (employees) involved in the change process and at various hierarchical levels needs to be selected, such as

- Executives from a strategic position
- Senior/Middle Managers from a departmental representation and team leads
- Frontline or general employees from a lived experience position
- Change Leaders/Change Ambassadors for a holistic view

While statistical generalisation was not the aim of this study, a bigger sample (25) was required to allow for thematic saturation, which was the point at which no new themes emerged (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Kumar, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019). In organisations with diverse hierarchies and functional units, saturation often requires a larger sample than single-group studies.

This sample ensured that framing, which is a top-down strategy, and buy-in, as a bottom-up response, were sufficiently represented. The targeted population was selected based on the research question to ensure that the questions mentioned above were answered and that the researcher did not waste time targeting the wrong population (Creswell & Poth, 2017; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

#### 4.9. Unit of analysis

Saunders et al. (2019) and Yin (2014) note that the unit of analysis defines what is to be studied and is directly linked to the research question. This study's unit of analysis was the process of framing and buy-in during a specific change initiative rather than the organisation or the individual employees. Therefore, the primary unit of this study was based on the framing process used during a transformative initiative in the organisation. This includes how the change is communicated, interpreted, and responded to by all stakeholders.

#### 4.10. Sampling techniques and sample size

Since the study was qualitative, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was utilized to select the population. This was primarily based on the research questions chosen, which determined the population and, from there, determined the sample size, focused on the depth, richness, and detailed information of the case study (Bryman, 2021; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Although the recommended sample size is 16 participants, many authors suggest data saturation, which is going beyond the stipulated number and interviewing more participants (Bell et al., 2022; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) further mention that this process should be done "until the additional data collected provides little, if any, new information of or suggest new themes" (p. 314).

By selecting participants from diverse roles and backgrounds, the study achieved a comprehensive exploration of various levels of organisational influence. Since the selected organisation operates across multiple business units and geographical locations, a larger qualitative sample is needed to reflect cultural, historical, and positional differences in how framing is interpreted and how buy-in was formed or resisted (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Ocasio et al., 2016). It was therefore important that those sampled should have been part of the past change initiatives that have occurred in the organisation to understand any schemas they might have developed over the years towards change. As previously mentioned, purposive sampling enhances depth and relevance; however, it carried a risk of selection bias.

To mitigate this risk, the following strategies were implemented:

- A clearly defined criterion was used to select the participants, such as they should have been involved directly with the change initiative, and their role in the change process should match the criteria above.
- Other scholars also encouraged maximal variation sampling within a purposive sampling approach as it was meant to capture a wider perspective across departments, hierarchical levels, and demographics (Bell et al., 2022; du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019)

Therefore, the study's intention of 30 participants is both methodologically appropriate and strategically justified due to the study's complexity, diversity, and interdisciplinary nature. The researcher's careful management of bias enhanced the trustworthiness, richness, and practical relevance of this study's findings.

#### 4.11. Research/measurement instrument

The study's primary instruments were semi-structured interviews and complemented by document analysis.

- The semi-structured interviews followed both thematic and unstructured/in-depth formats. Since this is an exploratory design study, the thematic format allowed the participants to answer the "research question or address a research topic" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 443). On the other hand, the researcher does not want to limit the participants, hence the unstructured/in-depth format where questions were open-ended, "allowing the interviewees' opinions to emerge through their opinions" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 445). These questions are meant to explore how the participants experienced the framing of the change, how they made sense of it, and how this change influenced their buy-in. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes to one hour, and a consented audio recording was utilised

#### 4.12. Data collection

Scholars such as du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018) note that the data to be collected has depth and is rich, "gathered from complex and multi-faceted phenomena..." (p. 173). The data to be collected consists of semi-structured interviews, the primary data to be collected, with the stakeholders mentioned above, to allow for an in-depth exploration of the strategic framing process and the adoption of change from the employees across diverse cultural and operational contexts.

#### 4.13. Data analysis

The analysis technique used in this study was thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which Saunders et al. (2019) note as being typically referred to as a "general analytic approach or

method in which patterns of meaning are developed through processes of coding” (p. 664). This technique was used to identify or search for recurring themes and patterns in the data set, which entails interview transcripts (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) also note that this technique is holistic as it provides order and logic to one's data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) note that to analyse data, the researcher will need to follow a six-phase process with include:

- Familiarisation with the obtained data
- Creating the initial codes
- Finding themes that are related to framing, buy-in, and the interlinking of the two
- Reviewing and refining these themes
- Defining and assigning naming conventions
- Reporting

These themes were then mapped against the theoretical constructs of this research, which allows for more insights into how frames influenced various levels of buy-in. The coding strategy was designed to reflect these frameworks to ensure conceptual integrity throughout the data analysis process.

Using the Atlas TI Web software, all transcripts were coded using the inductive approach. According to Bell et al. (2022), the inductive approach is a qualitative study process that utilises primary data to assist the researcher in understanding the research data presented to them. The initial first-order codes, mentioned by Grodal et al. (2021) and Blagoev et al. (2024), were grouped into categories obtained from the shared meaning of the initial codes. Thereafter, using a theoretical lens and linking the codes to the constructs of framing and buy-in, the codes were grouped into categories and themes. Bhattacherjee (2012) calls this phenomenon the deductive approach, as the process involved testing the theoretical concepts against the research data. This step enabled the researcher to be more focused and organised in the analysis.

Using the themes derived from the initial codes and tested against these, a refinement needed to be conducted to ensure they aligned with the main idea, framing, and buy-in, and ensured they are meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher constantly needed to refer to individual codes and categories to ensure quality data and ensure that the essence of the data was not lost. Braun and Clarke (2006) also emphasise that the researcher needs to ensure that all themes can stand on their own without co-dependency on another theme. Finally, the themes needed to be linked to constructs of framing the change and buy-in of the organisation.

#### 4.14. Data Quality

Due to the nature of the research, high data quality is essential for the credibility and reliability of a qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2019), as the lack thereof poses a risk of bias from both the researcher and the participants. Various strategies can be deployed to ensure the research's findings and conclusions were trustworthy. Firstly, the literature used needed to be current and relevant and stem from high-quality journals to test the validity of the constructs and findings. Secondly, to build credibility, the triangulation method, which is the use of different sources of information, will be utilised to ensure a rich and well-rounded perspective (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Triangulation will mitigate against bias as the narrative was from different arguments and narratives. Thirdly, to ensure transferability, Thorne (2016) suggests a detailed findings report that enables future researchers to find applicability to other organisations in a similar context. Moreover, the use of purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain diverse perspectives. Lastly, Creswell and Poth (2017) suggest that a pilot test interview be conducted, which could improve the viability and reliability of the interview guide.

#### 4.15. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are of great importance in qualitative research, maintaining the integrity, credibility, and respect for the rights of the respondents (Creswell and Poth, 2017). This research followed general ethical principles that are informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw, avoidance of harm, and researcher reflexivity and bias mitigation (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

Furthermore, to ensure that the organisation's data is secure and to gain access to this data, the researcher aims to ensure that:

- Engage with the relevant stakeholders who are potential gatekeepers to obtain necessary approvals before conducting the research (Martelli & Greener, 2018)
- Provide an official letter of intent to the Change Management department, which will research aims, ethical considerations, confidentiality guarantees, and potential organizational benefits.
- Obtain Ethical clearance from the University's ethics committee and any internal ethics board at the organisation, if required.

Moreover, interviews conducted were audio-recorded, ensuring to obtain consent from the participants, and thereafter transcribed verbatim. All the data obtained was stored securely with limited access to the data.

Lastly, the researcher's insider awareness offered a strategic advantage to gaining trust, meaning-making interactions understanding the employees' narratives that may be inaccessible to outsider researchers.

#### 4.16. Study's Limitations

This study aimed to produce significant outcomes; however, some limitations must be noted: Firstly, there could be subjectivity in the quality of data, whereby the data interpretations tend to be subjective, and the researcher would need to be aware of their own biases and values. Secondly, the results were context-oriented, single organisation, and not generalisable to all organisations (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018; Thorne, 2016). Thirdly, the sample size may not fully capture the diversity of the organisation, particularly across cultures. The data collection was time-bound and therefore may not capture the long-term changes of trust and buy-in as the change evolves.

#### 4.17. Project Plan

*Table 1: Project Plan*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Finalised Proposal	Final Edits, Supervisor approval, Submission	May 2025
Literature Consolidation	Gathering more secondary sources, refining	May – June 2025
Ethical Clearance	Application	23 June 2025
Design Instrument	Interview guide refinement and finalization	June 2025
Data Collection	Conduct interviews, and obtain all documents related to the research	July – August 2025
Transcription	Transcribe all data (verbatim), start preliminary analysis	August - September 2025
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis, identification of patterns	September

Findings and Discussion	Synthesise results, relate results to literature and highlight contributions	September – October 2025
Write-up & Review	Supervisor feedback and revisions	October – November 2025
Submission	Final formatting, Turnitin, Submission	November 2025

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings from a study that explored the topic, Framing Change Dialogically: Exploring the Impact of Change Framing on Employee Buy-In. The questions related to this topic were discussed in Chapter 3 of this research. The sample size of 25 semi-structured interviews was conducted to deduce these findings. This chapter, therefore, aims to interpret the participants lived experiences, meaning, and perspectives to uncover the communicative, relational, and contextual dynamics that shaped their understanding, engagement, and buy-in during the organisational change.

The analysis followed a qualitative, interpretive approach, as discussed in the previous chapter, employing a thematic analysis to ensure rigour and transparency between the first-order data, second-order categories, and the emergent themes. A visual interpretation of these will be represented below.

### 5.2. Overview of Participants and Organisational Context

#### 5.2.1. Organisational context

The study was conducted within a multinational organisation that is undergoing a major digital transformation, where a new ERP system is being implemented. While the change initiative was positioned to the employees as a strategic transformation aimed at digital integration and operational excellence, the employees experienced this change as both an opportunity and a disruption to their normal routine. The initiative required changes in workflows, data management practices, and coordination between any siloed functions in the organisation. Although the organisational leadership framed this change as essential for the organisation's future competitive edge, the employees' experiences revealed that communication, training, and engagement practices varied across regions and hierarchical levels.

The transformational change coincided with various leadership transitions, which amplified uncertainty and shaped how employees interpreted the leadership's intentions and credibility. Therefore, the change served as an important context to explore how dialogic framing shapes employee buy-in, be it emotionally, cognitively, or behaviorally.

### 5.2.2. Sample Profile

The sample size consisted of 25 participants interviewed, who represented a diverse cross-section of the organisation. The description of the sample is provided in the previous chapter. The diverse participation allowed for multiple voices to be captured from both those responsible for the framing and leading the change and those experiencing and using the system on the ground.

Table 2 below indicates the participants' profiles.

Interview No.	Role / Position	Region / Location	Level of Involvement in Change	Tenure / Experience
1	Change Champion	Namibia	High – Departmental support lead	Mid-level
2	Business Lead	Namibia	High – Led system rollout	Senior
3	Legal Risk & Compliance Officer	Namibia	Moderate – Policy alignment	Mid-level
4	Supervisor / Team Lead	Namibia	Moderate	Mid-level
5	Accountant / Finance Officer	Namibia	Medium	Mid-level
6	Supervisor	Namibia	High – Long tenure	19 years
7	Supervisor	Namibia	Moderate	10+ years
8	Supervisor	Namibia	Moderate	8 years
9	Team Leader	Namibia	High	12+ years
10	Senior Manager	Head Office SA	High	15+ years
11	Senior Analyst / Functional Lead	SA	High	Experienced
12	Admin Officer / Change Champion	Namibia	Moderate	5+ years
13	Costing Administrator	Namibia	Moderate	4 years
14	Accounting Clerk	Namibia	Low–Medium	3 years
15	Finance / Project Lead	Namibia	Moderate	Experienced
16	Department Stream Lead	Regional	High	Senior
17	Tax Manager / Financial Accountant	Regional	High	Senior

18	Department Manager	Namibia	High	19 years
19	Costing Administrator	Service Dept.	Namibia	Moderate
20	Supervisor / Change Champion	Namibia	Moderate	7 years
21	Senior Leader / Regional Head	SA	High	Senior
22	Mid-level Supervisor	Namibia	Moderate	Mid-level
23	Change Lead / Senior Manager	Namibia	High	Senior
24	Operations Manager	Namibia	High	Senior
25	Senior Manager	Multi-site (7 regions)	High	Senior

All 25 interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams as most of the targeted group was based in Namibia. The virtual format provided accessibility and consistency when collecting data, which enabled the participants to share their experience of the change in a familiar digital tool used in the organisation. The average interview duration for all interviews was 30 minutes, with the shortest interview being 21 minutes (Participant 4) and the longest being 44 minutes (Participant 1). Each Interview was recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim (Appendix 2).

### 5.3. Results Presentation

The findings are organized in direct response to the main question and three sub-questions mentioned in Chapter 3. All data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involves a thorough reading of all 25 interview transcripts for familiarization, as outlined in Chapter 4, and aligns with each research question. Table 3 below outlines the consolidated observations, which present a question-by-question synthesis of the participants' experiences.

*Table 3: Researcher's own interpretation notes*

Research Question	Key Participant Statements	Representative Quotes
MRQ: How does leadership's framing of transformational change influence employee buy-in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing seen as strategic intent but emotionally distant</li> <li>- Presence = trust; absence = doubt - Buy-in = cognitive (understood), emotional (felt), behavioural (acted)</li> </ul>	<p><i>"They said paperless... but more paperwork. Trust gone."</i> – Int. 14</p> <p><i>"Gemba walks made us feel part of it."</i> – Int. 20</p>

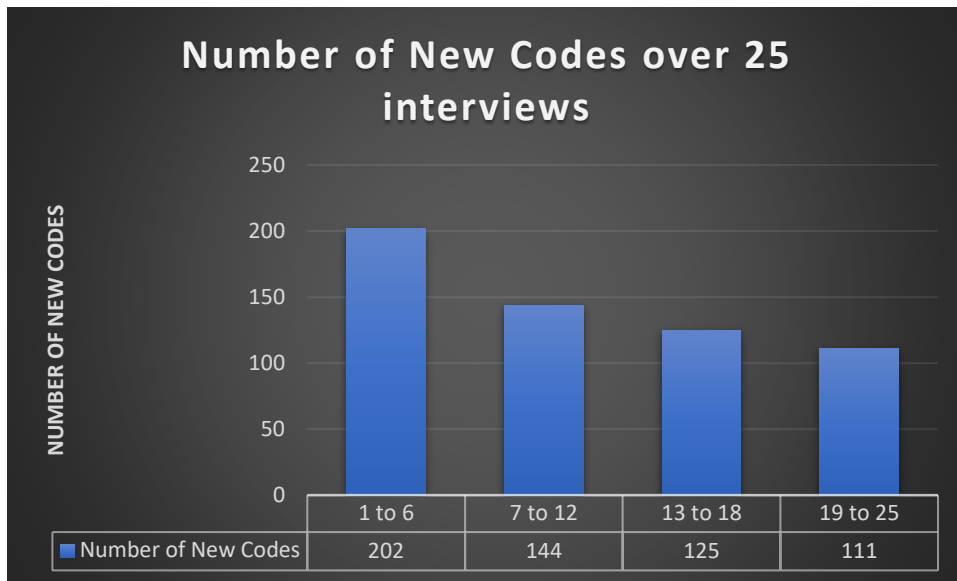
Research Question	Key Participant Statements	Representative Quotes
SQ1: How does leadership dialogical framing influence employee buy-in?	- Monologic (emails, town halls) = awareness only - Dialogic (Gemba walks, real-time help) = ownership - Post-go-live silence = reversal of buy-in	<i>"Emails are not communication... tailor it."</i> – Int. 23 <i>"Champions spoke our language."</i> – Int. 9
SQ2: What dialogical mechanisms are most effective, and how do they impact cognitive, emotional, behavioural dimensions?	- Change Champions, presence, storytelling, feedback - Change Champions = highest impact across - Lack of Feedback = lowest (unresponsive)	<i>"Sharing how Windhoek fixed it... made it real."</i> – Int. 25 <i>"We vent to each other... no one listens."</i> – Int. 19
SQ3: How do contextual factors shape framing effectiveness?	- Hierarchy blocks voice - Region delays framing - Generation filters meaning	<i>"Older staff said 'not my job'."</i> – Int. 19 <i>"Seven sites... one person can't cover."</i> – Int. 25

**A total of 582 open codes** were generated through the initial open coding process. These were then systematically clustered into 13 Sub-themes, from which six overarching themes were identified; however, five will be discussed, and the sixth, reframing organisational identity through change, was found to bridge across the other five themes. Data saturation was achieved by interview 19, with the remainder of the interviews confirming the established thematic categories. The five themes represented in Table 5 will be discussed below, with each theme linked to the corresponding Research Question.

*Table 4: Categories and Themes representation*

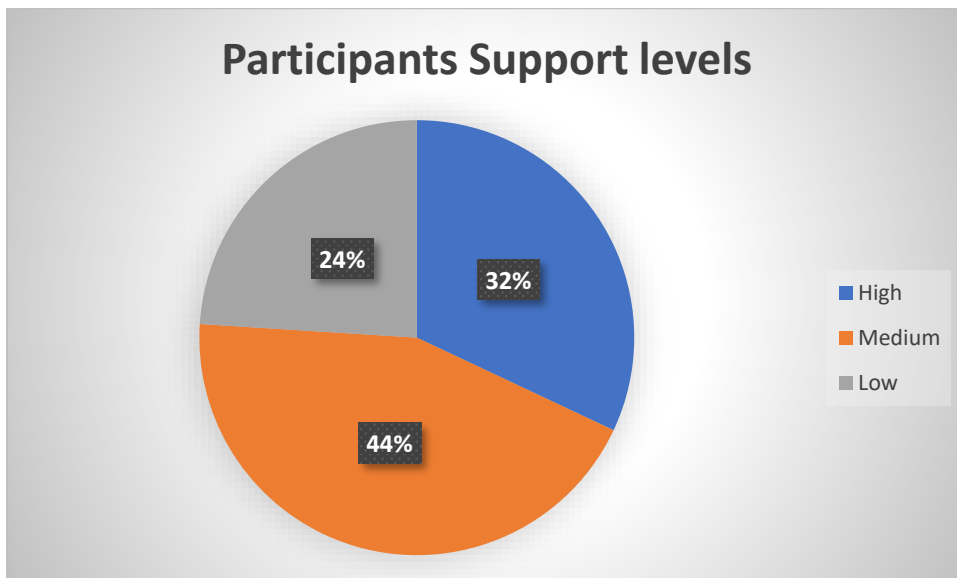
Category	Theme
1.1 Visibility & Proximity	<b>1. Leadership Communication and Engagement</b>
1.2 Clarity & Coherence	
1.3 Transparency & Timing	
2.1 Peer-Led Learning	<b>2. Employee Support and Empowerment</b>
2.2 Training Design & Duration	
2.3 Post-Go-Live Support	
3.1 Substantive Inclusion	<b>3. Feedback, Inclusion, and Employee Voice</b>
3.2 Symbolic vs. Authentic Voice	
3.3 Voice Efficacy & Ownership	
4.1 Middle-Manager Role	<b>4. Leadership, Hierarchy, and Trust</b>
4.2 Relational Trust & Credibility	
5.1 Localisation & Adaptation	<b>5. Cross-Regional and Local Contexts</b>
5.2 Cultural & Regional Sensitivity	

Figure 1: Data Saturation Graph



Based on the interpretive notes, it is revealed that 32% of the participants highly support the change, 44% show medium support, and 24% are low in support of this change.

Figure 2: Participants' Support levels for the change



### 5.3.1. Research Question One Findings

*How does leadership dialogic framing influence employee buy-in during an organisational change?*

This question aims to highlight the nature of leadership framing, specifically the degree to which dialogic framing, as opposed to monological framing, shapes employees' cognitive understanding, effective commitment, and behavioural performance of change. The analysis of the 25 interviews reveals that all 5 themes directly link to this question.

#### 5.3.1.1. Leadership Communication and Engagement

Overall, leadership communication and engagement are effective when combined with visible leadership presence, inclusivity, and authentic transparency. Participants consistently highlighted and acknowledged communication quality, transparency, and leadership visibility as contributing factors that shaped their engagement towards the change. The use of structured walkabouts, hybrid communication methods, and ongoing communication resulted in trust for some employees.

*“The communication was clear from the beginning to say that we are going to change from SAP to Next, but we didn't know what Next is.” (Interview 2).*

*“Here in Namibia, managers walk the floor and check in often. But in other regions, we hear leaders are hardly around.” (Interview 5)*

*“They have manager walkabouts, weekly or every second week, to check how we're doing with the new system, if we're still on board, and any challenges we're facing.” (Interview 4)*

*“Management conducts 'gemba” walks, visiting the floor to listen to concerns and encourage employees to speak up.” (Interview 12)*

These statements indicate that regular, scheduled visits were essential for the leaders to understand and connect to the employees' experiences. The systemic use of lean management principles prioritized direct observation.

*“I stay close to the team through hurdle meetings, skip-level meetings with lower-level staff, and by being physically present on the floor.” (Interview 24)*

This account demonstrates leadership visibility and how essential it is to reinforce both informal and formal interactions. These findings indicate that employees view leaders who are physically present are engaged and supportive, which reinforces the notion that visibility is not just about being seen; however, it is an ongoing involvement of the leaders' daily operations.

However, it should be noted that not all employees saw and felt this engagement.

*“They were here for launch, then gone. No walkabouts after week two”. (Interview 17)*

*“By the time we get the message here, the decision has already been made. It feels like information gets lost along the way.” (Interview 12)*

*“Communication was late and lacked visibility. There were no prominent displays like banners or screens promoting Jenga, unlike other organizations we visited. (Interview 21)*

This inconsistency eroded the onset efforts, turning dialogues into monologues, which collapsed the employee’s cognitive clarity and caused uncertainty.

Therefore, the overall deduction from these findings indicates that physical leadership presence is the cognitive foundation to buy-in that allows employees to co-construct understanding with leaders, and a sustained presence results in emotional trust. However, inconsistent visibility across departments and regions weakened emotional trust, which is a core contributor to buy-in.

### 5.3.1.2. Leadership, Hierarchy, and Trust

Trust emerged as the emotion linking communication to buy-in. Therefore, the organisation’s hierarchy plays a critical dialogical filter role as it can enhance or block trust based on the leadership’s framing of the change.

The findings reveal that for some employees, the daily huddles, led by some of the leadership, enhanced their cognitive clarity and built an emotional alignment.

*“My GM held daily huddles—no slides, just ‘How’s it going?’ That’s when I understood the ‘why’.” (Interview 11)*

*“Our supervisor helped us connect the dots. She explained how the system changes affect our daily work — that made a big difference.” (Interview 10)*

*“You trust leaders who do what they say, even if the outcome isn’t perfect. It’s about honesty.” (Interview 7)*

*“I encourage my team not to be afraid to ask questions, even in VFL or Gemba walks. Management won’t know our struggles unless we tell them.” (Interview 8)*

This reveals that employees appreciated the small rituals that connected them with their leaders. Leadership managed to bridge the gap by translating strategic messages into meaningful operational reality. This reality turned cognitive awareness into emotional investment. Their relational accessibility fostered trust and reinforced leadership credibility. This demonstrates that credibility leads to emotional safety, where employees feel seen, heard, and supported. This, in turn, reduced change anxiety and increased adaptive efforts. However, not all employees have total trust in leadership due to the promises made and not kept.

*“Leadership promised no human intervention, with systems like vendor selection and tax code assignment working automatically, but none of that happened. We’ve resorted to*

*using Excel. They didn't listen to us when we raised concerns, disregarding our input despite our efforts to explain why certain processes wouldn't work." (Interview 17)*

This indicates credibility collapse, which led to emotional withdrawal for the team. The promise of a better and more efficient system, but failure to deliver caused the employees to disengage cognitively and emotionally, leading to a workaround of the system.

### 5.3.1.3. Cross-Regional and Local Contexts

The contextual narratives, from the findings, are rooted in real regional experiences of the employees. This provided tangible, relatable, and emotionally compelling insights into this study. These contexts shaped the tone and texture of leadership dialogue. Participants often described frequent updates, while others felt the messaging was inconsistent.

In regions where leaders were visible and communicative, particularly Windhoek, employees reported higher levels of engagement and trust:

*"Here in Namibia, our managers walk the floor, check in, and explain things in our language. It helps us feel part of it." (Interview 5)*

Contrary, some employees experienced a sense of exclusion from the change narrative

*The change is organization-wide, so all regions, Namibia, Botswana, and Angola, should be informed, not just those directly impacted. (Interview 22)*

*Yet, the focus was on Namibia, leaving other regions uninformed. (Interview 23)*

*Ensure consistent messaging for everyone, so no one feels excluded. Everyone should receive the same message regularly to prevent negativity or feelings of exclusion. (Interview 15)*

*"A lot of information shared in Windhoek wasn't shared with other plants, causing a communication gap." (Interview 6)*

*"The focus was on office-based staff in Windhoek, excluding those in mines or other areas who were unaware of the change's magnitude or value. This made the process less inclusive, as some employees felt it wouldn't benefit them, especially those planning to leave." (Interview 21)*

These regional inconsistencies demonstrate critical gaps in information sharing and that dialogic framing needs to be standardized to avoid employee exclusion, ensuring emotional buy-in and collective commitment across regions.

Functionally, interview 7 highlighted that: *"the Reman team was excluded from early communications,"* and described their situation as *"a bit neglected,"* and the participant noted that meaningful engagement only began after implementation. This delayed and selective

inclusion demonstrates a top-down, centralized approach that failed to extend inclusive channels to all affected groups

*“Hierarchy creates challenges because different levels have different priorities and targets. Building rapport with employees fosters trust and openness to change, but some senior leaders believe compliance is enough, dismissing the need for buy-in.”(Interview 16)*

Equally, one-directional communication reinforced distance and inequality, which undermined collective commitment. Participants also noted that some cultural norms affected how freely they were able to participate in dialogue, further widening the power distance.

*“That probably speaks to the culture of someone not being able to speak up because they’ll be looked at in a certain light.” (Interview 3)*

This illustrates that the success of dialogic framing depends not only on how leaders communicate and their intent, but also on how the employees receive the culture of the organisation.

Despite efforts for leadership to implement inclusive communication, the findings indicate that there were significant geographical and functional disparities that limited employee access and created exclusion. These recurring observations across different interviews underscore a pattern in which inclusivity was compromised by the inconsistent distribution of information, particularly disadvantaging decentralized units and operational teams that were not part of the central change design process.

#### 5.3.1.4. Feedback, Inclusion, and Employee Voice

Participants continuously expressed their perspectives regarding the feedback they received. They consistently distinguished between symbolic participation and substantive inclusion, which showed that dialogic framing is confirmed not by how many communication channels were available, but by how the dialogue was reciprocated.

When the leaders engaged through two-way communication platforms, such as change champion sessions, townhalls, and open forums, employees felt both valued and heard.

*“After the launch, we still have weekly connect meetings with the teams to air our frustrations, opinions, and so forth. We have a platform where we can share our thoughts.” (Interview 5)*

*“The weekly meetings for the change champions had quite an impact. You could share what you feel, your emotions—angry, negative, positive.” (Interview 6)*

*“We had weekly champion meetings where issues were discussed, and some changes were made immediately. You could see your input mattered.” (Interview 10)*

These experiences reinforced cognitive buy-in, the understanding of how their roles contributed to the overall change, and emotional buy-in, the feeling of being recognized and respected. However, when there was a lack of responsiveness in these feedback channels, some participants reported feeling frustrated, disengaged, and lost trust.

*“It was challenging because the platform was structured to accommodate only the 5%. We only engaged the broader employee base three months before implementation, which was too late, especially as it coincided with the holiday period. This delayed engagement affected commitment and participation.” (Interview 16)*

*“Workshops and forums were used but started late and reached a limited audience. There was a lack of early excitement or visibility, like signage at entry points, to engage users and convey what Jenga entails, which reduced effectiveness in motivating employees.” (Interview 21)*

*“However, when they repeatedly ignored us, I stopped trying to fix things.” (Interview 17)*

These contrasting views demonstrate that dialogic framing operates as a relational process, not a technical one. If leaders invite input from employees but fail to respond, they reinforce symbolic dialogue, where communication that looks participatory but feels performative. Contrary, when feedback loops are closed, employees experience dialogue as mutual sensemaking rather than strategic messaging.

The findings further indicate that when dialogue is inclusive, it builds psychological safety, which is a precondition for employees to genuinely buy-in into the change. The employees who expressed higher motivation and commitment they trusted that their voices were heard and had influence.

*“The go-live was postponed three times—initially planned for April, then September, then December—after managers engaged teams and found them unready. We communicated this to the GM and acting country manager, who listened empathetically and delayed the launch, showing responsiveness to staff concerns.” (Interview 25)*

Therefore, feedback, inclusion, and employee voice demonstrate that leadership’s dialogic framing can transform communication from transmission to co-creation. When leaders use responsive dialogue, they can construct shared meaning and foster collective ownership to change, which can bridge the gap between the intended message and the implementation of the change. When the dialogue is genuine, the employees can internalize the “why”, feel valued, and in turn contribute positively towards the change. Equally, when the feedback is superficial or is ignored, it diminishes trust, leads to compliance without effective commitment.

### 5.3.1.5. Employee Support and Empowerment

The findings surrounding this theme revealed how employee buy-in is significantly shaped by how employees felt equipped, supported, and empowered during the change.

Participants across different levels noted that effective framing was not limited to verbal persuasion, but also through the leader's actions that inspired a positive response and collaboration. Where the leadership framed the change using dialogue, employees felt committed and embraced the change.

However, participants repeatedly contrasted their empowering experiences with those characterized by top-down instruction. Where training and support were offered, employees portrayed confidence and willingly engaged

*“They tried their best, and even the training and the way they were communicating was on the top level. There were also people available to assist anytime during the day through Teams.” (Interview 2)*

*“The weekly meetings for the change champions had quite an impact. You could share what you feel, your emotions—angry, negative, positive.” (Interview 6)*

*“Our operations manager would walk to my office or warehouse to ask how they could assist.” (Interview 8)*

Others, however, described the experience negatively, where they felt the communication was one-way and the training lacked depth to help them adjust to the new normal

*“It’s only that the training was too short.....we could’ve asked more and put more effort into the system before starting.” (Interview 5)*

*“They assisted, but from a management perspective, they could have been more involved.” (Interview 6)*

*“However, insufficient training was provided to end users, and end-to-end testing across departments was limited” (Interview 9)*

This highlights that dialogic framing is presented not only in what leaders say but in how they foster understanding.

Some participants highlighted the value of ongoing support, post-rollout, and peer collaboration for sustained engagements.

*“The change champion meetings were quite effective, helping us understand the need for the change and its benefits. They also managed high emotions during the go-live phase, making us feel more secure about the organization’s decision to transition to the new system.” (Interview 19)*

*“However, post-implementation, I initiated morning check-ins on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays with different levels—bottom, middle, and higher management. These sessions focused on how employees were handling tasks, what challenges they faced, and what they wanted to raise.” (Interview 16)*

These findings illustrate dialogic empowerment that allows leaders to invite employees to create meaning. When this empowerment is not available, it erodes trust.

Thus, leadership’s dialogic framing influences employee buy-in by turning support structures into a space of shared meaning. Collaborative training, how employees respond to problem-solving, and post-change communication help leaders create a dialogue of empowerment. Cognitive buy-in, therefore, emerges when employees understand their role. Furthermore, emotional and behavioral buy-in occurs when there is appreciation and inclusion, and when employees act with confidence, respectively.

In contrast, when leadership communication is too procedural, seems detached, and standardized, employees may interpret the change as imposed, therefore, turning to compliance without fully committing.

### 5.3.2. Research Question Two Findings

*What specific dialogic mechanisms (e.g., storytelling, open forums, feedback channels) are most effective in gaining employee buy-in, and how do these impact on the employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions?*

This question highlights which dialogic mechanisms foster buy-in and how these influence employees’ cognition, emotions, and behavior towards that buy-in. The aim is to uncover which leadership practices (storytelling, open forums, and feedback channels) shape employees’ understanding of the change, how emotionally aligned they are to its purpose, and their active involvement in its implementation. Therefore, this question examined the practical representation of dialogic framing, which is how leaders moved beyond one-way communication to enable employees to co-create meaning, foster trust, and empower them to engage as partners during the change process. All five themes were applicable when addressing this question

#### 5.3.2.1. Employee Support and Empowerment

Across the interviews, participants noted the degree to which leaders involved the change champions to provide ongoing support and offer role-specific guidance towards the change.

When this was done, the employees felt included in the sensemaking process and these change champions helped the end users adapt to the new system.

*“Every Tuesday or Thursday, we had sessions at 2:10 PM where change champions gathered feedback from teams about their experiences, both positive and negative, with the system. These sessions allowed open discussion.” (Interview 9)*

*Forums allowed questions and views, and change champions helped peers relate better. (Interview 23).*

These reflections indicate that leaders and employees were able to co-create meaning to help employees understand, rather than instructions being one-directional. Participants all reflected that training was a key mechanism to allow for conversation flow and understanding rather than a mere compliance exercise.

*“Training sessions and open discussions allowed teams to clarify uncertainties with facilitators. Team members could freely voice concerns, such as questioning system functionalities, which fostered support and engagement.” (Interview 25)*

*“During training, we started understanding” (Interview 5)*

Cognitively, these learning mechanisms helped employees make sense of the technical aspect of the change as they could connect the new system and processes to their roles. The emotional buy-in was evident when the leaders were more present, visible and supportive.

*“Yes, they’re helping because we ask where we’re stuck, and they come back to help” (Interview 4)*

Behaviourally, employees still feel disempowered as they feel they do not have autonomy to implement solutions and cannot implement new processes that might work for them and their teams.

*“I had to find my own workarounds for about 80% of tasks. Our input was heard but not really supported.” (Interview 14)*

*“We shared our processes and insights with the implementation team, but they ignored us and did their own thing.” (Interview 17)*

Furthermore, some participants also reported that training and support were often rushed, generic, or not intended for the greater masses, which broke down the dialogic framing. Due to this, employees often felt excluded from the learning process. Some of the leaders also acknowledged these factors:

*“Training was conducted too early—starting in December for a March go-live—causing users to forget key details due to delays” (Interview 22)*

*“Open forums and extended training durations would have been more effective. Involving regional representatives in the development task force could have ensured better alignment with operational needs. Without in-house expertise during troubleshooting, teams*

*struggled to resolve issues, highlighting the need for stronger regional involvement from the start.” (Interview 25)*

*“They waited too long to start with the consultations, and the training was not effective.” (Interview 1)*

*“We had change champions who met in discussion platforms, but this involved less than 5% of the organization. The other 95% were not exposed to these forums. We could have done more to cascade these opportunities to everyone impacted, as they were often more affected by the change than the champions. Broadening these platforms would have ensured more employees felt included in the journey.” (Interview 16)*

This contrast underscores that dialogic mechanisms are most effective when they are seen as relational and adaptive. Therefore, this theme answers this question as the findings from the interviews indicate that dialogic framing, such as training, post-rollout support, and peer learning, drives employee buy-in in the cognitive and emotional dimensions; however, these findings indicate a negative impact on the behavioral dimension.

This theme, therefore, highlights that dialogic framing is influenced not only through storytelling or feedback but also through how leaders communicate support and enable participation in learning.

#### 5.3.2.2. Leadership Communication and Engagement

Based on this theme, the participants consistently described how leadership communicated, not just what was spoken, to determine whether they understood, trusted, and acted accordingly on the change initiative.

Employees valued communication that allowed them to dialogue and exchange, rather than one-way instructions. Storytelling and regular updates were effective in translating the strategy into relatable meaning.

*“The most important thing is that I had to change the way I communicate because early on I noticed that the more I communicated, the better, because people felt well-informed. When we go to meetings, discussions, webinars, or Teams meetings, the guys seemed to know what was happening. It put the team in a good space,”(Interview 1)*

*“When the Jenga team was on-site, they conducted engaging workshops with fun exercises to assess our emotional readiness for the change. These were effective in building excitement.” (Interview 9)*

On the contrary, when leaders relied on formal communication channels, employees felt excluded from the sensemaking process

*“Open forums and extended training durations would have been more effective. Involving regional representatives in the development task force could have ensured better alignment with operational needs. Without in-house expertise during troubleshooting, teams struggled to resolve issues, highlighting the need for stronger regional involvement from the start.” (Interview 25)*

*“We were also brought in late, close to the go-live date, which created pressure. The rushed timelines affected the quality of training materials and flows, but given the circumstances, we did our best.” (Interview 13)*

Cognitively, two-way communication enabled employees to make sense of the change and align their understanding; however, this would have been even better if dialogues had been conducted sooner rather than later. On the emotional side, open and transparent engagements brought trust and reduced anxiety for some employees, but bringing only a few employees along caused anxiety to the rest of the employees, and they felt they could have contributed towards the change in a meaningful manner. Behaviourally, having leaders who were present prompted the employees to participate actively.

Participants also described that having visible and approachable leaders reinforced trust and dialogue

*“Lazarus also spent an entire day with us, offering hands-on support for any questions or issues. Management was patient, understanding that the transition would cause delays, which fostered a supportive environment.” (Interview 19)*

In contrast, when leadership was less visible and detached, it weakened trust and fuelled resistance.

*After training, support lasted for a month, but then it was up to us. (Interview 14)*

These insights confirm that leadership communication also acts as a dialogic mechanism, not only for conveying information but also for constructing shared meaning.

Thus, when leaders communicate and engage the employees effectively, they shape cognitive buy-in by building trust and belonging and behavioural buy-in by motivating active participation. However, when communication is lacking and impersonal, it undermines dialogue and results in partial understanding and passivity.

### 5.3.2.3. Feedback, Inclusion, and Employee Voice

Participants clearly differentiated between symbolic inclusion, where leaders sought insights without follow-through, and substantive inclusion, where employees were able to influence real outcomes. For example, one participant mentioned:

*“We held discussions in management meetings, but these often lacked follow-through, such as show-and-tell sessions to demonstrate the change. Early show-and-tell after introducing the change helps employees connect with the message. For future territories, we plan to start these engagements earlier to ensure inclusivity. (Interview 10)* Equally, employees described frustration when leaders failed to close the feedback loop.

*“My team is exhausted after over two years of this, and I’m struggling to keep them positive. I stand by them and won’t leave them unsupported. I wish the implementation team had been on the floor with us and taken our feedback seriously.” (Interview 17)*

*“My team frequently encounters system errors, requiring us to pause tasks, log tickets, and wait for feedback, which is frustrating and time-consuming.” (Interview 11)*

These findings illustrate that dialogic framing is effective when it moves beyond mere consultation towards collaboration. The presence of communication channels, such as forums, feedback emails, townhalls, etc., does not ensure inclusion; rather, employees were looking for leader authenticity through their responses

This is evident in some of the participant responses:

*“For example, the go-live was postponed three times—initially planned for April, then September, then December—after managers engaged teams and found them unready. We communicated this to the GM and acting country manager, who listened empathetically and delayed the launch, showing responsiveness to staff concerns.” (Interview 25)*

*“A quicker response makes you more eager to do better and improve” (Interview 7)* Furthermore, participants linked inclusion to trust in leadership intent. Whenever feedback was transparent, employees saw the change as a collaborative effort rather than imposed. *“They created a space where we could freely express our feelings and discuss challenges with the new system.” (Interview 11)*

Therefore, this theme and its findings indicate that dialogic mechanisms are effective when you include responsiveness, transparency, and co-creation. When feedback is authentic, employees move from passive recipients to active contributors, which enhances cognitive clarity, emotional connection, and behavioural engagement. However, when feedback is staged, employees regard communication as manipulation. Thus, the employees’ genuine voice transforms change into a shared narrative, creating the psychological and relational conditions necessary for deep, sustained buy-in.

#### 5.3.2.4. Cross-Regional and Local Contexts

The study found that leadership communication practices differed in the various regions, which shaped how employees engaged with the change. Where leaders adapted their

dialogic approaches to accommodate local norms, employees reported a stronger understanding of the change. Some participants noted:

*“Locally, we printed updates for notice boards to address access issues, computer literacy, and language barriers, explaining them to ensure understanding and alignment. (Interview 20)*

*“You need to help people understand change at their own pace and level. Some will buy into cost-cutting or improving customer delivery because of their exposure or education level. Others need it explained step-by-step in a language they understand. In the absence of that, you expose yourself to misinterpretation.” (Interview 1)*

Contrary, limited interaction and slower feedback created a sense of exclusion and uncertainty in other regions.

*“Ensure consistent messaging for everyone, so no one feels excluded. Everyone should receive the same message regularly to prevent negativity or feelings of exclusion.” (Interview 15).*

*“The focus was on office-based staff in Windhoek, excluding those in mines or other areas who were unaware of the change’s magnitude or value. This made the process less inclusive, as some employees felt it wouldn’t benefit them, especially those planning to leave.” (Interview 21)*

These disparities highlight that dialogic mechanisms are not context-free. For them to be effective, they are dependent on whether they resonate with the current realities and the cultural expectations. Geographical distance and linguistic inaccessibility posed a threat to employees not fully understanding the rationale behind the change, causing limited buy-in. Cognitively, contextualized communication helped support employees in linking the organisation’s intent to their local meaning. In Windhoek, for example, employees had a better understanding of the change due to the ongoing leadership engagement. However, in less-engaged regions, employees were frustrated and lacked understanding of the rationale. Employees in excluded regions expressed their frustration, which made them feel isolated, especially the lack of visibility. This made them emotionally unattached to the change initiative:

*: That caused a lot of frustration. I was fine, but people on the ground weren’t because they had issues needing resolution, and nobody came to their sites. You could motivate them to phone or share knowledge, but they felt the effort wasn’t made to reach them. In the long run, we all need to share knowledge.” (Interview 6)*

Whereas, where leaders were visible, there was trust and a sense of belonging. Based on these emotional and cognitive differences, employees had varying levels of engagement. Teams in well-supported regions were able to offer real-time feedback when errors occurred.

In contrast, those in remote regions felt less connected and relied on the change champions to assist them where possible.

*“It takes long to get things resolved; feedback or resolving problems takes a week or so.” (Interview 7)*

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of dialogic mechanisms in gaining buy-in depends on standardization or centralizing the communication to ensure that all employees achieve stronger cognitive clarity, emotional connection, and behavioural engagement. Therefore, dialogic framing requires that leaders be sensitive to the context; what builds buy-in in one region may also be required in another region to ensure trust. When communication takes local culture, language, and lived experience into consideration, it transforms change narratives into locally meaningful conversations, which reinforces dialogue.

#### 5.3.2.5. Leadership, Hierarchy, and Trust

While leadership communication was central to framing change, the organisation’s hierarchy either enabled or constrained the extent to which dialogue could occur authentically. Participants noted that when leadership communication flowed top-down without authentic engagement, two-way dialogue was limited and reduced cognitive understanding. Participants noted:

*“Hierarchy creates a disconnect if communication from country managers or business unit heads doesn’t reach supervisory levels. A balanced top-down and bottom-up approach is needed to ensure the message reaches all levels effectively.” (Interview 10)*

*“Dialogue mostly happened with our line manager. Beyond that, it got stuck. Senior teams did help, but we didn’t feel free to fully express ourselves. Sometimes asking questions felt like bothering them, so I’d stop asking.” (Interview 14)*

This indicates that even when leaders intended to frame change dialogically, hierarchical communication structures distorted or blocked that framing, which weakened the cognitive dimension of buy-in. This left the employees having to interpret messages second-hand through middle or junior managers, who may not have had full context or authority to adapt them, which resulted in uncertainty and fragmented sensemaking.

In contrast, leaders who reduced any hierarchical distance by being visible, listening actively, and engaging in transparent discussions were able to cultivate trust and commitment from the employees.

*“The forums and huddles allowed open discussions, and I felt able to express everything freely.” (Interview 11)*

These findings indicate and reinforce that dialogic framing is more relational than positional. Having authentic and trustworthy leaders drives employees to internalize change messages rather than distant authority figures.

Cognitively, open and trust-based interactions helped some employees to make sense of complex messages. But this was not the case for all employees, as some simply complied. Similarly, the perception of fairness and authenticity deepened the employees' trust in the leadership, which motivated proactive participation.

However, several participants also felt they needed to silence their voices within hierarchical teams.

*“there’s no clear platform for employees to communicate directly with leadership. For non-change champion employees, it’s challenging to know where to start voicing frustrations or challenges, as they typically go through line managers.” (Interview 19)*

This stifled dialogue and prevented the leaders from accessing critical feedback. Due to this, some participants were disengaged and lacked trust. This led to middle managers acting as key intermediaries, where they served as “sensegivers” and sustained dialogue.

Therefore, this theme answers the above question as it demonstrates that dialogic mechanisms are effective when power relations allow openness and reciprocity. When there is trust, hierarchical communication turns to genuine dialogue.

### 5.3.3. Research Question 3 Findings

*How do contextual factors, such as cultural diversity and organisational hierarchy, shape how effective leadership dialogic framing influences employee buy-in?*

This question aims to determine the impact of the contextual factors mentioned above on the effectiveness of leadership dialogic framing in influencing employee buy-in. It seeks to uncover how dialogic communication works or fails in different settings. The main aim was to deduce how local culture, power distance, and leader visibility affect the employees' cognitive understanding of the change and their readiness to participate. The relationship of these factors became evident in four of the five themes: Leadership, Hierarchy and Trust; Cross-regional and Local contexts; Feedback, inclusion and Employee Voice; Leadership Communication and engagement.

#### 5.3.3.1. Leadership, Hierarchy, and Trust

The findings of this study indicated that when employees perceive the leadership to be authentic, dialogic framing is shaped. Where communication was mainly top-down, employees were reluctant to express themselves, question authority, and contribute to discussions, which limited shared meaning making.

*“Communication between us and top leaders is poor. For example, I plan with my team to meet deadlines, like closing creditors by a certain date, but I can’t even get two minutes with my boss to discuss issues because she’s also busy fixing problems, like the lack of quality reports.” (Interview 17)*

*“Trust towards the organization is lacking. Find non-electronic ways to get feedback, like leaving a suggestion box in the tea room or bathroom, ensuring confidentiality. People worry computer traces will identify them. Guarantee protection to bring trust back and get honest feedback.” (Interview 1)*

These findings indicate that participants have limited access to their leaders, and the hierarchical distance reveals that there are limited opportunities for authentic dialogue. Interview 17 highlights that “communication between us and top leaders is poor”, which indicates there are structural barriers that limit interaction between the leader and the employee. This, therefore, results in cognitive disconnection and emotional disengagement. Moreover, Interview 1 reflected confidentiality concerns, which exposed a lack of trust in the organisation. This lack of psychological safety, expressed, undermines any inclusion efforts and silences employee voices, which further limits the flow of upward feedback that is essential to co-construct understanding.

Collectively, these quotes indicate that rigidity and distrust act as contextual stumbling blocks of dialogic framing and weaken the ability of leaders to foster buy-in. Without the proper and safe communication channels, leadership transparency, and accessibility, employees feel disengaged and resist participating in dialogue.

Similarly, in contexts where the leaders reduced the hierarchical distance, trust was deepened and employees felt the need to contribute meaningfully.

*“The communication was effective, with regular updates. Every Tuesday or Thursday, we had sessions at 2:10 PM where change champions gathered feedback from teams about their experiences, both positive and negative, with the system. These sessions allowed open discussion.” (Interview 9)*

*“Leadership is open with communication, using emails and holding sessions to share updates and documents. These platforms allow us to ask questions in a safe environment, which fosters open dialogue. I can’t suggest specific improvements, as they’re already quite inclusive.” (Interview 18)*

These settings allowed psychological safety and collective ownership, which enabled dialogic framing to operate as a mutual sensemaking process rather than a directive from

the top. Participants in these settings showed stronger emotional buy-in and engaged positively with the change.

Therefore, these findings confirm that hierarchical structures are not fundamentally obstructive; however, their impact is based on how leaders navigate them. When leaders portray humility, invite critique, and are authentic, dialogic framing flourishes.

### 5.3.3.2. Cross-Regional and Local Contexts

How leadership communication was interpreted was further shaped by regional and cultural diversity. Employees in the different regions described having unequal access to information, leadership visibility, and opportunities for dialogue.

Cultural and linguistic context mattered to the employees to allow for adaptation and to avoid misinterpretation of what the change meant and how it would affect their day-to-day.

*“You need to help people understand change at their own pace and level. Some will buy into cost-cutting or improving customer delivery because of their exposure or education level. Others need it explained step-by-step in a language they understand. In the absence of that, you expose yourself to misinterpretation.” (Interview 1)*

*“Cultural diversity significantly affects communication. For example, during implementation, I learned how people greet and refer to each other in different regions. In one instance, someone told a group they were “making noise,” which caused immediate tension because it was culturally inappropriate, regardless of hierarchy. I apologized on their behalf, realizing the impact of that small action. This showed me that cultural norms and backgrounds shape how messages are received. Failing to understand these can create barriers before the change is even discussed. To communicate effectively, you must understand your audience’s cultural norms and what they find acceptable, or you risk losing their trust and engagement.” (Interview 16)*

These revealed that employees’ responses to change are facilitated by different contexts, such as their language preferences, educational background and culture. Interview 1’s insights that “you need to help people understand change at their own pace and level” reveal the necessity for leaders to adapt and be audience-sensitive when framing change. When leaders fail to tailor their communication, they risk causing a misunderstanding with their audience and further alienating them.

Interview 16 highlights that even minute linguistic and behavioural mistakes can generate tension and resistance in employees. The participant acknowledged that communication goes beyond what is said, but in which context (linguistic fluency vs. cultural fluency).

Leaders ought to be aware of how to express authority, respect, and feedback cross-regionally for them to receive the buy-in intended.

Therefore, collectively, these findings indicate that leaders who engage with cultural nuances build psychological safety and inclusion, which strengthens buy-in. Similarly, when contextual differences are overlooked, employees view this as exclusion and insensitivity, which reduces the willingness of employees to engage.

#### 5.3.3.3. Feedback, Inclusion, and Employee Voice

The data also showed that feedback mechanisms aligned with the local communication norms, especially in the various forums where employees engaged actively to strengthen all buy-in dimensions.

*“Forums allowed questions and views, and change champions helped peers relate better.” (Interview 23)*

*“On the benefits side, appointing in-country change champions, who are influential and respected mentors, significantly drove stakeholder buy-in. Their involvement helped employees accept the change, enhancing engagement across the region.” (Interview 24)*

From these, it is evident that the regional forums, together with the appointment of the in-country change champions, played a crucial role in bridging the gap between leadership and the culturally diverse employees in the different regions. The participants highlighted the significance of the various forums, as they allowed employees to open up about the change, ask questions, and raise their frustrations. These platforms were used to find meaning and engage in peer-led sensemaking sessions, which is evidenced by Interview 23.

These insights demonstrate that the forums and appointment of the change champions moved the communication process from a hierarchical one to a horizontal one, which reduced the power distance and enhanced the legitimacy of the change narrative. In doing so, the leadership extended their reach to allow for dialogue at the peer level, while ensuring that communication remains inclusive, contextual, and increases trust.

#### 5.3.3.4. Leadership Communication and Engagement

Finally, participants responded positively to leadership’s visibility, approachability, and how they treated the cultural nuances.

*“I create a safe, respectful environment during engagements, ensuring mutual respect and fairness across all levels. By maintaining a consistent approach and*

*emphasizing there are wrong questions, I foster open dialogue. This encourages change champions and employees to express themselves without fear of judgment, enhancing engagement in larger platforms.” (Interview 24)*

*“The approach has changed, leadership is now more patient, touching base more often. If they can’t answer, they find someone who can explain at the right level, which is working.” (Interview 1)*

*Within the service team, communication was clear, and we received strong support during the transition. For example, we had a Microsoft Teams chat group where we could send screenshots of issues, and Mario would provide immediate assistance before we needed to log calls. Lazarus also spent an entire day with us, offering hands-on support for any questions or issues. Management was patient, understanding that the transition would cause delays, which fostered a supportive environment.” (Interview 19)*

This further indicates that when the leaders were visible, symbolic distance and emotional resonance were reduced, which further strengthened cognitive understanding.

#### 5.4. Findings Summary

The findings above reveal the dynamic and multi-layered process the organisation experienced during the change and how both the leadership and employees interpreted and internalized it. The analysis of the 25 semi-structured interviews revealed how framing and communicating the change significantly influenced how employees understood, emotionally responded, and the different levels of buy-in across the hierarchical structures, functions, and regions.

The main themes that emerged reflected the unfolding journey of how 24% of the participants had low engagement with the change, due to their initial resistance towards it, and how the other 76% participants indicated either a medium or high engagement, and confidence with the change and shared ownership of the transformation. Where employees previously viewed leadership communication as more technical and one-way evolved to a dialogic and relational process to enable them to make sense of the change within their own context.

When leaders were visible and responsive, trust and psychological safety became evident; however, when not, these elements eroded. Similarly, when leaders shifted from being distant authority figures toward being accessible and empathetic partners, the employee’s perception softened and bridged the gap, which allowed for more open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving to occur. Equally, the analysis revealed that for this organisation, the use of peer-led learning and support, using change champions, bridged

knowledge gaps, which were left by formal training systems. These mechanisms provided a nurtured sense of empowerment and self-efficacy to the employees.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that emotional and cultural factors shaped how the participants engaged with the change. As the change progressed, it was evident that the employees' collective narrative shifted from compliance to contribution and ownership, as they started to share their ideas and felt pride when those ideas were implemented.

Essentially, the findings demonstrate that for the implementation of change to be effective, it should not merely rely on structural and procedural clarity but on how leadership cultivates belonging, trust, and meaning throughout the process. The emergence of a shared identity through dialogue, emotional learning, and reflection highlights that change has become embedded in the organisational psyche, not just in their systems and processes.

Therefore, the emerging patterns reveal that the employees' experience of the transformational change was not understood through isolated channels. However, the findings indicate collaboration between how change was framed by leaders, the mechanisms that were used, and the contextual realities at play, which shaped how the employees interpreted the change and their responses. Individually, the themes point out vital communication elements, trust, local context, and participation, which collectively propose a holistic, interrelated process that is underpinned by employee buy-in. As the data analysis progressed, it was evident that framing, mechanisms, and context were not separate influencers, but together they shaped how employees adopted, resisted, or became disengaged from the change.

Chapter 6 will interpret these findings and critically examine how they contribute to existing theoretical patterns concerning framing, sensemaking, dialogic OD, and employee buy-in in the context of transformational change. The discussions center on and aim to extend the current knowledge and understanding of leadership dialogic communication and identify how it forms during transformational change, and its implications for leadership practice, where mechanisms like cultural diversity, hierarchy, and global dispersion come to play.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous chapter and seeks to interpret the findings in relation to the empirical theoretical foundation of Chapter 2. The main aim of this study was to explore how leadership's dialogic framing of transformational change influences employee buy-in. This study then drew various theories to uncover this, such as dialogic organisational development (OD) (Bushe & Marshak, 2015), sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), Relational Leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006), and Framing (Fairhurst, 2011; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). The analysis drew from 25 semi-structured interviews, revealing five key themes: Leadership communication and engagement; Leadership, Hierarchy, and trust; Cross-Regional and Local Contexts; Feedback, inclusion, and Employee Voice; and Employee Support and Empowerment. A sixth theme, reframing organisational identity through change, was identified, which connects across all the themes.

This discussion chapter is centered on the research questions outlined in Chapter 3. These questions first examine how leadership framing overall shapes buy-in and then address the sub-questions that focus on dialogic mechanisms and contextual factors. Linking the findings to the literature highlights this study's theoretical contributions, its practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The underlying discussion highlights that dialogic framing is not a static tool but one that is relational. The relational process fosters cognitive, emotional, and behavioural buy-in under certain contexts, yet weakens in hierarchical and culturally diverse settings without adaptation.

Therefore, this discussion aims to critique, affirm, and challenge the findings, drawing on existing literature. For example, Bushe and Marshak (2016) emphasize the use of participatory dialogue, whereas the findings revealed inconsistencies in the implementation, especially across regions, which led to varied levels of buy-in.

## 6.2. Discussion of the Main Research Question

### 62.1. How Does Leadership's Framing of Transformational Change Influence Employee Buy-In?

This question explores the relationship between leadership framing and employee buy-in during an organisational transformational change, which is conceptualized as the employees' cognitive acceptance (comprising the employees' understanding of the change), emotional commitment (how they align and trust leadership), and behavioural support towards the change (their engagement and resistance levels) (Lewis & Sahay, 2019; Oreg et al., 2018). The findings indicate how change is framed significantly shapes buy-in, especially when it is dialogic, which aligns with Hypothesis 1 in Chapter 3: Leadership framing positively influences buy-in by increasing trust and reducing ambiguity, with dialogic approaches outperforming top-down methods. The discussion section systematically assimilates the five themes mentioned in the previous chapter and the bridging theme, ensuring to align with the literature and theoretically extend where needed

Literature describes framing as a powerful sense-giving process and strategy that utilises language, symbols, and narratives that leaders use to interpret events and attach meaning to them (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Fairhurst, 2011; Kaplan, 2008). How participants interpreted the manager walkabouts, Gemba walks, and huddles in the findings supports the literature by showing that visible leadership presence enabled cognitive clarity and emotional trust, which is important for participatory communication and reducing uncertainty (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). For example, some participants reported a higher acceptance of the change due to regular huddles that connected the strategic goals of this change to their daily realities, which reduced uncertainty as per Weick (2020). This aligns with the sensemaking theory, where Maitlis and Christianson (2014) attest that employees look for cues from their leaders when there is ambiguity.

Similarly, dialogic OC scholars position framing not as an independent variable to sensegiving, but more as a co-constructed form of sensemaking (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, 2016; Hastings & Schwarz, 2022). The findings strongly align to this as storytelling, open forums, and change-champion networks allowed employees to merge their personal narratives with those of the organisation, which created emotional commitment and behavioural ownership (Stouten et al., 2018). In relational leadership terms (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006), when leaders were visible and empathetic, they were viewed as facilitators rather than directors of the change, which cultivated psychological safety

(Edmondson, 2019) and trust towards leadership (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). The reciprocated trust proved vital, especially when leaders kept their promises and were accessible. The employees became proactive; however, when there were broken promises, trust eroded, producing cynicism, and employees withdrew (Ford et al., 2008; Oreg et al., 2018).

However, when framing is inconsistent, such as in the findings, it leads to disengagement and a lack of trust. This notion challenges literature's optimistic view of framing as a critical tool for managers (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). Participants in remote regions highlighted delayed and often absent communication, which created a sense of exclusion, resulting in low support, as noted by one response, "information gets lost along the way." This response resonates with scholarly critiques that framing can be manipulative when disconnected from the employees lived reality (Banerjee, 2021; Langley et al., 2013), resulting in resistance as opposed to buy-in (Oreg et al., 2018). The findings further highlighted how hierarchical filters distorted framing by transforming potential dialogic communication into monologues, as noted by Van Den Heuvel et al. (2013) and Vaara and Whittle (2021) on power dynamics.

Furthermore, a pivotal emotional link, trust, emerged, supporting the relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012), which requires evidence of empathy and credible communication to build commitment. Leaders, based on this theory, are seen as facilitators of collaborative relationships. The findings revealed that participants appreciated leaders who were collaborative, visible, and inclusive (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), promoting psychological safety (Raelin, 2014; Edmondson, 2019). However, when the system failed, symbolizing broken promises, trust eroded, and some participants felt that leadership should not have tried to fix what was not broken, aligning with Ford et al. (2008) that buy-in requires employees to be psychologically invested. Behaviourally, buy-in encourages proactive support and feedback from various stakeholders, including peers; however, top-down approaches, in this organisation, led to the employees relying on outdated ways to solve problems, indicating superficial compliance (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

Overall, the findings for this question indicate and affirm that dialogic framing improves buy-in, which enables sensemaking and relational ties. This notion challenges those scholars who purely view sensemaking as an individualistic sense (Allard-Poesi, 2005) by highlighting institutional factors like hierarchy but extends the literature to feature multinational contexts.

### 6.3. Discussion of Sub-Question 1

#### 6.3.1. How Does Leadership Dialogic Framing Influence Employee Buy-In During Organisational Change?

This question explored how leadership's dialogic framing, a phenomenon that describes the relational, emergent, and co-created communication, and is rounded in Bushe and Marshak's (2015) Dialogic OD approach, influences employee buy-in. The findings, supporting Hypothesis 2, indicate that this phenomenon promotes trust, collective sensemaking, and psychological safety and fosters buy-in. Interestingly, the findings also indicate that dialogic framing is dependent on context hierarchy and consistency, and if poorly implemented or lacks similar distribution in the various regions, it can collapse into a monologic practice.

##### 6.3.1.1. Dialogic Framing as a Relational and Sensemaking Process

Bushe and Marshak (2015) position dialogic OD as a co-created, conversational process rather than a top-down exercise that is planned. This is evident in the findings, as participants described dialogic mechanisms, such as weekly change champion forums, leadership walkabouts, and regular check-ins, as spaces where they could express their emotions, provide suggestions, interpret the change, and normalize it. This aligns with the empirical work of Bushe & Nagaishi (2018), which argues that dialogic engagement produces collective sensemaking and validates the employees' emotions to enable other possibilities.

These patterns fit directly into the sensemaking theory. The findings reveal that participants constantly sought leadership cues as they tried to navigate and interpret the unfamiliar system rollout, which matches claims from scholars such as Maitlis and Christianson (2014) and Weick (1995) that sensemaking deepens under ambiguity. Having these spaces reduced anxiety and allowed employees to ask questions, test the system and interpret it, and receive feedback where there was uncertainty. For example, in Windhoek, where leaders "explained things in our language," they provided exactly the kind of contextualized framing Lewis (2019) saw as being important to provide cognitive clarity.

This resulted in stronger cognitive buy-ins, where employees experienced a dialogic environment:

*"That's when I understood the why."* (Int. 11)

*“Champions spoke our language.”* (Int. 9)

Therefore, dialogic framing operated as a sense-giving mechanism that took abstract goals and transformed them into meaningful narratives.

#### 6.3.1.2. Leadership Presence and Relational Trust as Catalysts of Buy-In

The importance of visible and relationally engaged leadership became a major pattern. The leadership’s physical presence during Gemba walks, huddles, and impromptu visits became what employees used to repeatedly interpret as leadership’s care, authenticity, and empathy. This supports the relational leadership theory (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006), which stresses that a leader’s authenticity emerges when there are ongoing relational interactions with employees and peers.

Therefore, the findings indicate that where leaders were authentically present, the employees felt supported and valued. Similarly, when the leaders were absent, employees felt a sense of detachment, being neglected, and an indifference to the change. This is in line with the study conducted by Agote et al. (2016), who argued that when leaders are transparent and responsive in their behavior, they build trust with their employees, which is an important emotional foundation concerning buy-in.

However, for this study, trust was eroded, particularly when leaders were absent and inconsistent, which led to employee withdrawal and reduced behavioural engagement. These dynamics extend the literature as they demonstrate how hierarchy behaves as a dialogic filter, especially where leaders were able to explain the messages effectively, dialogic framing flourished, and where the hierarchy was unchallenged, there were monologues.

#### 6.3.1.3. Dialogic Framing and the Cognitive–Emotional–Behavioural Pathway

The study’s findings back the literature that what activates the three dimensions of buy-in is dialogic framing (Lewis & Sahay, 2019; Oreg et al., 2018).

### **a. Cognitive Dimension – The Why**

When the leaders conducted various forums, change champion meetings, and personally explained the change, they helped employees interpret the reasons behind the change. The employees emphasized that when they were able to ask questions in the various forums and got context-specific answers, it created clarity in why the change was happening and reduced confusion.

This aligns with research from Cornelissen & Werner (2014), highlighting that framing is an interactive sense-giving activity

### **b. Emotional Dimension – Building trust, safety, and Identification**

Whenever leaders listened, validated concerns, and responded well, the employees felt a sense of trust and emotional safety. However, when the leaders ignored their input, broke promises, and went silent after go-live, it triggered frustration, disengagement, and disappointment among employees. This aligns to the study of De Jong et al. (2016), who argued that when communication is perceived as manipulative, trust is eroded and turns buy-in into cynicism. These accounts affirm Fadzil (2019) and Agote et al. (2016) on the emotional fragility of buy-in.

### **c. Behavioural Dimension - Employee participation, ownership, and proactivity**

Dialogic framing allowed employees not only to rely on leadership to engage in the change but to play an active role, especially those appointed as change champions. This turned the change from being leader-owned (Top-down approach) to peer-owned (relational approach). This approach is consistent with Oreg et al. (2018) that leader-owned, monologic environments lead to behavioural passivity and minimal compliance, while co-creation allows trust, respect, and ownership for employees (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Lewis & Sahay, 2019; Balogun et al., 2023)

#### 6.3.1.4. Regional and Hierarchical Variations: Dialogic Intent without Dialogic Reach

A unique contribution to the study is the clear outline that dialogic framing is context-sensitive. While the Windhoek employees benefited from relationally engaged leaders, brand champion visibility, other regions felt neglected and excluded. These gaps support the argument made by Liu et al. (2020) that dialogic communication requires context tailoring.

The findings identified three barriers: Geographical distance, Hierarchical filters, and Cultural norms. These findings support Vaara and Whittle (2021), who argued that power dynamics can shape sensemaking by favouring certain voices over others. Where the employees reported power distance, buy-in was unfavourable and took longer than expected (Hu et al., 2018)

#### 6.3.1.5. Dialogic Framing Failure: The risk

While many examples demonstrated positive dialogic framing, the findings also reported and demonstrated how it can become a mere symbol and not be meaningful. A striking disruptor to the findings is performative dialogue, which is the creation of apparent participative mechanisms such as forums, suggestion boxes, Q&A sessions, and change-champion networks, which sought employee voice; however, they failed to acknowledge or act upon it. Both leaders and employees saw these as counterproductive, at times. In the current case, employees differentiated between “real” dialogue, which visibly shaped their decisions, and “fake” dialogue, where they felt their input was invalid. The latter had negative outcomes than regions that had received little or no interaction with leaders. Some employees described that although the forums were helpful, their input was not acted upon, which literature identifies as dialogic failure (Bushe & Marshak, 2013; Passetti et al., 2019) or a dialogic loop (Liu et al., 2020). These loops are what scholars refer to as psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau et al., 2018), which employees felt were breached when their voice was ignored. These violations turn hope into cynicism, which demonstrates the expectancy-disconfirmation paradox (Colquitt et al., 2013; Thau et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). This risk coincides with Ford et al. (2008), who highlighted that cynicism and resistance would be prevalent when there is pseudo-participation.

Equally, in regions where mechanisms like forums existed but the feedback loops were broken, there was a faster decline than in those regions that traditionally had top-down communication, and the silence disappointed them. With the silence came what Detert et al. (2011) and Sherf et al. (2021) refer to as voice silence.

This study, therefore, reveals that performative dialogue resulted in cognitive disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and behavioural withdrawal from some employees. These indicate that though dialogic framing is important, it can also be a fragile practice, meaning that when authentic, it is highly effective, but when inconsistent, it can be

damaging. This is consistent with the literature from Rafferty et al. (2013) and Fugate et al. (2020).

#### 6.3.1.6. Sub-Question 1 Conclusion

Overall, this question reveals that leadership dialogic framing is a promoter for employee buy-in when the change is implemented consistently, relationally, and the employees are responsive. Literature confirms that dialogic framing promotes trust, shared meaning, and psychological safety. It enables cognitive understanding when the narrative is co-constructed, it allows for emotional safety when leaders are empathetic and their presence is relational, and fosters behavioural commitment when ownership is shared and there is an allowance for problem-solving events.

However, what is also evident from the findings is that dialogic framing is not inherently inclusive or reliable, as it depends on leadership authenticity, sustained presence, attention to regional asymmetries, and a willingness to act on feedback for it to succeed. When these conditions were unmet, the concept of dialogic framing was only symbolic, which eroded trust and reduced buy-in. Thus, the study confirms Hypothesis 2 and contributes to empirical studies of dialogic framing. Though this confirmation is true, framing is context-dependent, and for buy-in to occur and be successful, it requires that leadership has authentic relational engagements, and the organisational conditions need to be conducive.

### 6.4. Discussions of Sub-Question 2

#### **6.4.1 What Specific Dialogic Mechanisms Are Most Effective in Gaining Employee Buy-In, and How Do These Impact Employees' Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural Dimensions?**

Sub-Question 2 of this research investigated the specific dialogic mechanisms through which leadership framing is translated into and examined how these shape the Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural (CEB) dimensions of buy-in. While the previous sub-question highlighted dialogic framing as a foundation for sensemaking and psychological safety, this question identifies how the employees interpreted, felt, and acted during the change.

The findings confirm Hypothesis 3, which posited that dialogic mechanisms enhance buy-in when they enable understanding, connection, and co-creation. However, what is highlighted

in the findings is that these mechanisms may vary in their success depending on timing, their relational depth, and the context. This aligns with the empirical work of various authors that positions these mechanisms as social infrastructure and provides dialogic framing with a tangible form (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Raelin, 2016; Bushe & Marshak, 2015).

#### **6.4.1.1 Dialogic Mechanisms as the vehicles of meaning-making**

Four mechanisms, from the findings, emerged as enablers of employee participation and sensemaking: Change champions, forums, and weekly sessions, storytelling and informal relational check-ins, and responsive feedback loops.

Each of these mechanisms played a role in the employees' understanding of the change (cognitive), their feelings about it (emotional), and how to act towards it (behavioural). Each mechanism played a distinct role in shaping how employees understood the change (cognitive), how they felt about it (emotional), and how they acted toward it (behavioural).

##### **a. Change Champions Peer-led translators of meaning**

The change of champion networks became an important mechanism across the board. These change champions acted as translators of meaning, which bridged the gap between employees and leadership. The employees mentioned that the champions “spoke our language” and “made things relatable”

This aligns with the study by Cornelissen et al. (2014), who mentioned that peer-led interactions or strategic actors help create relevance to the framed organisational messages, and Raelin's (2016) work that emphasizes leadership practice where shared leadership provides sensemaking.

The cognitive impact the champions had included clarifying expectations, the system processes, and the implications this change will have on the employees' roles. They also reduced ambiguity, which is in line with the literature (Rafferty et al., 2013; Weiner, 2020), who argue for clear rationale and leadership alignment. Furthermore, the emotional impact, which also aligns with empirical research, is that the champions created an emotional bridge, which helped the employees reduce anxiety and normalise frustrations (Fugate et al., 2020). Lastly, the behavioural impact included better and initiative-taking engagement sessions and solving issues quicker, while diffusing resistance.

### **b. Dialogic Forums: Collective sensemaking platforms**

The forums that consisted of weekly updates, Huddles, and MS Teams check-ins created conversational spaces where employees could articulate and express their emotions, and together with the leaders, co-create meaning. Leaders could communicate and engage based on these expressions and emotions, while the employees could validate their experiences and receive real-time clarifications on matters at hand. These findings agree with studies from Raelin (2016) and Bushe and Marshak (2015) that argue that dialogic spaces create generative change through collective interpretation of the change rather than on an individual level. Other scholars also affirm that collective sensemaking allows employees to ask questions and get clarity (Whittle et al., 2016; Schildt et al., 2019), which promotes transparency and voice.

The findings further indicate that these forums improved the employees' comprehension of timelines, expectations, and processes. They also made the teams feel included however, some participants felt there should have been broader forums and that the whole Namibia region needed to be included, heard, and valued. Scholars attest that creating such spaces can produce buy-in and offer employees a sense of ownership and reduce resilience (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Wegerif & Yang, 2011; Boyd & Sherry, 2024). However, when these forums were inconsistent and concentrated in Windhoek, employees felt disconnected and out of touch with the change, and some resorted to old ways of doing things.

### **c. Storytelling and relational check-ins**

Denning (2005) describes storytelling as a leader's way to communicate the organisation's values and foster communication, sparking action and collaboration. In this study, the leaders were able to do this through informal walkabouts and Gemba walks. These check-in walks allowed the employees to share their experiences on a one-on-one basis rather than in the forums mentioned above. They further served as an emotional anchor during the technical change. These walks allowed the leaders and employees to learn, struggle, and succeed together. However, in remote regions, the absence of leaders magnified the exclusion and delayed the buy-in.

These findings are related to the literature that widely recognizes storytelling as an effective power in change (Boal & Schultz, 2007), as it shapes identification and emotional engagement. Furthermore, Fugate et al. (2020) highlights that employees cope better with change when leaders share their relatable experiences.

The findings indicated that the impact of storytelling involved leaders living by example, which built trust, empathy, and psychological closeness, allowing the employees to mirror the openness of leaders and adapt to the new normal.

Therefore, this mechanism was evident when leaders showed up physically, and the gap was also visible in the remote regions.

#### **d. Feedback loops**

Feedback loops became clear when leaders responded and reported back to the employees concerning their concerns. Although some participants felt that feedback took too long and became despondent, some saw the positive side of feedback loops. When they saw their suggestions being taken into consideration and adjustments were made, they interpreted the change as a collaborative effort and more relational. Bushe and Marshak (2015) note this as generative dialogue due to the possibilities that come with engaging and providing feedback. Oreg et al. (2018) also argue that when employees feel and believe their voice is heard, their behavioural commitment increases.

Therefore, the impact that was noted in this study concerning this mechanism included employees understanding the new system better, deepened trust in leaders, better engagement from employees, and they took initiative in solving problems.

However, when suggestions were ignored and not addressed, or when feedback was not provided, it created cynicism, frustration, and emotional detachment, which supports Carlsen (2006) on the dangers of limited dialogues.

#### **6.4.2 Shortfalls of these Mechanisms**

The findings indicate that these mechanisms are not inherently effective, but they depend on three conditions: Timing and sequencing, regional reach, and authenticity. When the forums ignore the inputs from employees, it produces cynicism and disengagement. Employees seemed to lack cognitive readiness and emotional confidence when forums were late. Secondly, remote areas received minimal engagement, which reduced the impact of the mechanisms and contributed to employees in those areas feeling excluded. Lastly, employees felt unheard when the mechanisms were inconsistent, which had an impact on buy-in.

These shortfalls are challenging the literature on the effectiveness of dialogic tools (Passetti et al., 2019) and display that relational depth, continuity, and contextual adaptation are needed.

### 6.4.3 Integrating Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural Outcomes

The results thoroughly exhibit an interdependent CEB pathway as depicted below:

Figure 3: CEB Pathways

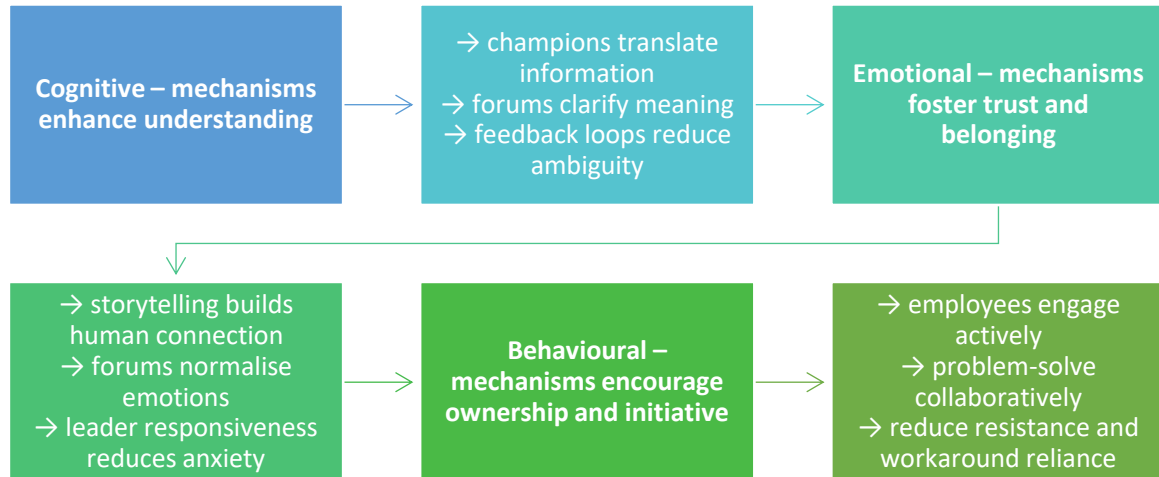


Figure 3 aligns with Oreg et al.'s (2018) research that depicts a multidimensional view of buy-in and matches with the sensemaking studies covered in Chapter 2.

### 6.4.4 Conclusion Sub-Question 2

This question's focus moved from the overarching viewpoint of dialogical framing to the specific mechanisms that operationalise it. The discussion above strongly supports Hypothesis 3, indicating specific dialogic mechanisms are effective to ensure employees buy-in, especially when the leaders are authentic, inclusive, contextually based, and continuous. Outside of these qualities, the same mechanisms become counterproductive and cause disengagement. For example, Storytelling, forums, and feedback loops worked as Bushe and Marshak (2015, 2016) and Bushe and Nagaishi (2018) argued, old narratives to new possibilities within the organisation, thereby promoting cognitive and emotional sensemaking (Balogun et al., 2023; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Thus, these dialogic mechanisms are neutral tools for communication. In conclusion, dialogic mechanisms are the engine room of transformational buy-in.

## 6.5. Discussion of Sub-Question 3

### **6.5.1 How Do Contextual Factors, Such as Cultural Diversity and Organisational Hierarchy, Shape the Effectiveness of Leadership Dialogic Framing in Fostering Employee Buy-In?**

This question explores the degree to which contextual factors, specifically cultural diversity, geographical dispersion, the organisation's hierarchy, and psychological safety, foster the success of leadership dialogic framing to ensure buy-in. This question is important, especially when the organisation is complex and diverse, such as the case organisation navigating diverse cultures, linguistic differences, and hierarchical landscapes. The findings, therefore, highly support Hypothesis 4, which suggests that dialogic framing is more likely to encourage cognitive, emotional, and behavioural buy-in when there is low hierarchy with a high inclusion rate and environments are adapted within context. Across the four themes mentioned in the previous chapter, the data collected systematically reveal that context acts not just as a factor in the background but is an active mediator of dialogic success. Below is the discussion of the findings concerning this question that is theoretically grounded.

#### **6.5.1.1 Culture and Language diversity**

The findings indicate that diversity in culture and language shapes how employees interpret and respond to dialogic framing. The participants across various regions noted that when the leader's message was localized, "explained in a language they understand," or contextualized to the specific department or environment, there was a better understanding and emotional connection towards the change. Equally, when the framed message seemed generic, relayed to only a few, and overly technical, the employees felt alienated and neglected, especially since they also needed to understand the system. These feelings were especially prominent in regions outside of Windhoek, with remote operations that lacked consistent leadership visibility. The employees in these regions felt frustrated, uninformed, and excluded from a process that was going to need them in the end.

These findings align with and extend the study conducted by Hofstede (2001) that argued that cultural dimensions influence how the message is received; however, more recent scholars offer more accuracy. Arregle et al.'s (2024) study on subcultural dynamics concluded that when subcultures are not acknowledged, they can create silos and division among employees, which could change strategic framing. Similarly, Cornelissen et al. (2014) note that linguistic frames and metaphors mediate sensemaking and must echo local practice for interpretation. Bushe and Nagaishi (2018) further emphasise the importance of

dialogic OD in multicultural contexts where multiple systems coexist; however, for the case organisation, when leaders actively bridged interpretive systems, the importance of this concept is realised. These findings align and advance the current studies by indicating that linguistic frames are not merely symbolic to the employees but have a performance influence.

Furthermore, Logemann et al. (2019) and Piekkari et al. (2020) reveal that language policy is a vital lever during a multinational change. Therefore, these findings extend their study, which concentrates on headquarters-subsidiary relations to intra-African regional diversity, indicating that even within a single country (Namibia), language diversity can derail dialogic intent.

Much of the literature surrounding sensemaking focuses on either the team or the individual levels (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 2020). The findings extend their reach to demonstrate that the organisation's cultural routines, such as language, storytelling, and local examples, mediate sensemaking to some degree. This notion supports Introna's (2018) critique surrounding sensemaking studies, which constantly neglect the organisation's context. In the multinational setting of this study, the evident cultural diversity is not insignificant but fundamental to how employees interpret leadership framing, echoing Luiz and Barnard's (2022) need to increase contextualization of organisational behaviour.

### **6.5.1.2 Organisational Hierarchy and Power Dynamics**

A pattern evident in the data is that the organisation's hierarchy, which is a strong moderator, influences the success of dialogic framing. The findings indicate that middle managers and supervisors sometimes act as filters in some instances, which magnifies the dialogic intent by promoting open communication and offering a safe space, while at other times, they would suppress questions and act as bottlenecks. Some participants indicated that certain information would remain at certain levels and would not reach all employees, and some leaders also stated that only a small percentage would get communication firsthand. These comments signal a communication breakdown on the intended dialogic chain. Such constraints led to employees feeling emotionally withdrawn, refusing to comment, and avoiding engaging in the change.

A study by Ocasio et al. (2018) aligns with this view, attesting that hierarchical structures and power flows shape organisational attention. Similarly, Vaara and Whittle (2021) argue that change communication can be political and shaped by conversational struggle, where some

voices are heard better than others. Heyden et al. (2017) stress the important role of managers being able to translate and authenticate executive strategies and narratives. While these scholars focused their study on top-down approaches, this study shows bidirectional bias, where middle managers and supervisors not only failed to translate the messages upward but also could not provide feedback downwards, which converted dialogic invitations into one-way communication. The double bias explains the reason hierarchical distance damages psychological safety and ownership in the behaviour of employees. Therefore, the study results reinforce this argument by indicating that dialogic intent is not enough by itself, but needs middle managers to advocate for it.

Furthermore, the study extends beyond identifying hierarchy as just a structural constraint, but as an active moderator of communication that shapes how messages are transmitted, how employees feel about the change, and follow-through on behaviour after implementation. Uhl-Bien's (2006) relational leadership theory aligns with this, specifically on dialogic framing within the context of organisational change.

#### **6.5.1.3 Regional Inequality**

A critical contextual factor that emerged in the study was geographical dispersion, which influenced dialogic framing. Employees outside Windhoek, in remote regions, expressed having limited leadership visibility and presence. This resulted in fewer opportunities to discuss the difficulties they were facing, any suggestions they had, and slower feedback loops. To compensate for this lack of visibility, the employees in the outskirt regions relied on the middle management and change champions who became their translators during the transition. The feeling of being disconnected and alienated was often described by the participants because they were not part of some crucial conversations that needed their initial buy-in.

Early dialogic OD scholars argue that sustained engagements and frequent conversations with employees are harder when there are geographical barriers in place (Boje et al., 2004; Gabriel, 2005). Other studies acknowledge that physical closeness is important and that employees desire it for meaningful dialogues and buy-in (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). Gabriel (2005) and Passetti et al. (2019) also warn that dialogic communication may fail due to insufficient resources allocated and leaders failing to follow through. The findings support these scholars by showing exactly how geographical and logistical challenges broke the dialogic intention of the leaders. The findings also support that remote regions felt excluded from the constructed meaning, which disconnected the sensemaking efforts.

Likewise, Numi and Koroma (2020) highlight how dispersed teams often suffer the consequences of declined dialogic communication over time. This is evident in this study, as mentioned above, consequently leaving change champions to be spatial brokers and maintaining discursive openness across the sites.

#### **6.5.1.4 Cultural Norms, Psychological Safety and Voice Effectiveness**

Cultural norms that involve hierarchy, respect, and difference shaped how effectively employees use dialogic spaces. Where there was a higher power distance or where leadership questioning was culturally discouraged, the employees refrained from speaking up, even though forums were available. This indicated a lack of psychological safety, as employees described that expressing themselves would lead to being labeled as negative. Therefore, emotional buy-in is dependent on psychological safety and trust, and not just the available mechanisms.

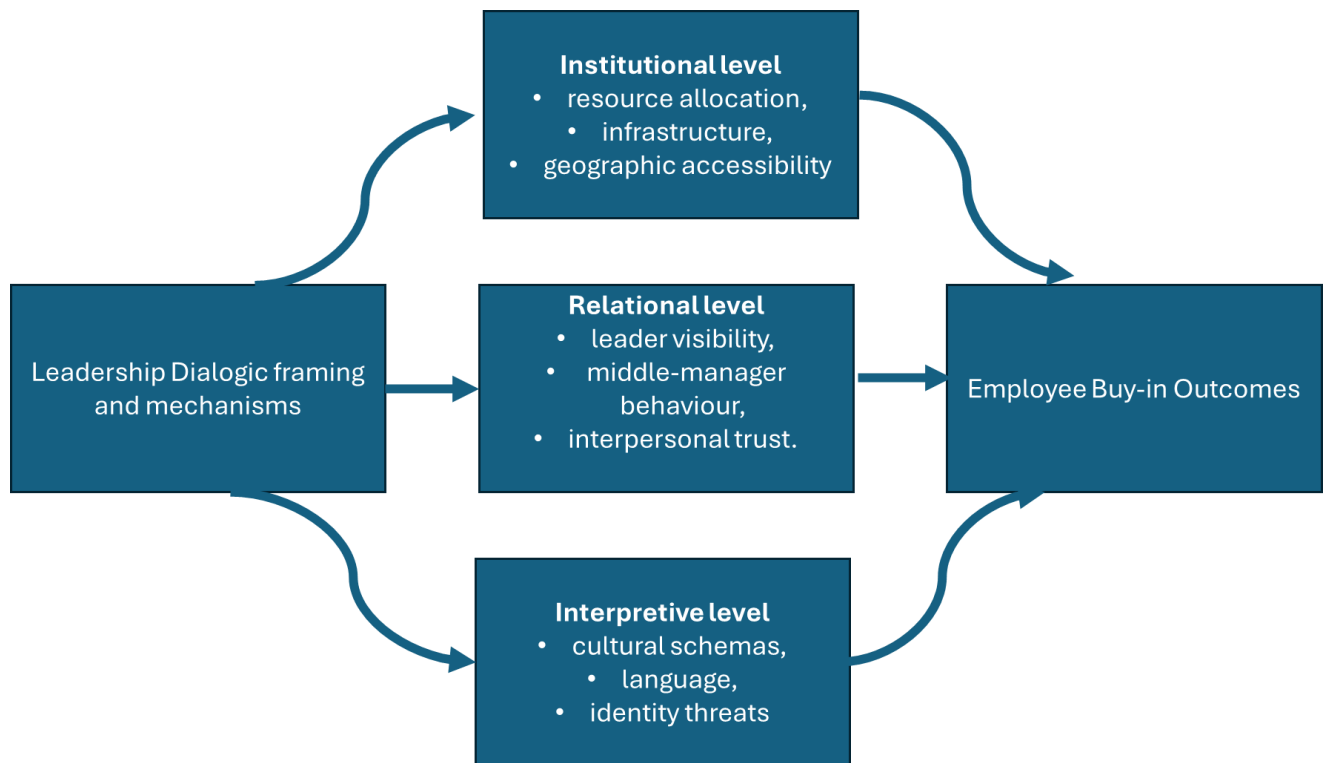
The findings align with Wilkinson and Fay's (2011) study, arguing that the employees' voice effectiveness is dependent on whether there is organisational psychological safety and not only on structural opportunities. Team psychological safety scholars also emphasise that open communication is a result of a leader's vulnerability and responsiveness in any condition (Hu et al., 2018; Nurmi & Koroma, 2020; Roussin et al., 2016). Ravasi et al. (2019) argue that any identity threat during change can cause emotional defensiveness, which is consistent with the current study, where employees feared expressing themselves, felt confused, and withdrew when the leaders did not facilitate safety.

This data extends these studies by highlighting that voice behaviours during a transformational change can be conditioned. Thus, dialogic framing is incomplete without context-sensitive factors that adopt cultural norms on authority. Therefore, Bushe and Marshak's (2015) argument that dialogic OD is relational is strengthened; however, cultural intelligence should form part of the dialogic practice.

#### **6.5.1.5 Cross-theoretical Synthesis: A Multilevel Contextual Moderator Model**

The findings propose that contextual influences operate using a multilevel moderator system that is interconnected.

Figure 4: Multilevel Contextual Moderator Model



This model supports and responds to the theoretical study of Langley et al. (2013) and Ocasio et al. (2016), who advocate for process theories that integrate the relational and institutional levels. It also responds to Introna's (2018) argument that sensemaking studies lack attention to institutional mediation, and the current study identifies exactly how this mediation operates in practice.

### 6.5.1.6 Conclusion Sub-Question 3

Sub-Question 3 highlights that context is not merely a marginal backdrop decisive moderator of dialogic effectiveness. This context directly confirms Hypothesis 4, which proposed that Dialogic framing has a positive effect on employee buy-in when there is lower hierarchical distance and higher cultural inclusivity. The findings indicate that cultural diversity, the organisation's hierarchy, the regional equality felt, and psychological safety deeply shaped how leadership's framing of the change was interpreted, trusted, and acted on. When the contextual moderators are supportive, dialogic framing strengthened the employees' cognitive clarity, heightened their emotional trust, and they participated effectively. Equally, when there were hierarchical filters, limited resources, or cultural misalignment, dialogic framing lost its relational touch and failed to produce meaningful buy-in. By grounding dialogic framing into the employees' lived experiences, the study answers Hypothesis 4;

however, it also extends existing theory (Arregle et al., 2024; Luiz & Barnard, 2022) and offers a robust, multilevel framework that provides actionable guidance to those in similar organisations

## **6.6. Overall Discussion Conclusion**

This chapter combined the empirical findings with the theoretical foundations laid in the literature review, highlighting how dialogic framing, dialogic mechanisms, and contextual moderators interrelate to foster employee buy-in during a transformational organisational change. Together, the analysis offered a solid and theoretically grounded understanding of buy-in as a concept and process that is co-constructed, relational, and contextually moderated rather than a static communication outcome.

Sub-Section 1 indicated that leadership dialogic framing, which is anchored in emotional awareness, transparency, and relational presence, is the foundation for employee sensemaking during change. The results align with dialogic OD literature that highlights dialogue as a participatory meaning-making process (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, 2018; Marshak & Bushe, 2018). The study also aligns with sensemaking scholars who emphasise that leaders ought to be key sensegivers during change (Cornelissen et al., 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). The positive response of employees when there was consistent validation of their emotional experiences boosted relational leadership theories that emphasized empathy, visibility, and authenticity (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; McCauley & Palus, 2021). However, whenever dialogue was stifled, inconsistent, and filtered, framing failed to create trust, which contradicted scholarly contributions that framing, on its own, is sufficient to gain employee support (Stouten et al., 2018). These outline the fragility and dependence of dialogic framing on contextual relational quality, therefore, extending the literature.

Sub-Question 2 examined the role that dialogic mechanisms play in translating what is framed into practice. For instance, for this study, mechanisms such as weekly forums, brand-champion networks, and storytelling practices functioned as the key for sensemaking, which is consistent with the literature that conventional processes foster collective understanding and reduce uncertainty (Raelin, 2016; Boal & Schultz, 2007). For the participants, these mechanisms contributed to their cognitive clarity, emotional understanding, and how they behaved. However, the findings indicated that the mechanisms are not inherently proactive, but their effectiveness depends on employees feeling psychologically safe, the leaders' follow-through, their availability, and local adaptation.

When training was rushed and communication was inconsistent, or when the leader's responsiveness was lacking, there was a disruption in how the employees made sense of the change. This challenges the literature that highlights participatory mechanisms as universal (Passetti et al., 2019), and theory is extended by highlighting that these mechanisms require relational and contextual capability to function as intended.

Sub-Question 3 then showed that context, such as institutional, relational, or interpretive, acts as a decisive multilevel moderator that shapes the impact of both framing and the mechanisms mentioned above. At the institutional level, how resources were allocated and the geographical dispersion shaped how employees access their leaders and the relevant information concerning the change, which is consistent with institutional and multinational organisational studies (Luiz & Barnard, 2022). Relational dynamics, which include hierarchy, middle-management filtering, and trust, support the findings that power structures can influence sensemaking (Ocasio et al., 2018; Vaara & Whittle, 2022). What also shaped how employees perceived the change communicated as authentic or alienating, aligned with cross-cultural and organisational identity studies, is the interpretive factors such as the employees' cultural schemas, their linguistic diversity, and their own identity concerns (Hofstede, 2001; Ravasi et al., 2019). Therefore, these findings align to Hypothesis 4 and further extend the existing literature by illustrating that dialogic practices are not socially constructed, but rather are rooted within contextual constraints, especially in culturally diverse multinationals.

Overall, these findings clearly illustrate that leadership dialogic framing initiates sensemaking; dialogic mechanisms then reinforce it; then the contextual moderators determine whether employees buy into the change.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored how leadership dialogic framing influenced employee buy-in during a transformational organisational change. It further investigated how dialogic mechanisms and various contextual moderators shape this process.

This chapter aims to synthesise the theoretical and empirical insights that were produced across the research process. This chapter will consolidate the findings from the data analysed, articulate the study's theoretical and practical significance, and then outline the contributions it seeks to make to scholarship and to organisational practice. This chapter also critically reflects on the limitations of research design and proposes recommendations for future research.

Thus, this interpretive, qualitative case study examined three interconnected dimensions: (1) how leadership framing influenced the employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural buy-in; (2) how effective the dialogic mechanisms were to foster shared sensemaking; and (3) the mediating role of contextual factors such as hierarchy, geographical dispersion, and cultural diversity. A comprehensive discussion of the findings was provided in Chapter 6, where a link to theory and literature was highlighted.

Chapter 7, therefore, builds on this discussion by noting the study's principal theoretical conclusions, identifying the study's theoretical and practical contributions, and proposing practical recommendations to leaders in the future. Other considerations for this chapter are the limitations, supported by a balanced and critical interpretation of the findings, and recommendations for future research that can develop the empirical model suggested and conceptualise the insights found here.

### 7.1. Principal Theoretical Conclusions

As mentioned, the study examined how leadership framing, especially its dialogic form, influences employee buy-in, the dialogic mechanisms, and the contextual moderators that shape this process. The study then derived five interrelated theoretical conclusions that advance the field of dialogic OD, transformational change, relational leadership, and employee resistance.

First, leadership dialogic framing acts as a relational and interpretive foundation for organisational sensemaking. When authentic and continuous, it becomes more effective

than the traditional top-down relationship and generates buy-in during a disruptive organisational change. These findings affirm and extend Bushe and Marshak's (2015, 2016) dialogic OD studies, Maitlis and Christianson's (2014) sensemaking literature, Hastings and Schwarz's (2022) oscillation model, and Stouten's et al., (2018) meta-analytical study on participatory change practices, indicating that localized framing narratives, transparency, and emotional validation foster meaningful employee understanding, emotional attachment so they can engage meaningfully with the change. A safe, supportive, and creative environment was created whenever framing was clear and adaptable (Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018). Buy-in was also activated when leadership activated deep listening, enabled collective sensemaking, and ensured a psychologically safe environment (Edmondson, 2019; Frazier et al., 2023; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Oreg et al., 2018; Pallesen et al., 2025)

Second, Dialogic mechanisms, such as the weekly champions forums, the leadership walkabouts, localized storytelling, and feedback loops, became the relational infrastructure needed, rather than biased tools, whose success depended on leaders being authentic, inclusive, and relevant in specific contexts. This conclusion highlights how leadership practices and participatory sensemaking frameworks (Balogun et al., 2023; Raelin, 2016) can be successful in one region, but counterproductive in another, depending on the specific context.

Third, contextual factors act as the fundamental multilevel moderators of dialogic effectiveness, operating concurrently at the institutional, relational, and interpretive levels. In regions where there was high power distance, language diversity, and geographical dispersion, these moderators erode leadership intent, aligning with several scholarship theories that organisational change is influenced by power struggles, contextual settings, and subcultural silos (Arregle et al., 2024; Langley et al., 2023; Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Context is, therefore, central to fostering employee buy-in.

Fourth, employee buy-in is best guided by the following: (1) employees' cognitive clarity of the change initiative, (2) emotional feeling of trust and safety, and (3) the employee's active responsibility and proactive support. All this is dependent on the leader's authentic dialogic framing, but can be distorted by hierarchy, cultural norms, and regional exclusion, thereby combining and refining Oreg et al.'s (2018) affect-based models, Frazier et al.'s (2023) psychological safety mediation study, and Dirk and Ferrin's (2022) trust-as-mediator findings.

Fifth, which became the most disruptive, performative dialogue, where leaders solicited the opinions of the employees, yet failed to act on the suggestions, which resulted in a lack of trust, psychological safety, and commitment from the employees. By raising expectations and not delivering violates the relational psychological contract, causing performative dialogue to erode trust, reinforce voice-silence, and leadership-induced sensebreaking (Detert et al., 2020; Colquitt et al., 2013; Ford et al., 2008; Morrison, 2014; Pratt & Crosina, 2016; Rousseau, 1995). This finding argues the positivity of participatory mechanisms in the dialogic OD literature (Bushe & Marshak, 2015; Oswick et al., 2020) and posits that those who participated were in a lower position than non-participants (Passetti et al., 2019)

Together, these insights shift dialogic OD from being a largely prescriptive, tool-oriented model to a culture-centric contingency framework that requires relational authenticity, contextual intelligence, and for leaders to be aware of risks that arise. The findings also demonstrate that for a successful transformational change to occur, the question concentrates less on the “right” dialogic method utilized and more on whether leaders have the willingness to acknowledge the relational and contextual conditions at play without causing harm using those methods, rather than transform the organisation.

## 7.2. Research Contribution

The study makes the following contributions to theory, research, and practice:

### **7.2.1 A contextual grounded mode of dialogic framing and employee buy-in**

The framework presented in Chapter 6 synthesises previously siloed streams, such as dialogic OD, relational leadership, sensemaking, psychological safety, and political discourse, into a cohesive single model. Unlike other models, this study embraces context and positions it as a decisive moderator that influences meaning-making and engagement.

### **7.2.2. Extending Dialogic OD and Sensemaking Theory to African Multinationals**

The study’s grounding and analysis are based on a culturally diverse, high power-distance, geographically African multinational context, and answers calls from various scholars for non-Western theorising (Arregle et al., 2024; Luiz & Barnard, 2022; Nkomo, 2011; Zoogah et al., 2015). Therefore, the study demonstrates the limited knowledge and transferability to African organisational realities.

### **7.2.3 Elevation of change champions as key theoretical actors**

The study highlighted change champions as key players for peer-sensemaking and connectors of different parts of the organisation, especially where there are relational deficits in dispersed contexts. This idea builds on existing theories surrounding boundary-spanning and shared leadership practices in multicultural, resource-constrained environments.

### **7.2.4 A demonstration of the harmful potential of performative dialogue**

Another empirical demonstration of this study is that any inconsistent participation can cause harm, producing a steeper trust decline, psychological safety destruction, and resistance rather than honest communication. Therefore, the findings introduce *iatrogenic dialogue* as a category of organisational harm (Hastings & Schwarz, 2022; Pallesen et al., 2025) and require organisations to re-evaluate the assumed benefits of participation.

Together, these research findings are not mere additions to existing literature; however, they challenge several existing beliefs, especially the assumptions that participatory mechanisms always work, that communication is unbiased, and that seeking employee voice is always beneficial. The results offer both scholars and practitioners with more accurate and contextually based understanding of successfully achieving buy-in during transformational change.

## **7.3. Recommendations for Management and Other Stakeholders**

For practitioners designing transformational change in multinationals, culturally diverse, dispersed organisations, the following recommendations are crucial as they move beyond simplistic solutions into more contextual and relationship-focused frameworks:

First, leaders ought to maintain consistent visibility across all contexts. This includes proactively being present for all regions, especially in dispersed ones. This presence need not only be physical but also relational, involving dialogues. These dialogues are an opportunity for leaders to address any emotional concerns and anxieties related to the change and build emotional trust and psychological safety.

Secondly, leaders need to invest in context-sensitive mechanisms. The current mechanisms have laid a foundation; however, they need to be more inclusive, ensuring all voices contribute, and continuous. Performative dialogue should be avoided to gain credibility and genuine behavioural ownership.

Thirdly, organisations should consider building a multilevel context strategy to address deficiencies at institutional, relational, and interpretive levels. For instance, at the institutional level, leaders need to ensure there is enough access to resources and dedicated training time across all units and regions where the change is taking place. This will compensate for any organisational deficits and create an even ground for all. Then at the relational level, the organisation should empower middle managers as sensemakers and translators of the change rather than keeping this at the senior or executive level. This allows for a wider distribution of sensemakers to share the load of the change. Lastly, at the interpretive level, the leadership should employ culturally sensitive messaging, where they are aware of and inclusive of language and identity-conscious engagement practices in all forms of communication, especially for multinationals. This ensures that the message has contextual reach and will avoid misrepresentation.

Fourth, organisations or leaders should prioritise psychological safety. As the bedrock of a successful buy-in process, psychological safety allows employees to be behaviourally committed. For this to happen, leaders need to model openness and vulnerability and eliminate the fear of negative repercussions when employees ask difficult questions and raise concerns.

Lastly, leaders need to strengthen feedback loops to achieve the goal of behavioural ownership. Leaders need to create visible ways to demonstrate how the employees' feedback is important and assists with decision-making. Doing this enhances emotional trust and translates that into support for the change.

#### 7.4. Limitations of the research

As with any study, several limitations must be acknowledged that future researchers ought to be aware of as a contribution to future research.

- This study is based on a single African multinational organisation going through a digital transformation. While accessing the organisation's cultural, linguistic, and

geographical diversity of the case helped strengthen the generalizability, statistical generalizability to other industries remains limited. Replicating this study across multiple cases is required to test its applicability of the multilevel contextual model

- The study was conducted in the final phases of an 18-month journey, with the system go-live occurring in April of the same calendar year. Although the fresh recollection benefited the study, they were asked to recall pre-go-live events. This reconstruction of past events remains vulnerable to the selected memories of participants and biases, especially since they were aware of the mixed success of the transformation at the time of the data collection (Weick 1995). A longitudinal study, incorporated with real-time diary entries, repeated qualitative interviews, and observational field notes or quantitative surveys, would help capture the evolving perceptions, emotions, and behaviours and reduce contamination.
- Another limitation of this study is the privileged voices of the employees and middle managers, with only limited senior executive participation. This highlighted only one view towards the change, and strategic intentions, resource constraints, and competing priorities of the senior leaders were not systematically explored. Therefore, including a balanced multi-stakeholder design would benefit the study and provide a complete view.
- While the case is based in Namibia and the surrounding regions with diverse cultures, it still does not encapsulate the full African context. Power-distance dynamics differ throughout the continent; therefore, caution is warranted when researching other African contexts.
- The study explored the different dimensions of buy-in (Cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) but did not use any psychometric scales (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Oreg et al., 2018) or any performance indicators. Consequently, though there is evidence of performative dialogue failure, the exact depth is unquantifiable.
- As an insider, the researcher brought deep contextual knowledge, which posed a risk to certain narratives. These narratives posed a threat to the study as complete detachment is not always possible.

## 7.5. 7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

The following recommendations are suggested for future research:

1. This study found that buy-in is a mediated progressive process; therefore, future studies must move beyond the cross-sectional qualitative data to longitudinal studies and examine how buy-in evolves throughout the full change lifecycle.

2. Another recommendation for future researchers would be to compare various multinational organisations (African, European, and Asian) on how cultural and institutional contexts shape dialogic processes.
3. Future researchers could develop and test quantitative measures for the relationships identified in this study's empirical model.
4. Digital tools to shape trust, voice, and dialogic interaction should be explored I geographically dispersed populations.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions

**Title: Framing Change Dialogically: Exploring the Impact of Dialogic Framing on Employee Buy-In .**

#### Interview Format

- **Duration:** Approximately 60 minutes per interview.
- **Method:** In-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in-person or virtually (e.g., Teams or Zoom) with an audio recording. Before recording, the researcher will obtain participant consent.
- **Ethical Considerations:** The researcher will obtain written consent to ensure anonymity, and all data will be stored securely. Participants have the right to withdraw at any given time as the interviews are voluntary.

#### Interview Structure

The interview guide is structured into sections that address the research objectives and the constructs (dialogical framing and buy-in). The questions are open-ended to match the interpretivist approach, with probing questions highlighted to encourage the interviewee to elaborate.

#### Administration

**Purpose:** *Build rapport, explain the study, and set the tone.*

- Thank you for participating in this study. I'm exploring how leaders communicate organisational change, particularly in an organisation with past challenges, and how employees respond in terms of trust and support.
- Explain there are no right or wrong answers.
- Explain that your interest lies in their personal experiences and perspectives.
- Explain that the interview will take about 45-60 minutes, and that their responses will be anonymized to protect their privacy.
- Ask if they have any questions before you begin.

#### Introduction Script

"Thank you for participating. This study explores how leadership communication influences employee support for organizational change. Your responses are anonymous and will help improve change management practices. Do you have questions before we begin?"

**Section 1: Background and Context (5–10 minutes)**

1. Can you describe your role in the organization and how long you've been involved in the current change initiative (e.g., digital transformation or restructuring)?
  - Probe: How has the change affected your daily work or team dynamics?
2. What is your overall perception of the change initiative so far?
  - Probe: What aspects of the change do you find most challenging or beneficial?

**Section 2: Experiences with Leadership Communication (10–15 minutes)**

3. How has leadership communicated the purpose and goals of this change to you and your team?
  - Probe: Can you share examples of messages, meetings, or interactions that stood out? Were they inclusive or participatory?
4. Have leaders used approaches like workshops, storytelling, or open forums to discuss the change?
  - Probe: How did these make you feel about the change? Did they help you understand (cognitive) or feel motivated (emotional) to support it?
5. In what ways has leadership encouraged employee input or collaboration during the change?
  - Probe: How effective were these in building your commitment or willingness to participate (behavioral support)?

**Section 3: Impact on Employee Buy-In (10–15 minutes)**

6. To what extent do you understand and agree with the rationale for this change (cognitive acceptance)?
  - Probe: How has leadership communication, such as storytelling or forums, influenced your understanding?
7. How motivated or emotionally aligned do you feel with the change (emotional commitment)?
  - Probe: What specific communication strategies (e.g., transparent narratives, empathetic discussions) contributed to or hindered this?
8. How actively do you participate in or support the change (behavioral support)?
  - Probe: Have mechanisms like feedback channels or inclusive workshops encouraged your involvement?

**Section 4: Contextual Factors (5–10 minutes)**

9. How does the organization's hierarchy affect leadership communication and employee participation?

- Probe: Have power dynamics limited open dialogue? How could anonymous feedback improve this?

10. In what ways does cultural diversity in your team or organization influence how change is communicated and received?

- Probe: Have culturally sensitive approaches (e.g., multilingual forums) enhanced or challenged buy-in?

11. How does the type of change (e.g., digital vs. structural) impact the effectiveness of leadership communication?

- Probe: What adaptations, like tailored storytelling, would better suit this change?

**Section 5: Closing and Reflection (5 minutes)**

These questions allow for additional insights and wrap up.

12. Is there anything else about leadership communication or the change initiative you'd like to share?

- Probe: How could communication be improved to better foster buy-in?

13. What recommendations do you have for leaders to enhance employee support for this change?

- Probe: Focus on mechanisms like storytelling or forums.

**Closing:** "Thank you for sharing your insights. Your input is valuable. Responses are anonymous and securely stored. May I follow up if needed?"

## Appendix 2: Informed Consent Letter

### Informed consent letter

I am conducting research on *Framing Change Dialogically: Exploring the Impact of Dialogic Framing on Employee Buy-In in an Organisation*. Our interview is expected to last 1 hour and will help us understand *how leadership's dialogic framing of a transformative change impacts employee buy-in in an organisation*. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- the interview to be recorded;
- the recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- the data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- all data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Zamanqwe Mazibuko    Research supervisor name: Dr Maxine Jaffit

Email: 04920890@mygibs.co.za    Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: 065 804 4912/083 215 6149    Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: ZSMazIBUKO \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Approval

### GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM 2025/26

#### G. APPROVALS FOR/OF THIS APPLICATION

When the applicant is a student of GIBS, the applicant must please ensure that the supervisor and co-supervisor (where relevant) has signed the form before submission

#### **STUDENT RESEARCHER/APPLICANT:**

29. I affirm that all relevant information has been provided in this form and its attachments and that all statements made are correct.

Student Researcher's Name in capital letters: ZAMANGWE MAZIBUKO

Date: 10 Jul 2025

Supervisor Name in capital letters: MAXINE JAFFIT

Date: 13 Jul 2025

Co-supervisor Name in capital letters:

Date: 10 Jul 2025

**Note:** GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all of the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

#### **Decision:**

Approved

#### **REC comments:**

Date: 28 Jul 2025

## Appendix 4: Codes, Categories and Themes

Category	Theme	Open Codes
1.1 Visibility & Proximity	1. Leadership Communication & Engagement	Leadership walkabouts encouraged openness; Manager walkabouts for monitoring; Face-to-face preferred over Teams; High visibility is key; Corridor discussions reveal real issues; Leadership presence on site appreciated; Leaders visible during crisis; Leaders visiting sites improved trust; Weekly leadership visits; Daily check-ins by leaders; Increased visibility after complaints; Local leadership bridging gaps; Leadership now more patient; Leadership follow-up weekly; Presence improved morale; Leadership check-ins informal; Leaders present early in training; Visible post-go-live; Regional visits improved trust
Category	Theme	Open Codes
1.2 Clarity & Coherence	1. Leadership Communication & Engagement	Need plain language; Messages too technical; Need translation into simple terms; Emails too long; Simplified posters improved reach; Storytelling helped; Messaging clearer over time; Inconsistent messages across groups; Technical jargon confusing; Need for storytelling; Early communication unclear; Some didn't understand system purpose; Clear communication strengthened buy-in; Communication lacked step-by-step guidance; Need relevant examples; Technical language barriers; Improved after simplification; Regional message inconsistencies
Category	Theme	Open Codes

Category	Theme	Open Codes
1.3 Transparency & Timing	1. Leadership Communication & Engagement	Late consultations; Late engagement of employees; Mistakes admitted improved trust; Need early bottom-up feedback; Delayed communication to frontline; Info given only to managers; Overly positive narrative; Transparency improved later; Need honesty and authenticity; Communication reactive not proactive; Feeling rushed due to late comms; Leaders transparent later; Need ongoing updates; Early communication built comfort; Lack of transparency reduced trust; Disconnect between narrative & reality; Leadership corrected issues after feedback
Category	Theme	Open Codes
2.1 Peer-Led Learning	2. Employee Support & Empowerment	Younger employees helping older staff; Peer mentoring across ages; WhatsApp support groups; Buddy system learning; Informal peer networks; Team sharing tips; Peer translation; Peer pressure aiding adoption; Collaborative learning spaces; Coaching absent staff; Intergenerational learning; Creating own user guides; Older learning from younger; Peer success stories motivating
Category	Theme	Open Codes
2.2 Training Design & Duration	2. Employee Support & Empowerment	Training rushed; Practical challenges not addressed; Training lacked context; Too technical for many; Online ineffective; Need practical sessions; Mismatched training material; In-person preferred; Mixed ability slowed progress; Need refresher training; Too generic training; Hands-on preferred; Tailored training by role; Need training before rollout; Best learning via real examples; Localized material improved learning

<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Open Codes</b>
Category	Theme	Open Codes
2.3 Post-Go-Live Support	2. Employee Support & Empowerment	Support slow initially; Helpdesk overwhelmed; Need follow-up after training; Leadership responsiveness inconsistent; Communication improved post-go-live; System updates improved experience; Supervisor coaching; Empowered to log tickets; Escalation channels used; Support lacking after go-live; People left behind; Leaders acted on feedback quickly; Weekly post-go-live sessions; Self-directed learning emerged; Weekly technical updates; System improved after fixes; Refresher support needed
Category	Theme	Open Codes
3.1 Substantive Inclusion	3. Feedback, Inclusion & Employee Voice	No involvement in design phase; Need earlier involvement; Employees want early inclusion next time; Bottom-up input encouraged; Early inclusion faded later; Need direct access to project team; Internal checklists created; Suggestions implemented; Desire for cross-functional planning; Need engage frontline early; Late engagement reduced buy-in; Participatory planning increased trust; Inclusion improved ownership
Category	Theme	Open Codes
3.2 Symbolic vs. Authentic Voice	3. Feedback, Inclusion & Employee Voice	Feedback forms unread; Complaints ignored; Leaders listened only after escalation; Employees felt unheard; Workshops allowed questions but no answers; Inconsistent champions; Tokenistic involvement; Hierarchy blocked escalation; Employees feared judgment; Leadership defensive early; Perception change “done to us”; Feedback platforms distrusted

<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Open Codes</b>
Category	Theme	Open Codes
3.3 Voice Efficacy & Ownership	3. Feedback, Inclusion & Employee Voice	Communication became two-way; Employees challenge decisions; Leadership encouraged openness; Raise issues without fear; Employees confident to report issues; Recognition improved morale; Ownership increased as feedback acted on; Voice empowered employees; Pride and confidence increased; Employees part of solution; Proactive seeking of updates; Iterative feedback loops strengthening voice
Category	Theme	Open Codes
4.1 Middle-Manager Role	4. Leadership, Hierarchy & Trust	Supervisors translating messages; Managers overwhelmed; Supervisors filtering info; Supervisors coaching; Supervisors as trust builders; Emotional support from supervisors; Motivating teams; Supervisors under pressure; Supervisor confusion; Breakdown at supervisory level; Supervisors created psychological safety; Supervisors mediated between levels
Category	Theme	Open Codes
4.2 Relational Trust & Credibility	4. Leadership, Hierarchy & Trust	Trust improved after fixes; Empathy reduced resistance; Honesty built trust; Fear of reprisal reduced openness; Trust declined from inconsistency; Psychological safety grew; Vulnerability increased credibility; Transparency restored trust; Older employees reassured by leaders; Authenticity increased trust; Emotional support strengthened loyalty; Trust built by consistent follow-up
Category	Theme	Open Codes

Category	Theme	Open Codes
5.1 Localisation & Adaptation	5. Cross-Regional & Local Contexts	Materials adapted regionally; Regional champions for localised content; Different readiness levels; Examples rewritten for countries; Local realities missing in HQ communication; Need local process maps; Namibia lessons transferable; Local execs unsure how to help; Cross-border gaps; Localization due to linguistic differences
Category	Theme	Open Codes
5.2 Cultural & Regional Sensitivity	5. Cross-Regional & Local Contexts	Cultural differences in feedback; Younger using humor to cope; Older staff needed reassurance; Fear linked to age; Regional differences in adoption; Intercultural translation helpful; Language barriers slowed comprehension; Cultural nuances added later; Digital literacy varied; Local norms shaped communication