

Employee Management During Times of Organizational Change: Strategies for Overcoming Resistance and Work Stress

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Abstract

This study investigates effective strategies for managing employee resistance and work-related stress during organizational change. The research addresses key challenges organizations face in managing change by exploring leadership, communication, employee wellness programs, and adaptive HR practices. This research adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize existing studies on employee management during organizational change. The study analyzes empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks to identify strategies that mitigate resistance and stress in organizational transitions. The study highlights the critical role of transformational leadership, transparent communication, and employee wellness programs in reducing resistance and managing work-related stress. It identifies how clear communication and inclusive leadership contribute to higher employee engagement and adaptability. The research also underscores the importance of HR practices, such as agile performance management and HR analytics, in supporting smooth transitions. The findings provide actionable recommendations for organizations to implement comprehensive strategies prioritizing employee well-being and engagement during change. Managers are encouraged to adopt transformational leadership, improve communication, and integrate wellness programs to reduce resistance and stress. Future research could further explore the impact of these strategies in various industries and the potential role of emerging technologies.

Keywords: *Employee resistance, work-related stress, transformational leadership, organizational change, employee engagement.*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is an unavoidable and integral aspect of modern business dynamics, necessitated by various external and internal pressures such as rapid technological advancements, globalization, shifting economic conditions, regulatory changes, and evolving consumer preferences. Organizations that fail to adapt to these transformations risk losing their competitive edge, stagnating, or facing long-term decline (Struckell et al., 2022). Successfully navigating change has become a defining characteristic of resilient and sustainable organizations. While

transformation efforts are often initiated to enhance efficiency, drive innovation, and improve financial performance, the process is complex and challenging (Nambisan et al., 2019). Among these challenges, the management of employees during periods of change plays a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of transformation initiatives. Employees are the foundation of any organization, and their willingness or reluctance to embrace change can significantly influence the overall effectiveness of strategic shifts. While some employees may perceive change as an opportunity for growth and professional development, others may experience uncertainty, skepticism, and resistance (Boon et al., 2021). Introducing new systems, restructured workflows, or leadership transitions can disrupt established routines, create ambiguities in roles and responsibilities, and generate apprehensions about job security. Consequently, organizational change must not be viewed solely as a structural or strategic process but as a profoundly human-centered transformation that requires effective leadership, communication, and employee engagement strategies. A failure to manage the human dimension of change can lead to decreased morale, increased turnover, and disruptions in productivity, ultimately undermining the intended benefits of transformation efforts.

Despite its significance, employee management during organizational change is frequently impeded by two significant challenges: resistance to change and work-related stress. Resistance arises when employees perceive change as a threat rather than an opportunity, leading to defensive behaviors such as reduced cooperation, disengagement, or outright opposition to new policies and procedures (Nunoo-Mensah & Johnning, 2024). Psychological factors often contribute to this resistance, including uncertainty about future job roles, fear of redundancy, lack of confidence in leadership, and concerns over workload increases. Resistance may manifest subtly, such as decreased motivation and low participation in training programs, or more overtly through workplace conflicts and vocal opposition to management directives (Cieslak & Valor, 2025). Simultaneously, organizational change often introduces heightened levels of stress, which can negatively impact employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Employees experiencing prolonged or excessive stress are likelier to exhibit burnout, absenteeism, and diminished commitment to organizational goals (Salama et al., 2022). Given the critical role of employees in ensuring the success of change initiatives, addressing these challenges requires a structured and evidence-based approach. Although extensive research has explored various change management frameworks, organizations face difficulties minimizing resistance and mitigating employee stress. This persistent gap in practical application underscores the need for further academic inquiry into effective strategies for facilitating smoother transitions. By synthesizing existing research and examining best practices, a more comprehensive understanding can be developed of fostering employee adaptability, resilience, and engagement during organizational change.

Effective employee management during organizational change necessitates structured strategies to mitigate resistance and work-related stress. Implementing a three-phase change management model has been shown to reduce resistance and enhance employee engagement (Sufriyadi & Perkasa, 2024). Understanding demographic characteristics and their impact on stress perception can facilitate targeted interventions that improve employee well-being, particularly in the public sector (Kolundzic, 2024). Additionally, incorporating Stoic principles from Epictetan

philosophy into change management strategies has reshaped perceptions and improved communication between change agents and employees, thereby reducing resistance (Georgiadis & Sarigiannidis, 2025). Organizational change, particularly during economic downturns, heightens job-related stress and employee resistance (Tu & Zou, 2024). To mitigate these challenges, managers must prioritize open communication, provide sufficient training, and ensure adequate transition periods. These approaches have decreased stress levels and improved productivity (Taegar et al., 2024). Clear communication and reinforcing organizational identification are key to fostering employee commitment (Tu & Zou, 2024). Additionally, motivation plays a crucial role in minimizing stress and enhancing employee engagement (Taegar et al., 2024). Economic crises amplify resistance to change, making effective management strategies essential. Critical tools include transparent communication, strengthened organizational identity, and agile performance management systems (Tu & Zou, 2024). Proactive talent development and integrating technology into HR practices enhance workforce adaptability (Widjaja, 2023). Resistance is influenced by job insecurity, emotional pressures, and identity fragmentation (Küçükatalay et al., 2023). Organizations must implement training programs and ensure employee participation to facilitate smoother transitions (Küçükatalay et al., 2023). Aligning employee management strategies with organizational objectives is essential for navigating transformation successfully (Widjaja, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on employee management during organizational change, several gaps remain in both empirical and theoretical dimensions. Existing studies have established the importance of structured change management models, transparent communication, and employee engagement strategies in mitigating resistance and work-related stress (Sufriyadi & Perkasa, 2025; Tu & Zou, 2024). However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these strategies interact in different organizational contexts, particularly in industries with distinct workforce dynamics or hierarchical structures. While studies have highlighted the role of leadership and communication, the effectiveness of specific leadership styles in reducing resistance and fostering adaptability remains underexplored. Additionally, while proactive talent development and integrating technology into HR practices have been recognized as crucial for workforce adaptability (Widjaja, 2023), further research is needed to assess how these interventions affect employees across different job functions and organizational levels. While psychological frameworks such as Epictetan Stoicism have been suggested as an alternative approach to managing resistance (Georgiadis & Sarigiannidis, 2025), empirical validation of this approach in real-world corporate settings remains scarce. Similarly, studies have focused on stress perception from a demographic perspective (Kolundzic, 2025). However, there is a lack of research on how stress levels vary across organizational change phases and how targeted interventions can be tailored accordingly. Additionally, while agile performance management and strong organizational identification have been recommended for mitigating resistance (Tu & Zou, 2024), there is insufficient empirical data on how these strategies influence long-term employee retention and organizational commitment. Addressing these research gaps is essential to developing a more comprehensive framework for managing employees during organizational transformation.

This study aims to bridge the existing research gaps by systematically reviewing and synthesizing current literature on employee management strategies during organizational change. While prior studies have explored individual aspects of resistance and work-related stress, limited research has examined their interconnectedness within a structured framework. Moreover, while leadership, communication, and employee engagement have been identified as crucial elements in mitigating resistance, empirical evidence on how these factors interact across different organizational contexts remains insufficient. This study contributes to the field by integrating existing theoretical models and evaluating their practical applications to determine which strategies are most effective in fostering employee adaptability during transitional periods. Furthermore, given the increasing complexity of workplace dynamics due to technological advancements and shifting workforce expectations, this study aims to assess how contemporary HR practices, including agile performance management and proactive talent development, can be leveraged to enhance employee resilience. To address these gaps, this research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to comprehensively understand how organizations can effectively manage employee resistance and stress during times of change. The following research questions guide the study: (1) What are the most effective strategies for mitigating employee resistance during organizational change? (2) How can organizations reduce work-related stress to improve adaptability and well-being? (3) How does communication ensure a smooth transition during organizational change? By answering these questions, this research offers theoretical insights and practical recommendations that can aid organizations in implementing more effective change management strategies.

Lewin's Change Model

Lewin (1947), a prominent social psychologist and a pioneer in organizational change theory, introduced Lewin's Change Model as a structured framework for understanding and managing organizational transformation. This model is rooted in force field analysis, which explains that change occurs due to the interaction between driving and restraining forces within a social system (Burnes, 2004). Unlike change theories focusing solely on structural adjustments, Lewin emphasized the psychological aspects of transformation, arguing that successful change requires addressing organizational structures and employee mindsets (Cummings et al., 2016). His model, divided into three key stages – Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze – remains one of the most widely applied frameworks in modern change management (Hussain et al., 2018). Compared to Kotter's 8-Step Change Model, which provides a more detailed procedural approach, Lewin's model is appreciated for its simplicity and adaptability across industries (Carreño, 2024). The Unfreeze phase highlights the need to prepare employees psychologically, ensuring they understand the necessity of change before implementation begins (Shirey, 2013). Change, the second phase, involves active implementation, requiring effective leadership and employee participation to reduce resistance (Hussain et al., 2018). Finally, the Refreeze phase solidifies changes in organizational culture, preventing regression to previous practices. Despite its continued relevance, scholars argue that modern business environments require more agile change models, integrating iterative feedback and continuous adaptation. However, the structured nature of Lewin's model still provides a foundational approach for organizations navigating transformation.

The Unfreeze stage in Lewin's Change Model is the foundation for successful organizational transformation by psychologically and structurally preparing employees before implementing changes. Organizations must first identify barriers to change and develop strategies to mitigate employee resistance, often driven by uncertainty and fear of job loss (Kotter et al., 2025). Transparent communication plays a critical role in this phase, ensuring that employees understand the necessity of change, its expected impact, and long-term benefits for both the organization and individuals (Li et al., 2021). When employees lack clear information, resistance increases, often manifesting in skepticism and disengagement. Therefore, a participative leadership approach that involves employees in discussions and decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and reduces resistance. Early training programs and open discussion sessions can provide reassurance, addressing emotional concerns that may arise during this preparatory stage. As the organization transitions to the Change phase, new policies, structural adjustments, and technological transformations are implemented. This stage often brings heightened stress and uncertainty, requiring strong transformational leadership to guide employees and reinforce motivation (Bass, 1996). Providing robust support systems, such as ongoing training and mentorship, helps employees adapt while minimizing resistance. However, change without alignment with organizational culture may lead to internal conflict, further delaying adaptation (Gibbons, 2015). Finally, the Refreeze phase ensures that changes are institutionalized and reinforced within the organizational culture. Employees risk reverting to old behaviors without reinforcement, undermining the transformation process. Periodic performance evaluations, continuous feedback, and long-term engagement programs are essential to maintaining organizational stability post-change.

Employee Management in the Context of Organizational Change

Employee management plays a fundamental role in ensuring organizational stability and workforce productivity, particularly during periods of transformation (Widjaja, 2023). As organizations undergo structural adjustments, technology adoption, or strategic realignment, employees often experience uncertainty regarding their roles and job security (Odulaja et al., 2023). This uncertainty can lead to resistance, disengagement, and decreased commitment if not managed effectively. Leadership strategies emphasizing adaptability, transparent communication, and proactive human resource policies are essential in preparing employees for change. However, a significant challenge in managing employees during transitions is resistance to change, which can manifest as active opposition, such as open defiance or reduced cooperation, and passive behaviors, like declining productivity and workplace disengagement (Cieslak & Valor, 2025). From a psychological perspective, employees tend to resist change due to loss aversion, where the fear of losing familiarity and stability outweighs the potential benefits (Oreg & Berson, 2015). Job insecurity theory highlights that employees facing uncertainty about their future roles often exhibit stress, anxiety, and reduced motivation, further complicating the transition process (Bouckennooghe et al., 2015). If left unaddressed, resistance can weaken organizational culture, reduce operational efficiency, and erode employee trust in leadership. Therefore, implementing comprehensive strategies, such as participative leadership, structured training programs, and performance-based incentives, can mitigate resistance and facilitate smoother transitions. While existing

models provide insights into change management, further research is needed to develop adaptive frameworks that address evolving workforce dynamics and the psychological complexities associated with organizational change.

Effective change management strategies are crucial in minimizing employee resistance and fostering a smooth transition during organizational transformation. One of the most significant factors in reducing resistance is clear and transparent communication, which ensures that employees understand the reasons behind the change and its benefits at both the organizational and individual levels. Oreg & Berson (2015) showed that poor communication often fuels uncertainty and opposition, as employees feel disconnected from decision-making. Organizations that implement open dialogue mechanisms and allow employees to express concerns and provide feedback tend to experience higher levels of change acceptance. Moreover, participative leadership, where employees are involved in shaping the change process, has been found to reduce resistance and enhance commitment to new organizational directions (Odoardi et al., 2019). Beyond communication and leadership, training and skill development programs are essential for equipping employees with the necessary competencies to adapt to new work environments. Rehman et al. (2021) indicate that employees who lack confidence in their ability to adjust to changes often exhibit higher levels of resistance and lower engagement. Organizations that integrate incentive and reward systems—such as performance-based recognition or career advancement opportunities—can accelerate change adoption by reinforcing positive behaviors. Emotional factors also influence resistance, with research highlighting that employees' perceptions of self-efficacy and control over change-related processes significantly impact their willingness to adapt (Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, 2016). As organizations navigate digital transformation and workforce shifts, strategic communication, leadership, and employee development remain essential in mitigating resistance and sustaining long-term organizational success.

Employee Resistance

Employee resistance to organizational change remains one of the most significant challenges in change management, often manifesting as a psychological and behavioral response to perceived threats. Resistance can be categorized into active resistance, including vocal opposition, protests, and even sabotage, and passive resistance, which is more subtle, such as decreased productivity, disengagement, and increased absenteeism (Bouckennooghe et al., 2015). Organizational structure and culture significantly influence resistance, with hierarchical organizations experiencing more opposition than flexible, innovation-driven workplaces where employee participation in decision-making is encouraged (Fietz et al., 2021). The primary causes of employee resistance stem from economic, psychological, and structural factors. Job insecurity remains a leading factor, as employees fear that organizational changes may result in job loss or undesirable role adjustments, triggering stress and opposition (Lee et al., 2018). A lack of trust in management exacerbates resistance, especially when change is imposed without clear communication or employee involvement in decision-making. Employees are more likely to oppose change if they lack the necessary skills to adapt, reinforcing anxiety and reluctance to embrace new systems. From a psychological standpoint, loss aversion theory explains why employees resist change, as they tend to fear

losing stability more than they anticipate the benefits of transformation. Furthermore, job insecurity theory highlights how prolonged uncertainty fosters stress, further amplifying resistance (DeGhetto et al., 2017). Addressing these factors requires strategic interventions, including transparent communication, leadership engagement, and structured training programs to enhance adaptability.

Employee resistance to organizational change remains a significant challenge that can significantly impact individual performance and overall organizational effectiveness. One of the primary consequences of resistance is a decline in productivity, as employees who oppose change often exhibit reduced commitment to their tasks, leading to lower efficiency and work quality (Afsar & Shahjehan, 2018). Resistance can contribute to the deterioration of organizational culture, as conflicts between employees who support and oppose change create workplace tension and hinder collaboration (Ford et al., 2008). A resistant workforce is more likely to disengage from the organization, increasing employee turnover and absenteeism as workers seek alternative opportunities in more stable environments (Rastogi et al., 2018). Such disruptions result in higher recruitment and training costs and weaken overall workforce morale, further exacerbating resistance-related challenges. Organizations must implement effective change management strategies to mitigate these adverse effects and prioritize transparent communication and leadership engagement. When involved in decision-making, employees develop a greater sense of ownership over change initiatives, reducing resistance (Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021). Transformational leadership also plays a crucial role in fostering commitment, as leaders who demonstrate empathy and provide clear guidance can help employees navigate uncertainty. Furthermore, structured training and development programs can equip employees with the necessary skills to adapt to new systems, mitigating anxiety related to technological or procedural shifts. Incentive programs that reward employees for proactive participation in change initiatives reinforce a culture of adaptability.

Work Stress

Work stress is among employees' most significant challenges, particularly during organizational change. It arises when workplace demands exceed an individual's capacity to manage them effectively, often leading to psychological and physiological strain (Vakola et al., 2023). While in stable organizational environments, employees benefit from well-defined roles and structured routines, significant transformations such as restructuring, digitalization, and mergers introduce uncertainty and increase stress levels (Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023). Employees frequently experience heightened job insecurity as they fear job redundancy or the need to acquire new skills to stay relevant in a changing workforce (Lee et al., 2018). Unclear role expectations and communication gaps exacerbate stress as employees struggle to understand shifting responsibilities and expectations. When leadership fails to provide clear guidance, speculation and anxiety spread among employees, leading to disengagement and reduced morale. While improving efficiency, technological advancements and automation often create fear among employees who feel unprepared for new systems, ultimately triggering resistance and stress. If left unaddressed, these stressors affect individual well-being and disrupt workplace culture, collaboration, and productivity. Organizations must implement proactive stress management strategies to mitigate these effects, including leadership support,

skill development programs, and open communication channels to foster employee confidence in navigating change (Ahmadi, 2024). By adopting such approaches, companies can reduce stress-induced resistance and enhance workforce resilience during transitional periods.

Work stress, particularly during organizational change, is a significant concern that can lead to various adverse effects on individual and organizational levels. Stress arises when employees perceive that the demands of their work exceed their ability to cope effectively. In stable organizational environments, employees typically experience more control over their roles and responsibilities, resulting in lower stress levels. However, during times of change, such as restructuring, digitalization, or shifts in corporate culture, employees often face increased workloads, role ambiguity, and job insecurity, which elevate stress levels (Hassard & Morris, 2020). Employees may also struggle with adapting to new technologies and systems, especially when their skills are perceived as insufficient to meet new demands (Kubiczek, 2024). The psychological impact of organizational change is further compounded by poor communication and lack of clarity from management, which often leaves employees uncertain about their future roles and job security (Fløvik et al., 2019). This uncertainty can trigger feelings of anxiety, fear of failure, and loss of control, which are key contributors to stress. Inadequate leadership support during these transitions can lead to employee disengagement and burnout, significantly hindering productivity (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Therefore, addressing these stressors requires effective stress management strategies, such as clear communication, supportive leadership, and training programs aimed at skill enhancement and stress reduction, helping employees navigate the challenges posed by organizational change. By fostering a supportive environment, organizations can alleviate the negative impact of stress and improve overall employee well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study utilizes a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine and synthesize existing research on employee management during organizational change, specifically focusing on stress and resistance to change. The SLR approach allows for a comprehensive and systematic literature review to identify trends, gaps, and insights into how organizational change impacts employee stress levels and the strategies used to mitigate these effects. This appropriate design provides a structured method to aggregate findings from diverse studies and conclude about best practices for managing employee stress and resistance during organizational transitions.

Sample Population or Subject of Research

The sample population for this research consists of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published in reputable academic databases (such as Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, and Emerald) between 2015 and 2025. These sources were selected based on their relevance to employee stress, organizational change, and management strategies. The inclusion criteria for the review are articles that focus on stress as a consequence of organizational change, resistance to change, and interventions used to manage these issues within

organizations. Studies from various industries and geographic locations were selected to provide a broad perspective.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Data for this review was collected through a systematic search of academic databases using specific keywords such as “employee stress,” “organizational change,” “resistance to change,” and “stress management strategies.” The selection of studies was guided by inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on studies that provide empirical data or theoretical discussions related to the research questions. No primary data collection was conducted as this is a secondary research method based on existing literature.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis for this systematic review involves thematic synthesis and content analysis. Thematic synthesis is used to identify recurring themes, patterns, and strategies for managing employee stress and resistance to change. Content analysis will also be employed to categorize findings across studies and assess the effectiveness of various interventions. The analysis aims to provide insights into the most common challenges organizations face during transitions and the strategies that have been most effective in addressing employee stress and resistance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study indicate that one of the most effective strategies for reducing employee resistance during organizational change is the implementation of transformational leadership. As Afsar and Shahjehan (2018) noted, transformational leaders inspire, motivate, and encourage employees to embrace change by clearly communicating the vision and providing emotional support throughout the transition. These leaders foster a sense of trust, respect, and commitment, which reduces resistance and increases employee buy-in. Furthermore, transparent communication is crucial in reducing resistance. Ahmadi (2024) points out that employees are more likely to accept and engage with the transformation when they understand the reasons behind the changes and the long-term benefits. Participating in decision-making is also a key strategy to involve employees in the change process, which has been shown to decrease resistance by making employees feel valued and integral to the transition. This strategy of participatory decision-making is essential for reducing uncertainty, which is often a major driver of resistance. The findings underscore the importance of strong leadership and communication in facilitating organizational change, with leaders serving as role models and communicators who help guide employees through the change process. Additionally, emphasizing the importance of organizational identity and ensuring that employees feel connected to the organization's core values and goals is another key aspect of reducing resistance. This holistic approach can lead to more successful and smoother transitions as it tackles the emotional and cognitive aspects of resistance.

The findings of this study highlight the critical role that organizations play in addressing work-related stress, especially during periods of significant organizational change. According to Kolundzic (2024), stress often arises when employees perceive job demands to exceed their capacity to cope, usually

exacerbated during transition periods. Increased workloads, role ambiguity, and a lack of clarity about the direction of the change are significant stressors for employees. Acknowledging these factors, organizations must implement comprehensive stress management strategies to reduce the negative impact on employee well-being. Research by Ahmadi (2024) suggests that organizations can mitigate stress by providing flexible working arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours, which allow employees to balance their professional and personal responsibilities better. Wellness programs that focus on stress management techniques, such as mindfulness training and access to counseling services, play a vital role in maintaining employee mental health. Another crucial strategy is offering training programs that help employees develop skills to adapt to new technologies or work systems. These initiatives help build employee resilience and ensure they feel competent, reducing uncertainty and job insecurity stress. By adopting these strategies, organizations can improve employee well-being and foster a more productive and engaged workforce, which is essential for navigating periods of change effectively.

Effective communication is one of the most critical components in ensuring a smooth transition during organizational change. Research by Li et al. (2021) emphasizes that transparent communication helps employees understand the reasons behind the change, the goals of the transformation, and how these changes will impact their roles. Clear communication reduces uncertainty, often a significant source of stress for employees, and allows them to prepare for the transition mentally. According to DeGhetto et al. (2017), when employees are well-informed about the organizational changes and their role in the process, they are more likely to embrace the transformation positively. Two-way communication is particularly valuable, encouraging employees to share their concerns, provide feedback, and participate in the change process. This fosters a sense of inclusion, reducing resistance and promoting employee engagement. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of ongoing communication throughout the change process, as this continuous dialogue ensures that employees remain informed and supported. Effective communication helps explain the change, manage employee expectations, and address concerns. As Kolundzic (2024) identified, regular updates, feedback loops, and employee opportunities to ask questions are essential for creating a supportive environment. In addition to facilitating understanding, communication also helps reinforce organizational values, ensuring that employees feel connected to the organization's larger goals, which is vital during times of transition.

The findings reveal that leadership is pivotal in reducing employee resistance and stress during organizational change. As highlighted by Afsar and Shahjehan (2018), transformational leadership is particularly effective in managing employee resistance, as it focuses on motivating employees to embrace change through inspiration, vision, and emotional support. Effective leaders build trust with their employees, which is essential in times of uncertainty. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, actively listen to employee concerns, and provide reassurance about the future are more successful in reducing anxiety and stress related to change. Moreover, managerial involvement during transition is key to maintaining organizational stability. Burnes (2004) stresses that managers who engage with employees, provide clear guidance, and offer practical solutions to challenges help ensure a smooth adaptation to change. This approach alleviates resistance and fosters

a sense of security and belonging, which is essential for promoting employee engagement. As Küçükatalay et al. (2023) identified, the leadership style also influences the level of stress experienced by employees. For instance, a supportive leadership approach that values open communication, offers resources for adaptation, and encourages collaboration is particularly effective in reducing stress levels. In contrast, a directive leadership style may exacerbate stress by adding to the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the change process. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of leadership in facilitating employee adaptation by building trust, providing support, and offering a clear vision.

This study also explores how modern HR practices can enhance employee resilience during organizational change. Organizations must adopt adaptive HR practices to support employees as the workplace becomes increasingly influenced by digital transformation, agile performance management, and evolving workforce expectations. According to Nambisan et al. (2019), agile HR enables organizations to respond rapidly to changes by setting flexible goals, fostering continuous feedback, and ensuring employees remain aligned with the organization's evolving needs. These practices are essential for helping employees adjust to new work processes, roles, and technologies that may be introduced during organizational change. Furthermore, proactive talent development ensures that employees have the necessary skills to navigate these changes. Research by Afsar and Shahjehan (2018) highlights that talent development initiatives, including training programs on new technologies and leadership development, can significantly reduce resistance by increasing employee confidence and competence. HR analytics allows organizations to track employee performance, identify potential stressors, and offer targeted support to employees struggling with the changes. By implementing these modern HR practices, organizations can ensure that employees are better prepared for change demands and are more resilient in facing challenges. These practices help manage resistance and improve employee engagement and organizational performance during periods of transformation.

The study evaluates the effectiveness of theoretical models such as Lewin's Change Model and Kotter's 8-Step Process in managing resistance and stress during organizational change. The findings suggest that while Lewin's Change Model provides a solid foundation for understanding the stages of change, adaptations are required to be applicable in today's fast-paced, digital-driven business environment. As Cummings et al. (2016) point out, the Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze process is still relevant but may need to be adjusted to accommodate continuous change rather than seeing change as a discrete event. Additionally, the 8-Step Process introduced by Kotter (Carreño, 2024) remains valuable for guiding organizations through large-scale transformations. This model emphasizes creating urgency, building coalitions, and achieving short-term wins, effectively driving change. However, the study indicates that both models, when applied in isolation, may overlook the complexity of modern change initiatives, where change is often incremental and ongoing. The study suggests that integrating these models with modern HR practices, such as agile management and data analytics, can provide a more dynamic and flexible approach to managing resistance and stress during organizational change. The study concludes that while Lewin's and Kotter's models provide essential frameworks, organizations must adapt them to modern challenges to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness in managing change.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the most effective strategies for reducing employee resistance during organizational change are a combination of transformational leadership, transparent communication, and employee involvement in decision-making processes. The research highlights the crucial role of leadership in building employee confidence and reducing uncertainty during times of change. Transformational leaders who inspire and provide clear direction are more successful in addressing the concerns and fears that often arise among employees. The study also found that employees actively involved in the change process, whether through feedback forums or group discussions, showed a more substantial commitment to the organizational goals and were more likely to embrace the implemented changes. When employees feel a sense of ownership and participation in decision-making, the resistance to change significantly decreases. These findings underscore the importance of leadership in managing resistance, not only by providing guidance but also by fostering a sense of shared purpose and ownership among employees. The effectiveness of this strategy is particularly evident in how employees who feel informed and included in the process tend to become advocates for the changes rather than resisters. Therefore, organizations that utilize a transformational leadership approach and involve employees in the change process are likelier to achieve a smoother transition and greater buy-in from their workforce.

The study also found that organizations effectively reduce work-related stress caused by organizational change by offering comprehensive physical and psychological support programs. One of the key findings was the impact of flexible work policies, such as remote working and flexible working hours, on reducing employee stress during transition periods. Providing employees with the ability to manage their schedules and work environments during change significantly reduces anxiety and stress associated with increased workloads and role ambiguity. Furthermore, stress management training programs were shown to help employees develop the coping skills needed to navigate the uncertainty and challenges that come with change. The research found that employees who had access to these stress reduction programs felt better prepared to manage the emotional and physical demands of the change process. This, in turn, led to increased productivity and engagement as employees felt more supported and less overwhelmed by the changes they were experiencing. The relationship between mental and physical well-being and employee performance highlights the importance of a holistic approach to managing stress during organizational transitions. Organizations prioritizing employee well-being through these programs will likely see a more resilient workforce and improved organizational outcomes.

Lastly, the study highlights the critical role of effective communication in ensuring a smooth transition during organizational change. Transparent, timely, and two-way communication significantly reduced employee anxiety and increased their understanding of the changes. Employees who were kept informed about the reasons for the change, the expected outcomes, and how the changes would impact their roles were more confident in their ability to adapt to the new environment. The research also found that two-way communication, which allowed employees to express their concerns and opinions, played a crucial role in easing the transition. When employees felt their voices were heard and their concerns addressed, they

were more likely to support the change efforts and engage with the process. The study emphasizes that communication should be informative and inclusive, allowing employees to provide feedback. This approach fosters a sense of inclusion and engagement, which is essential for a successful change process. Effective communication informs and empowers employees, reducing resistance and improving overall commitment to the change process. The findings highlight that organizations with strong communication strategies are more likely to successfully manage change and create a supportive and adaptable work environment.

The findings of this study align closely with established theories regarding the importance of communication and leadership in managing employee resistance to organizational change. Specifically, Lewin's Change Model, which emphasizes the critical stage of "unfreezing," highlights the necessity of preparing employees psychologically before implementing change. This stage is particularly relevant to the findings of this research, which underline the pivotal role of transparent communication and employee involvement in reducing resistance. According to Lewin, unfreezing involves challenging existing mindsets and creating an environment where employees are ready to embrace new behaviors and structures (Lewin, 1947). This concept is echoed in the study's results, where it was found that employees who were kept informed about the reasons for change and were actively engaged in the change process showed a significantly lower level of resistance. The importance of open communication and participation is consistent with Lewin's perspective that organizational change cannot be imposed without first addressing the psychological readiness of employees. By involving employees in the process and ensuring they feel heard and valued, organizations can reduce resistance and enhance the effectiveness of the change efforts. The study's findings emphasize that leadership must provide direction and motivation and facilitate communication channels that allow employees to express concerns and provide input. This two-way communication is vital in fostering trust and ensuring that employees are prepared for and actively participate in the change, ultimately leading to a smoother transition and more significant commitment to the organizational goals.

In comparison, several prior studies have yielded findings that align with the results of this research. For instance, Afsar and Shahjehan (2018) explored the relationship between ethical leadership and employee engagement, revealing that leaders demonstrating inspiring and supportive leadership can alleviate tension during organizational change. Similarly, Cieslak and Valor (2025) found that clear communication and active employee involvement in the change process can significantly reduce resistance. These findings resonate with the present study, underscoring the importance of transparent communication and engagement in minimizing resistance to change. However, other studies, such as those by Boon, Wynen, and Kleizen (2021), focus more on the role of unclear communication in exacerbating resistance when employees are not involved in decision-making processes. This aligns with the current research, which identifies ineffective communication as a major contributor to resistance. While many studies echo the present study's conclusions, some research suggests that broader external factors, such as industry pressures or market shifts beyond an organization's control, may influence resistance. Consequently, this study offers new insights into specific ways to reduce resistance by combining transformational leadership and more inclusive communication strategies. Conversely, Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio (2008) argued that

resistance is often a more profound emotional response and should be more structured rather than relying solely on communication and involvement. Their perspective suggests that individual psychological factors and emotional reactions to uncertainty may not be quickly addressed by practical or rational approaches, highlighting a divergence in views on the best ways to manage resistance.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that organizations must adopt a more comprehensive approach to managing change. First and foremost, organizations must foster transformational leadership that focuses on managing organizational tasks, empowering employees, and creating respectful relationships between management and staff. Leaders who can inspire and strengthen employee involvement in the change process will create a more favorable climate and reduce resistance to change. Furthermore, clear and two-way communication must be an integral part of organizational change strategies, as it can facilitate employees' understanding of the goals of the change and reduce anxiety caused by uncertainty. Employee wellness programs also play a critical role in mitigating the stress induced by organizational change. Policies promoting work-life balance, such as flexible working hours and remote options, can help reduce work-related stress and improve employee readiness to adapt to the changes. Organizations should adopt more adaptive HR practices, such as agile performance management and talent development, to prepare employees for change. Technology and data analytics can assist HR departments in monitoring employee behavior patterns and designing more targeted programs to support smooth transitions. By leveraging HR analytics, organizations can gain deeper insights into how employees respond to changes, enabling them to provide faster and more effective support during transition periods. By integrating these approaches, organizations can create a more responsive environment to change, helping employees adapt quickly, enhancing productivity, and minimizing the negative impact of work-related stress.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the strategies organizations can implement to effectively manage employee resistance and work-related stress during organizational change. The research answers key questions about how organizations can reduce resistance to change, mitigate stress, and enhance employee adaptability by investigating the role of transformational leadership, clear communication, employee wellness programs, and adaptive HR practices. The findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive environment where leadership and communication play pivotal roles in alleviating anxiety and fostering employee engagement. The study also emphasizes how integrating HR analytics and modern performance management practices can further streamline the transition process and improve overall organizational outcomes.

The value of this research lies in its contribution to academic theory and practical applications. In terms of knowledge, the study advances our understanding of how specific leadership styles, communication strategies, and employee wellness initiatives intersect to address challenges faced by organizations changing. Practically, the study offers actionable recommendations for organizations to develop comprehensive strategies that prioritize employee well-being and engagement during transition periods. This research presents a unique perspective by combining established theoretical models with contemporary HR practices, creating a new

approach to managing change. The implications for managers include adopting transformational leadership, clear communication, and proactive wellness programs to reduce stress and resistance, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

However, this study has several limitations, including its reliance on secondary data sources and the focus on general organizational settings without considering specific industry contexts. Future research could explore how these strategies perform in different sectors, such as healthcare, technology, or manufacturing, where the nature of change and employee responses may vary. Additionally, further studies could examine the long-term effects of employee engagement programs and how they influence organizational resilience over time. Researchers are encouraged to explore how emerging technologies, such as AI and machine learning, could further enhance the adaptability and effectiveness of employee management during organizational change.

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