

**Resistance to organisational change: identifying a model
to measure and manage its antecedents.**

by

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**RESEARCH PROPOSAL IN SUPPORT OF ETHICS
APPLICATION**

Abstract

Adaptation to changes in the broader environment is crucial to organisational survival, but change initiatives frequently fail. Failed change costs include poor employee outcomes, poor organisational outcomes, and costs to society at large. Employee resistance is a prominent contributor to failed change, but the literature provides no clear direction on how organisations might overcome this resistance. The observed determinants of resistance to change vary across studies and nations, providing limited insight to managers needing to implement change and manage resistance within their organisation.

This research attempts to clarify the antecedents of resistance to change that managers may be able to influence to reduce such resistance. First, a comprehensive literature review identifies the antecedents to resistance to change that managers might influence. Situational factors, such as participation and communication, affect employee resistance, and this research aims to elucidate the directionality of this relationship. Personal characteristics including future clarity and employee resilience are also antecedents of resistance, and paradoxical leadership could also play a role. Using a survey of employees from Australian organisations and structural equation modelling, this research tests the hypotheses that resources, communication, participation, and paradoxical leadership are situational factors that influence resistance, mediated by trust in management, future clarity, and employee resilience.

**Resistance to organisational change: identifying a model
to measure and manage its antecedents**

Organisations increasingly need to adapt and respond to changes in the broader environment, such as changes in technology, increased competition from globalisation, and even unforeseen challenges like COVID-19. Employee resistance to change can severely impede organisations' efforts to change and adapt. Understanding why employees resist and how to manage resistance is critical to successful change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Resistance is associated with poor employee outcomes, including psychological distress (Terry & Jimmieson, 2003) and increased absenteeism (Fugate et al., 2008); moreover, resistance is associated with increased employee turnover (Morrell et al., 2004), organisational under-performance, and even organisational failure (Garicano & Rayo, 2016).

Two issues hamper leaders' ability to manage resistance: understanding why resistance arises, and how to measure it. The literature is of limited help with these issues: Stouten and colleagues' (2018) integrative review of organisational change literature and management practices found that the literature is fragmented, without consensus, and difficult for organisational leaders to navigate. Measurement of resistance is also difficult: Weiner and colleagues (2008) inspected 43 instruments for measuring organisational readiness and resistance to change and found little evidence of reliability or validity for most publicly available measures. Blackman and colleagues (2013) note that comprehensive ways of assessing readiness and resistance to change are not readily available and call for new measurement methods.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a model of resistance to change that identifies the antecedents leaders may influence; secondly, to develop an instrument to measure resistance based on those modifiable antecedents; and thirdly, to test the model in a sample of Australian

organisations. Thus, this study will address a significant gap in the literature by contributing clear guidance and tools to help organisations measure, and manage, resistance to change.

Literature Review

Organisational change

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an example of why organisations need agility in adapting to changes in the broader environment: around the globe, businesses that failed to adapt, failed to survive (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). Organisational change is the transition of an organisation from one state of affairs to another, which may involve a change in structure, policies, processes, technologies, culture, and staffing (Doney, 1999). Organisations per se do not change: change happens through employees working together to implement new structures, policies, technologies, and so on. However, change does not always go well: more than half of organisational change initiatives in Australian organisations fail to meet their objectives (Doney, 1999), and this could be as high as 80 percent for public-sector transformations (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Frequently, failure is attributed to employee resistance to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008; Parry et al., 2014).

Resistance to change

Resistance to change is “any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to alter the status quo” (Zaltman, 1977, p.63) or “actions intended to slow or prevent change from occurring” (Rivera-Diaz, 2019, p.16). Resistance can manifest overtly in behaviours like verbally protesting, disrupting meetings, building coalitions of resistance, or covertly, such as not participating, withholding information, and even sabotaging (Cinite & Duxbury, 2018). Resistance can result in adverse employee outcomes, including psychological distress, anxiety, fatigue, social withdrawal, absenteeism, and resignation (Morrell et al., 2004; Oreg, 2003a; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003).

Resistance is also associated with adverse organisational outcomes, such as poorly implemented projects, failure to reap intended benefits, increased costs of absenteeism and employee turnover, totally failed change endeavours, and in some cases, organisational failure (Fugate et al., 2008; Garicano & Rayo, 2016; Morrell et al., 2004; Oreg, 2003a). Such outcomes can translate into considerable societal costs: for example, an initiative in the UK's National Health Services to introduce e-health technology—designed to improve efficiency and quality of healthcare—was abandoned after ten years, at a public cost of approximately £12.5 billion (Iles & Sutherland, 2001; Justinia, 2017; Rotomskienė, 2011). In context, that is equivalent to approximately 960,000 hip replacements, or 12 years' worth of chemotherapy treatment (EuroTreatMed, 2021; Laudicella et al., 2016). Employee resistance to change, and failure to properly manage that resistance, contributed significantly to the initiative's failure (Hendy et al., 2005; Rotomskienė, 2011). Similar e-health failures have been linked to employee resistance in the USA (Barrett, 2018) and Australia (Andargoli, 2021), perpetuating inequities in health outcomes and access to healthcare services (Alam et al., 2019).

Successful change implementation requires an understanding of how to gauge and manage employee resistance, but reliable methods are not readily available. To illustrate, Weiner and colleagues (2008) found little evidence of reliability or validity across 43 measures of organisational readiness for change, and suggest development of a reliable and valid instrument would be useful both for research and practice. Similarly, Blackman and colleagues (2013) note that comprehensive ways of assessing readiness and resistance to change are not readily available and call for new measurement methods (Blackman et al., 2013). Stouten and colleagues observe that in lieu of clear guidance from the literature, change leaders tend to rely instead on popular writers whose methods are founded more on anecdote and opinion than on evidence (Stouten et al., 2018). Robust research is warranted to address these concerns.

Theoretical framework

A brief chronology

The relevant literature reflects how the theory of resistance has been constructed over time. It has been a complex process. Lewin (1939) conceptualised resistance as opposing ‘driving’ and ‘restraining’ forces that hold an organisation in a state of stasis. Similarly, Festinger (1957) conceptualised resistance as a cognitive response emanating from a contradiction between the motivation to change and the motivation to maintain stability—cognitive dissonance. In 1978 Argyris and Shon argued resistance emerges from emotional defensiveness; whereas Brower and Abolafia (1995) position resistance as a particular kind of problematic behaviour. Other theories applied to explore resistance include expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1975), appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). That no single theory dominates the literature is likely indicative of the complexity of the construct. However, social cognitive theory (SCT) appears to align well with the literature’s current depiction of resistance as multidimensional, accommodating individual, situational, and behavioural factors (Piderit, 2000, Oreg, 2006).

Social cognitive theory

SCT suggests that behaviour supporting or resisting change arises from outcome expectations formed through an interplay of personal, behavioural, and situational factors (Bandura, 1986). Personal factors are intrinsic to the individual, encompassing elements like values, beliefs, skills, and self-efficacy. Behavioural factors include learned behaviours, for example an inclination to resist change because of adverse experiences with change in the past (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2020). Situational factors are elements in the broader environment such as systems, processes, resources, and policies. SCT suggests that change to any one of these factors can interact with other

factors to influence outcome expectations of the change, which in turn drive behaviour to support or resist change. Figure 3 on page 17 shows a theoretical representation of how resistance might arise.

Antecedents to resistance to change

Participation, trust in management, and communication

Kurt Lewin (1939) proposed that to foster successful change, managers need to increase relevant driving forces for change or decrease resisting forces. A seminal study by Coch and French (1948) applied Lewin's theory using participation and communication as driving forces that might reduce resistance and increase support for change. Through a series of experiments in a pyjama manufacturing firm, Coch and French manipulated employee participation in job redesign procedures. They had three groups – one as a control group with no participation in the changes, one with limited participation, and one with comprehensive participation throughout the whole change process. Although unsurprising to us now, Coch and French's findings were somewhat revelatory at the time: permitting employees to participate in the change design, decisions and implementation dramatically decreased resistance, and dramatically increased productivity. Further, they found that effective communication by management of the need for change stimulated employee participation in the planning and implementation processes.

Coch and French's work has been foundational to substantial subsequent evidence that participation and communication reduce employee resistance and heighten employee openness to change (Edwards et al., 2020; Jimmieson et al., 2004; Oreg et al., 2011; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003; Wanberg & Banas, 2000)—although there are some noticeably contrary findings, discussed later (Amarantou et al., 2018; Georgalis et al., 2015; Oreg, 2003a, 2006). Nonetheless, one limitation that consistently arises is that Coch and French focused only on situational determinants of resistance, asserting that resistance arises not from the individual but from the context in which the change occurs. Towards the latter half of the 20th century, a growing body of evidence emerged that

personal characteristics were also likely to be involved (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Pasmore & Fagans, 1992; Piderit, 2000).

Shaul Oreg, at the time a PhD candidate in Israel, responded to calls to consider a multidimensional model of resistance to change. Starting with his PhD thesis (Oreg, 2003a) and through nearly two decades of subsequent research, Oreg provides a comprehensive examination of resistance, from antecedents through to consequences (Oreg, 2003b, 2006, 2018; Oreg et al., 2008, 2011; Oreg & Berson, 2011, 2019; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2020; Van Dam et al., 2008). Oreg operationalised Pideret's (2000) suggestion of resistance as comprising three elements—*affective, behavioural, and cognitive resistance*—and proposed the notion of *dispositional resistance*, which he conceptualised as a personality trait (Oreg 2003a). Like other personality traits, dispositional resistance has been shown to be universal and immutable: that is, it is found in many cultures, is stable over time, and is itself resistant to change (Oreg et al., 2008; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2018; Soenen et al., 2017). As such, change leaders can likely do little to influence employee dispositional resistance: thus, focusing on situational factors may be more productive.

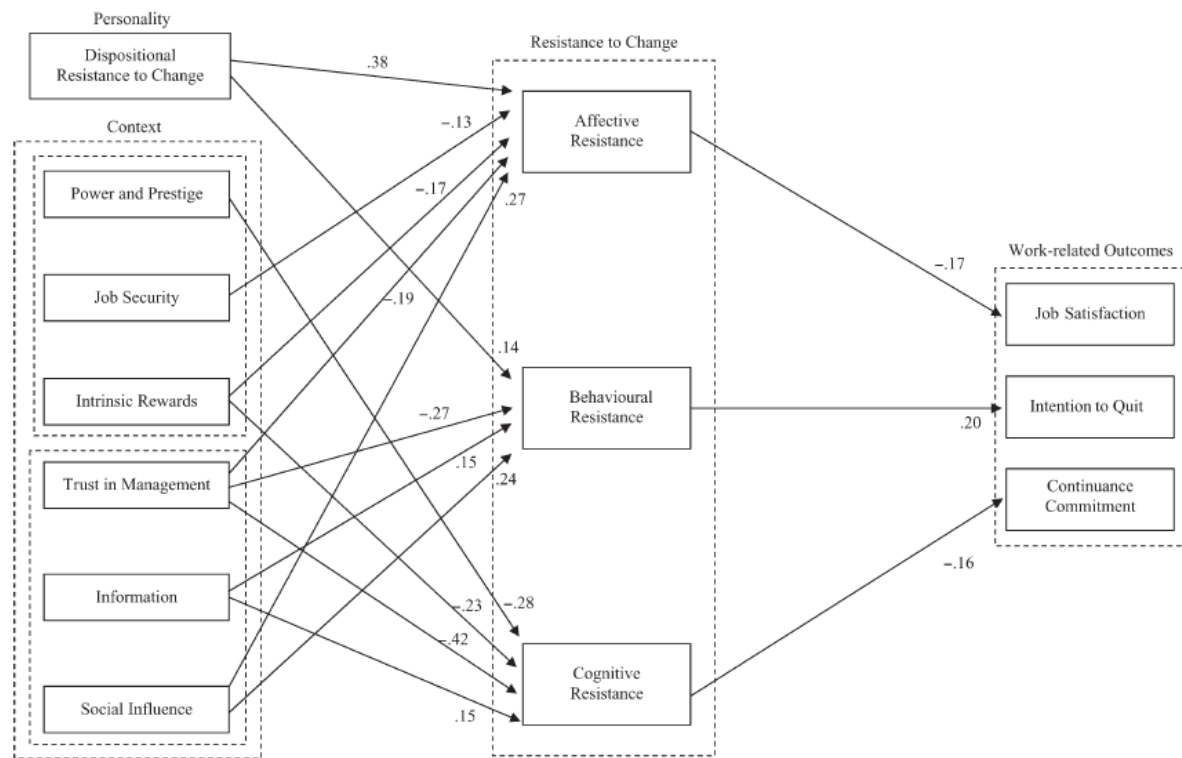
In 2006, Oreg incorporated situational factors into his model of resistance, shown at Figure 1. Looking at the antecedents on the left, we see, at the top, that dispositional resistance is accounted for, and below, the situational factors, such as trust in management, social influence, and job security. Resistance is portrayed in the middle column, showing its affective, behavioural, and cognitive elements. On the right, we see the consequences of resistance that Oreg measured in this study: job satisfaction, intention to quit, and continuance commitment.

Some situational factors in the model appear unlikely to be easily modifiable by managers. For example, it might be difficult for a manager to modify an employee's sense of power and prestige, intrinsic rewards, or social influence. The situational factors in the model more likely to be responsive to a manager's actions are job security, trust in management, and information

[synonymous with ‘communication’ in other studies, e.g. Amarantou (2014), Terry & Jimmieson (2003)]. Trust in management is likely to be especially consequential, diminishing all three resistance elements, with a particularly strong effect on cognitive resistance.

Figure 1:

Oreg’s (2006) Model of Resistance to Change (p.12)



Noticeably absent from the model is participation. Oreg (2006) does not address why he excluded participation, simply stating that most prior studies have already addressed it. Participation was included in his earlier work (Oreg, 2003a) and found to predict both behavioural and affective resistance. However, in that study, Oreg found conversely to his hypothesis—and most prior literature—that “increased participation in the change was associated with increased action against it” (Oreg, 2003a, p.136). In both the 2003a and 2006 studies, he found similarly regarding communication: conversely to expectations, more information resulted in more resistance, and less information resulted in less resistance.

Oreg explains these converse findings thus: potentially, if people are unaware of a change—given low levels of communication—they have no reason to resist it; substantive reasons to resist only arise once they receive information about the change. Similarly, greater participation presumably leads to greater familiarity with the expected change outcomes, which the person may then perceive negatively. Thus, more involvement leads to more opportunities to express resistance¹. Oreg suggests that future research should attempt to clarify the circumstances in which communication and participation reduce resistance, compared to the circumstances in which they may exacerbate it (Oreg 2003a).

Oreg's multidimensional model of the antecedents and consequences of resistance (Figure 1) contributed tremendously to the literature, but sampling limitations may limit the generalisability of his results. Participants were recruited from a large Israeli military organisation which is mechanistic (Morgan, 2006), hierarchical, formal and rules-based. Most participants were men (88%), with an average age of 45 years and an average tenure of 13 years (Oreg, 2006). Whether the results of this demographic can generalise to other organisational populations, such as small multicultural Australian enterprises, health service providers, or Northern Territory government departments, is arguable (Hofstede, 2001; Matsumoto, 2017). Certainly, Oreg's findings on communication and participation are contrary to research conducted in an Australian context, which generally finds that communication and participation reduce resistance² (Jimmieson et al., 2004, 2008; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2010, 2017; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003). These divergent findings may, at least in part, be due to non-generalisability of Oreg's results to other populations.

Evidence from Greece suggests that, in a public sector and health services context, Oreg's findings are only partially generalisable. Amarantou and colleagues (2018) explored the

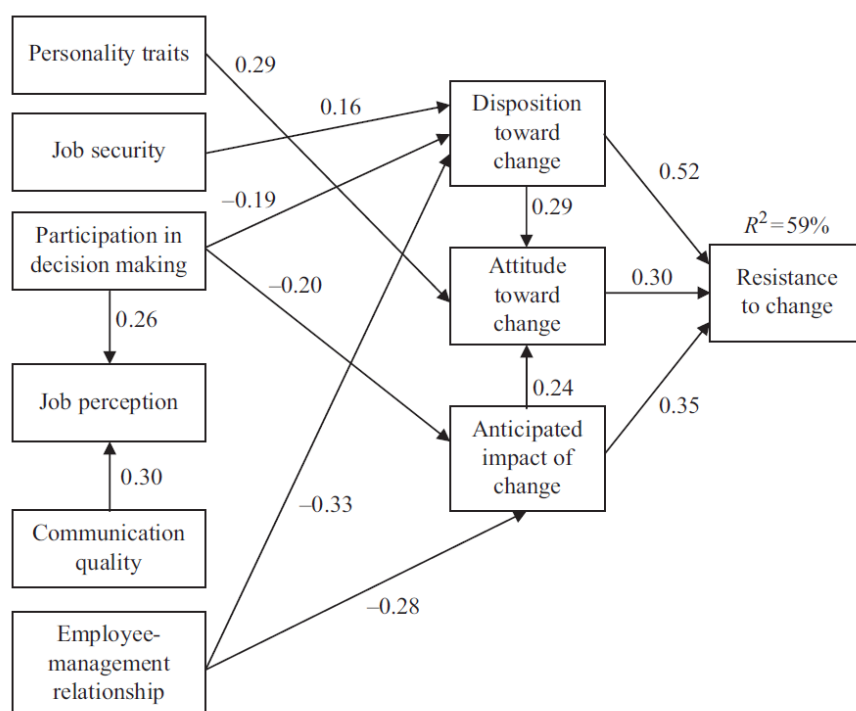
¹ These suggestions contrast with the author's experience of leading significant change in Australian organisations: low levels of information tend to lead to rumour and catastrophising of possible outcomes, and low opportunities for participation tend to lead to resentment, fear of missing out, and even sabotage.

² Though for a notable exception on both participation and communication see Georgalis et al. (2014), and for an exception on participation see McKay et al. (2013).

antecedents to resistance in a sample of six Greek public sector hospitals, all of which had experienced substantial recent change. Similarly to Oreg (2006), they measured dispositional and situational variables and derived a robust model (Figure 2) that explained 59% of the variance in employee resistance. Of this variance, only 8% was ascribed to dispositional resistance—the remainder was from potentially modifiable antecedents: trust in management, participation in decision making, and, to a lesser extent, job security. In contrast to prior research (Oreg, 2006; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003; Van Dam et al., 2008; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), Amarantou and colleagues found no direct effect of communication on resistance.

Figure 2:

Amarantou et al (2018) Model of Resistance to Change (p. 427).



That communication plays some role in resistance is not contentious, but the specific role that communication plays, and its directionality, is uncertain (Stouten et al., 2018; Wittig, 2012). Plausibly, communicating with employees about significant workplace changes should be beneficial to the change and reduce resistance, and several studies support this position (Boohene & Williams, 2012; Coch & French, 1948; Jimmieson et al., 2008; McKay et al., 2013; Van Dam et al.,

2008; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Yet Oreg (2003a, 2006), as we have discussed, found that more information resulted in more resistance; Amarantou and colleagues (2018) found no direct effect of communication on resistance; and Straatman and colleagues (2016) found that communication had an almost zero effect on employees' intention to engage in the change.

Findings from studies in Australian organisations have also been equivocal. For example, Terry and Jimmieson (2003) conducted three studies of large-scale change initiatives in Australia: a merger between two airlines, a restructuring of a large public sector agency, and the introduction of a new pay scheme into a public utility provider. In all cases, timeliness, quantity, and quality of information reduced employee resistance, and further, employees who felt they had received adequate information about the change reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction. Contrariwise, a study of antecedents to change-resistance in a large Melbourne-based firm found no significant relationship between communication and resistance, nor between participation and resistance (Georgalis et al., 2015). Instead, Georgalis and colleagues found that resistance depended on employees' sense of justice in the change process, and leadership style.

Rahaman and colleagues (2020) explored the relationship between communication, resistance and leadership style further, examining the influence of leadership style on resistance in low-change-information versus high-change-information conditions. They found that leadership style moderated the relationship between communication and resistance: that is, ethical leadership triggers employee commitment to change, and in this case, resistance will be low even in situations of limited information; however, if the leadership style is ineffective at triggering employee commitment to the change, resistance arises even in situations where there is considerable information about the change.

Where we are and what we know

Based on a comprehensive review of extant literature, trust in management emerges as the only robust predictor of resistance thus far. Job security is a consistent predictor but with minimal effect. Participation, communication, and leadership style likely play vital roles, but findings regarding how these factors influence resistance are ambiguous and, in some cases, opposite. Clearly, further exploration is warranted. Four other factors that emerge from the literature could help untangle the various antecedents: these are resources, future clarity, personal resilience, and paradoxical leadership.

Resources

In military field operations, a so-called ‘Hearts and Minds’ strategy provides for civilian populations’ resource needs as a crucial mechanism to reduce resistance, and this hearts and minds approach has been translated into a model for successful organisational change (Davies, 2008, p.1). Plausibly, and consistent with social cognitive theory and the notion of self-efficacy, if employees can access the resources they need—staffing, physical resources, processes, and training—to implement change effectively, they should be less resistant than employees lacking adequate resources. This premise is substantiated both anecdotally³ and in the broader literature: for example, inadequate resources provoked employee resistance in failed e-health initiatives (Murray et al., 2011); whereas training to develop competence to implement the change decreased resistance (Wang & Kebede, 2020).

Parry and colleagues (2014) propose that even when other factors are optimal—leadership, team spirit, communication, employee participation—change will not be successful if the right resources are not available. Parry and colleagues investigated the drivers of successful

³ The author had the privilege of working within the hearts and minds model on a large organisational transformation program with AXA in the UK in the 1990s. The strategy of understanding employees’ resource needs and meeting those needs was a cornerstone of what became one of the most successful change programs in the history of the company.

organisational change using a multicultural longitudinal design. Across six years, they surveyed over 175,000 participants in different industries in over 20 countries, including approximately 40,000 participants from Australia. Using exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, they derived six critical drivers of change success, of which adequacy of resources—sufficient staff, adequate systems, adequate skills and capabilities, and adequate processes—featured prominently. Potentially, a similar relationship exists between resources and resistance.

Future clarity

One relatively new development in the literature is the discovery by Moss and colleagues (2017) that a vivid sense of the future—future clarity—diminishes resistance to change. Moss and colleagues surveyed 207 participants examining three potential antecedents of resistance: future clarity, future continuance, and meaning in life. They found that people who could envisage their future clearly and vividly were less resistant to change. When a person can clearly envisage their future, it feels congruent and seems realistically achievable. As such, the envisioned future is less threatening than a future that feels uncertain and unclear, and people are less likely to resist it. Moss and colleagues' findings accord with other research, that a clear future vision of an individual's ideal self (Rogers, 1952) is instrumental to intentional change at an individual level (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Taylor, 2006). The discovery that future clarity might help overcome resistance is exciting because it captures a previously unidentified antecedent that may be amenable to modification through, for example, visioning workshops, visual management, and an emphasis in communications of 'painting a vivid picture of the future' both for employees and the organisation.

Employee Resilience

A higher level of personal resilience—a composite of self-esteem, perceived control, and optimism—has been known for some time to predict lower levels of resistance to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), but until recently was considered a dispositional trait (Oreg, 2003b) and therefore

not easily modified through the actions of leaders. However, recent research from New Zealand shows that a paradoxical leadership style can foster employee resilience (Franken et al., 2020). Given that higher resilience is associated with lower resistance, paradoxical leadership may be an antecedent to resistance through the mediating variable of employee resilience.

Paradoxical leadership

Paradoxical leadership is emerging as a powerful approach for managing change (Franken, 2019; Franken et al., 2020; Gordon & Cleland, 2021; Lavine, 2014; Nelson, 2018; Sparr, 2018). Paradoxical leadership arises from complexity theory: paradoxical leadership embraces ambiguity, recognising that leadership situations often call for paradoxical, or ostensibly contradictory, skills—“the ability to exhibit contrary or opposing behaviours (as appropriate and necessary) while still retaining some measure of integrity, credibility, and direction” (Denison et al., 1995, p.526). A paradoxical situation arises in organisations where two evidently competing realities exist that seemingly cannot coexist (Zhang et al., 2015). Such paradoxes might be, for example, to pursue innovation versus consistency, to instil empowerment in the team versus accountability, or to embrace change versus stability. In each of these scenarios it appears, at least superficially, that to embrace one option means rejecting the other. A paradoxical leadership style rejects this ‘either/or’ thinking in favour of ‘both/and’ thinking: paradoxical leaders embrace not one or the other, but both options (Lewis et al., 2014; Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015). Potentially, just as paradoxical leadership fosters employee resilience, it may nurture other antecedents of resistance such as communication and participation.

Theoretically, in organisational change situations, a leader capable of both/and leadership could adapt to differing needs of different team members, meeting each need with an appropriate but potentially different response, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Conceivably, paradoxical leadership enables team members to voice their ideas, suggestions, and objections to change regardless of differences (Li et al., 2018), leading to greater participation in the change and

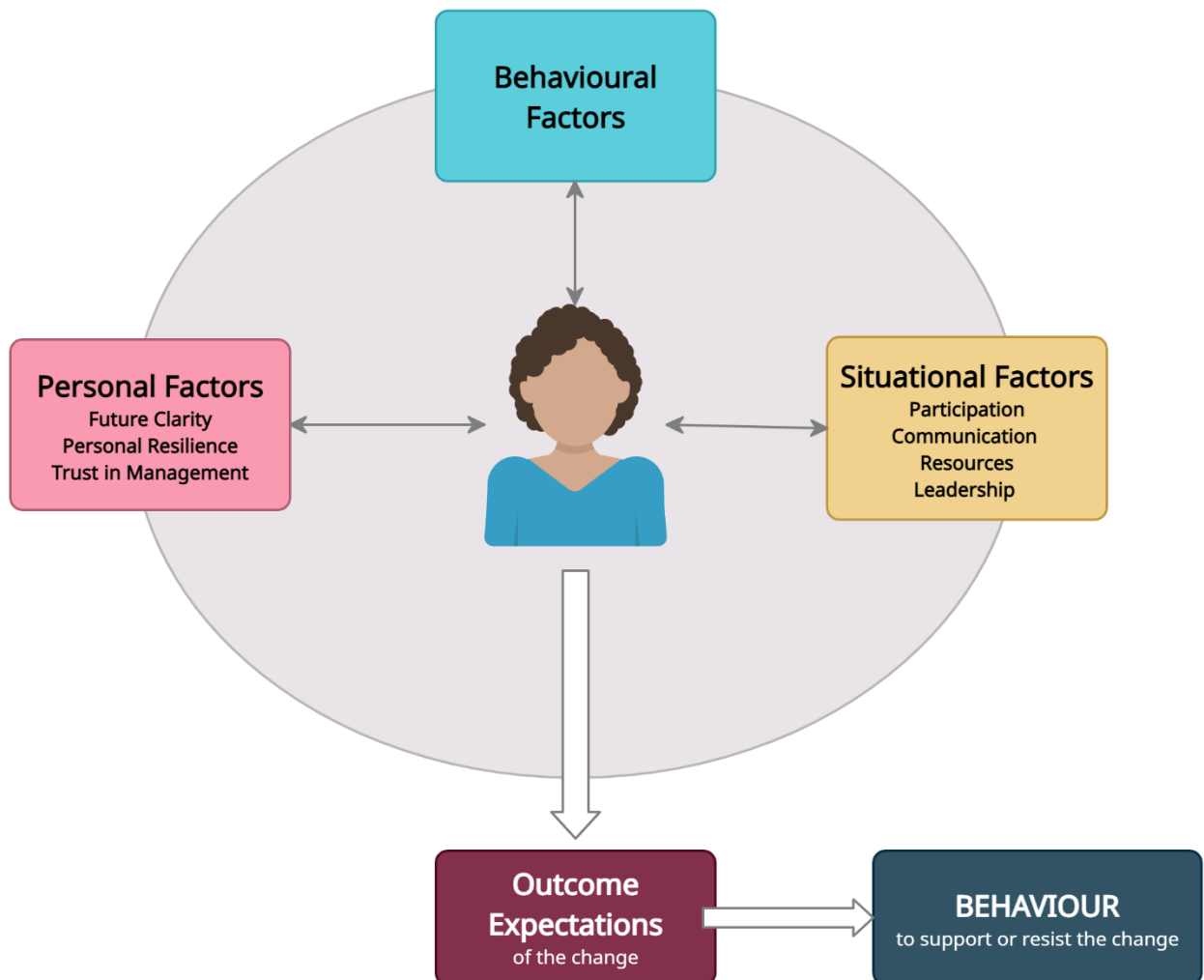
consequently lower resistance. Rahaman and colleagues' (2020) findings, for example [that an ethical leadership style fosters employee commitment to change, which in turn reduces resistance], may be not so much that an ethical leadership style is needed to trigger employee commitment to change, but a leader who can execute ethical leadership when warranted—and demonstrate entrepreneurial or other leadership styles at other times. Answering Oreg's (2003a) call, paradoxical leadership may help clarify the circumstances under which communication and participation ameliorate versus exacerbate resistance.

A theoretical model of modifiable antecedents

Distilling resistance to change through the lens of social cognitive theory, into a template of potentially modifiable antecedents, delivers the theoretical model shown in Figure 3. Situational antecedents include participation, communication, resources, and paradoxical leadership (Amarantou et al., 2018; Franken et al., 2020; Oreg, 2006; Parry et al., 2014; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Personal antecedents include future clarity, personal resilience, and trust in management (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Moss et al., 2017; Oreg, 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Social cognitive theory suggests that a change in any one of these factors might influence any other factor to affect an employee's outcome expectations of change and, consequently, their behaviour to either support or resist change.

Figure 3:

A theoretical model of resistance based on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory

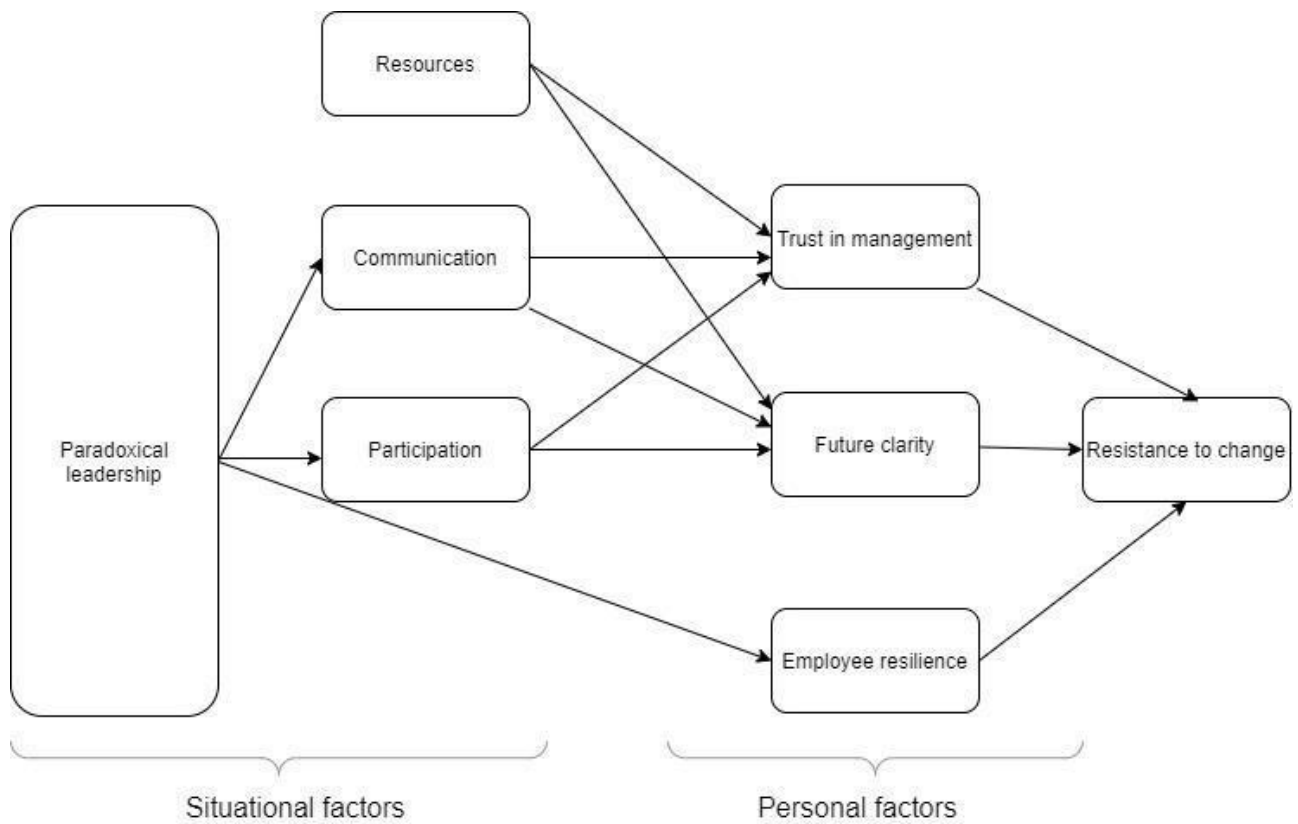


Conceptual model of modifiable antecedents to resistance to change

Integrating the theoretical model with the literature arrives at the conceptual model shown in Figure 4, to be tested by this research. We hypothesise that the situational factors on the left of the diagram—paradoxical leadership, participation, communication, and resources—will improve personal factors—trust in management, future clarity, and personal resilience—which, in turn, will reduce resistance to change.

Figure 4:

Conceptual model of modifiable antecedents of resistance to change



Hypotheses

Regarding employee resilience, we hypothesise:

- H1a: employee resilience is negatively related to resistance to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000);
- H1b: paradoxical leadership is positively related to employee resilience (Franken, 2019);
- H1c: paradoxical leadership is negatively related to resistance, mediated by employee resilience.

Regarding future clarity, we hypothesise:

- H2a: future clarity is negatively related to resistance to change (Moss et al., 2017);
- H2b: future clarity is positively related to (i) participation, (ii) communication, and (iii) resources; (Parry et al., 2014; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003)
- H2c: there is a positive association between paradoxical leadership and future clarity, mediated by (i) participation and (ii) communication.

Regarding trust in management, we hypothesise:

- H3a: trust in management is negatively related to resistance (Amarantou et al., 2018; Oreg, 2006),
- H3b: trust in management is positively related to (i) participation, (ii) communication, and (iii) resources (Parry et al., 2014; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003);
- H3c: there is a positive relationship between paradoxical leadership and trust in management, mediated by (i) participation and (ii) communication.

Regarding resources, we hypothesise:

- H4a: resources are negatively related to resistance to change (Parry et al., 2014)
- H4b: the relationship between resources and resistance is mediated by (i) trust in management and (ii) future clarity (Amarantou et al., 2018; Moss et al., 2017; Oreg, 2006).

Regarding communication, we hypothesise:

- H5a: there is a relationship between communication and resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003)
- H5b: the directionality of the relationship between communication and resistance is moderated by paradoxical leadership (Franken, 2019; Rahaman et al., 2020)

- H5c: the relationship between communication and resistance to change is mediated by (i) trust in management (Amarantou et al., 2018; Oreg, 2006) and (ii) future clarity (Moss et al., 2017).

Regarding participation, we hypothesise:

- H6a: there is a relationship between participation and resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Terry & Jimmieson, 2003)
- H6b: the directionality of the relationship between participation and resistance is moderated by paradoxical leadership (Franken, 2019; Rahaman et al., 2020)
- H6c: the relationship between participation and resistance to change is mediated by (i) trust in management (Amarantou et al., 2018; Oreg, 2006) and (ii) future clarity (Moss et al., 2017).

Finally, regarding paradoxical leadership, we hypothesise:

- H7a: paradoxical leadership fosters lower levels of resistance to change mediated via (i) participation, (ii) communication, and (iii) personal resilience.

Research Proposal

Aim of the research

As conveyed in Figures 3 and 4, this research applies social cognitive theory to help explain employee resistance to organisational change. This study will address a significant gap in the literature by elucidating the antecedents of resistance that change leaders may influence, developing a valid instrument to measure those antecedents, and articulating the relationships between them. Antecedents identified from the literature are communication, employee resilience, future clarity, paradoxical leadership, participation, resources, and trust in management.

Method

The current study will use quantitative methods to inform the aims of the research. It will develop a survey instrument combining existing scales, with some adaptations, to measure the antecedents of resistance to change identified in the literature review and expressed in the conceptual model (Figure 4). The survey instrument will be piloted with a reference group to confirm reliability and validity. The research will then apply the instrument to a survey of Australian employees who are currently undergoing or have recently experienced organisational change, and will use structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse results. This approach is consistent with other research on the topic (e.g. Amarantou et al., 2018; Georgalis et al., 2015; Oreg, 2006). The research will commence once ethics clearance is received from Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee (CDU-HREC).

Participants and recruitment process

Participants will be Northern Territory government department employees whose Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has approved participation in the research project. Approval in principle, pending CDU-HREC approval, has been received from the NT Public Service Commissioner's office and the CEO of one department. We will invite other departments to participate once CDU-HREC grants the ethics approval. Further criteria for participation that employees must be 18 years or older, and must have recently experienced, or currently be experiencing, significant organisational change.

The researchers will provide a draft email for the CEOs of participating departments to send to their employees to recruit participants. The email, which will be sent from the CEO's email address, will give some brief background to the project, let employees know that their department has opted to participate in the research, and invite employees to participate voluntarily. The email will advise that participation will be via an online survey which can be completed in working hours.

A link to the survey will be in the email. Participation will be anonymous, and neither the CEO, the employee's supervisor, nor anyone else will know which employees have participated. The survey will collect no identifying information, neither of individual employees, nor work units, nor departments.

Incentives to participate will not be offered. Participants will be given a web page URL to anonymously access a summary of findings once the research is completed. Additionally, they may opt to receive a plain English copy of the final report, noting that this will require the employee to disclose personally-identifying information, i.e. their email address.

Survey

The survey will be delivered online via Qualtrics and accessed via a link in the email sent from the CEO to employees. The survey will be available as soon as ethics approval is received from CDU-HREC, until 31 August 2021. The survey will contain approximately 50 questions and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants will first be presented with information about the survey and an Informed Consent form. Participants will then be asked: Are you currently experiencing one or more significant organisational changes? If yes: they will be directed to a version of the survey coded in the present tense. If no: Have you recently (in the past two years) experienced one or more significant organisational changes? If yes: they will be directed to a version of the survey coded in the past tense.⁴ Once at the main survey page, participants will be asked to think about a specific instance of significant organisational change that they are experiencing, or have experienced, and respond to questions for that instance of change.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all questions will be measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 7 = 'strongly agree'. Following participants' agreement with the

⁴ If they respond 'no', they will not be eligible to participate and will be directed to the exit page of the survey.

Informed Consent form, demographic information will be collected, including age, gender, job level, and tenure. Participants will then be directed to the body of the survey.

Resistance to change will be measured using a 10-item subset of Oreg's (2006) 15-item resistance to change scale, which measures resistance across affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. This multidimensional conceptualisation of resistance is consistent with current literature (Oreg et al., 2011; Piderit, 2000) and has demonstrated good reliability in previous studies, with Cronbach's alpha of between .88 and .92 (Amarantou et al., 2018; Georgalis et al., 2015). Indicative items include 'I complain about the change to my colleagues', 'I believe the change will benefit the organisation*', and 'I am quite excited about the change*'⁵.

Employee resilience will be measured using the updated 9-item version of Näswall and colleagues' (2019) employee resilience scale, which has shown to be reliable, Cronbach's alpha of .80 (Franken, 2019). Indicative items include 'I effectively collaborate with others to handle unexpected challenges at work', 'I approach managers when I need their support', and 'I effectively respond to feedback at work, even criticism'.

Future clarity will be measured using a modified five-item Clarity of Future Self scale developed by McElwee and Haugh (2010), which Moss and colleagues (2017) found reliable for measuring future clarity, Cronbach's alpha of .87. Indicative items include 'I really find it hard to predict what my work might be like in the future*', 'When I picture myself at work in the future, I can see clear and vivid images', and 'My future at work is too uncertain for me to plan very far ahead'*.

Trust in management will be measured using Oreg's (2006) three-item scale, which Oreg showed to have good reliability, Cronbach's alpha of .92. Following Amarantous's (2018) approach, three additional items will be adopted from Stanley and colleagues' (2005) scale to

⁵ Items marked with an asterisk are reverse coded.

capture management honesty. Indicative items include ‘Overall, there is a feeling that you can count on this organisation’s management’, ‘Management has been quite honest in stating its objectives for this change’, and ‘I believe that if management is suggesting this change, they are well informed and have good reasons for it’.

Resources will be measured using a four-item scale derived by Parry and colleagues (2014), which they found reliable, Cronbach’s alpha of .81. Sample questions include ‘My team has sufficient staff to implement this change’, ‘I have the skills and capabilities needed to deal with the change’, and ‘We have adequate processes in place to support the successful implementation of the change’.

Communication will be measured following the same approach adopted by Oreg (2006), using the four-item scale developed by Wanberg and Banas (2000), which Oreg found to be reliable with Cronbach’s alpha of .88. Indicative items include ‘The information I have received about the change has been timely’, ‘I have received adequate information about the forthcoming changes’, and ‘The information I have received about the changes has been useful’.

Participation will be measured using the three item-scale developed by Wanberg and Banas (2000), found to be reliable in an Australian context, Cronbach’s alpha of .96 (Georgalis et al., 2015). The items on the scale are ‘I have been able to participate in the implementation of the change’, ‘I have some control over the change’, ‘If I wanted to, I could have input into the decisions being made about the change’.

Paradoxical leadership will be measured using a 10-item subset of the 15-item scale developed by Franken (2019) and found to be reliable, Cronbach’s alpha of .94. Sample questions include ‘My manager trusts me to achieve outcomes’, ‘My manager effectively manages conflict within the team’, and ‘My manager acts calm when I make a mistake’.

Statistical analyses

Firstly data will be visually examined to ensure no obviously spurious records. The number of responses will be observed, noting that 150 is usually considered a minimum sample size for structural equation modelling (Maccallum et al., 1996). Responses with incomplete or missing data will be treated according to Tabachnick and Fidell's (2013) guidelines.

Data will be checked for assumptions relevant to SEM. Data will be examined visually for normality, including distribution, skew, and kurtosis via inspection of descriptive statistics, histograms, and Q-Q plots, noting that, for SEM, if the assumption of normality is violated, a sample size of 2,500 or greater is typically required (Hu et al., 1992). Data will be examined for univariate outliers through visual inspection of z-scores and box plots, and any outliers \pm three standard deviations will be treated following Pituch and Stevens (2016). Shapiro-Wilks scores will be examined to confirm visual findings regarding the normality of data. Next, data will be tested for correlations using Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis. We expect there a moderate but not significant correlation ($r > .20 < .80$) between the predictors and the outcome variable, and between the predictors and the mediating/moderating variables, indicating a good fit for regression analysis (Field, 2018). The assumption of linearity for all variables of interest will be confirmed through visual inspection of matrix scatterplots, and visual inspection of standardised residuals against standardised predicted values should indicate that the assumption of homoscedasticity for the residuals is met. Influential cases will be checked for by computing Cook's distances and Mahalanobis distances. Any Cook's distance less than 1 is likely to be of no concern (Cook & Weisberg, 1982), nor are Mahalanobis distances less than 15 (Barnett & Lewis, 1978). Multivariate outliers, if any, will be treated following guidelines from Tabachnick and Fidell (2013).

Finally, once all assumptions have been checked, SEM path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted using the *R* program, under the supervision of Dr Simon Moss. Firstly, the structural model will be refined and checked for theoretical and empirical soundness.

Next, the measurement model will be developed following directions from Foster et al. (2006). Finally, the measurement model and data will be uploaded into *R*, and SEM conducted against them. The output of SEM will be examined to determine the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, whether null hypotheses can be rejected, and whether predictive relationships can be established that support the conceptual model. Results will be interpreted and reported in the next phase of this research.

Conclusion

Resistance to change is a prominent contributor to failed organisational change, and carries detrimental employee, organisational, and societal outcomes. Although considerable research has examined resistance, agreement regarding its antecedents is unclear. Findings across studies and nations are contrary and provide little help to managers seeking to understand, measure, and manage resistance within their organisations. The situation demands further attention.

This research proposes a model of modifiable antecedents of resistance to change seated in social cognitive theory and an extensive literature review. Resistance arises both from dispositional and situational factors; however, managers can do little to influence dispositional resistance. Interventions focused on situational factors, such as participation and communication, are more likely to yield results. Paradoxical leadership may play a role in moderating these and other factors. We hypothesise that resources, communication, participation, and paradoxical leadership are situational factors that influence resistance, mediated by personal factors of trust in management, future clarity, and employee resilience. Using structural equation modelling, we will test these hypotheses in a sample of employees from Australian organisations.

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