



**Examining the management of change from a water board into a Regional Water Utility
in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

Sarah Sibongile Mngwengwe

981147129

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of Master of Business Administration**

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College of Law and Management Studies**

Supervisor: Prof. MacDonald Khanyangale

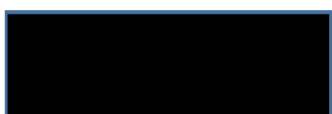
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ABSTRACT

While the reconfiguration of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards in KwaZulu-Natal is a crucial step towards effective water provision, there is a lack of research on how the change was actually managed, channels of communication used, and nature of employee resistance experienced in the change process. The main research objective of this exploratory qualitative study is to examine change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. This exploratory qualitative study design involved twenty participants selected to achieve data saturation. The participant pool consisted of executive members, senior management, middle management, representatives from organised labour, and employees who directly experienced the reconfiguration of a Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from the uMngeni-uThukela Regional Water Utility. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic approaches to get dominant themes depicting change management methods, communication, and employees' resistance during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KZN. The results revealed a variety of six themes related to change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, which include (1) top-down approach (2) visible leadership to drive change agenda (3) less structured change pathway (4) communicating the change process (5) consultant-driven change and (6) change agents-driven approach. Eight different formal and informal communication channels were used for clarity of messaging to reach employees during the reconfiguration: (1) face-to-face executive announcements, (2) Executive led internal workshops; (3) executive and board meetings; (4) excessive dependence on mass emails; (5) grapevine communication; (6) communication circulars; (7) brown bag sessions; and (8) executive-led staff information sessions. However, employee resistance emerged as a significant challenge, stemming from the top-down change process, concerns about job loss, psychological safety, and board instability were the root causes of employees' resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. To mitigate employee resistance the study recommends the importance of clear and effective communication channels for conveying consistent and transparent messages across various levels of the organisation, which is key for effective change processes and management. Establishing diverse communication channels tailored to different employees is very important for nurturing an informed workforce. Employees' resistance to change may be diminished if the top-down approach change is replaced with a consultative approach, and addressing the lack of leadership visibility is paramount for ensuring that change management is smooth, engaging, and not intimidating for employees.

Key words: Change management method, communication channels, employee resistance to change

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The management of change within the water sector is important, particularly when transitioning from a water board to a regional water utility. The key assumption in this type of shift is the enhancement of operational efficiency, effectiveness, and overall water service provision. Dini, Nhamo, Molose, Mpandeli, Hlophe-Ginindza, and Naidoo (2024) underscore that the water sector in South Africa, much like its counterparts globally, has experienced significant transformations over the years. A confluence of factors, including population growth, urbanisation, climate change, and the pressing need to improve service delivery, have driven these changes.

KwaZulu-Natal's water sector history dates back to the early 20th century, when the province was under British colonial rule. The colonial administration established the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA) to oversee the management of the province's water resources, which involved the construction of dams, canals, and various water supply systems. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the NPA was succeeded by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government, assuming responsibility for the province's water services.

However, the water sector in KwaZulu-Natal is currently confronting a multitude of challenges. Notably, the state of infrastructure is deteriorating; much of the province's water infrastructure—including dams, pipelines, treatment plants, and distribution systems—has aged significantly and is in urgent need of repair or replacement. KwaZulu-Natal is classified as a water-scarce province, with an average annual rainfall of approximately 650 mm (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023). The province is heavily reliant on rain-fed systems and storage facilities to fulfil its water requirements. The burgeoning population further exacerbates the pressure on existing water resources and infrastructure.

Moreover, climate change is anticipated to intensify the occurrence of droughts and floods in KwaZulu-Natal, placing additional strain on the province's already limited water resources (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Given these challenges, the water sector requires effective change management processes. The South African government has recently implemented various reforms to address challenges related to poor water service delivery and decent sanitation. In 1998, the National Water Act was promulgated to rationalise and streamline the management of South Africa's water resources (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). The Act established a new framework for water management, including creating a national water authority and provincial water boards. In 2003, the KwaZulu-Natal Water Services Act (No. 36 of 1998) was promulgated to improve the province's governance and management of water services. The Act established a new water service delivery structure, including creating a

provincial water board and municipalities. In 2010, the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government launched a Water Services Development Plan (WSDP) to improve access to clean water and sanitation services in KwaZulu-Natal. The plan prioritised investments in infrastructure development, including constructing new dams, treatment plants, and distribution systems. These reforms have aimed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of water service delivery in KwaZulu-Natal. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist, and there is a need for continued investment and innovation to address the province's pressing water needs (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022).

Against this backdrop of challenges and public water sector reforms in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility is seen as an opportunity to improve public water service delivery and decent sanitation to the underserved population of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa (South African Human Rights Commission; 2022). The reconfiguration aims to create a more efficient and effective organisation that can better respond to the needs of customers and stakeholders. The reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility is a significant transformation initiative to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of water service delivery in KwaZulu-Natal. Government policies, regulatory requirements, and industry trends drive the initiative. Several government policies and initiatives have contributed to the need for reconfiguration, including the National Water Act (1998), which aimed to rationalise and streamline the management of South Africa's water resources. The Act mandated the creation of a new framework for water management, including establishing national and provincial water authorities. The KwaZulu-Natal Water Services Act (2003) aimed to improve the province's water services governance and management. The Act established a new water service delivery structure, including creating a provincial water board and municipalities. The Water Services Development Plan (2010) aimed to improve KwaZulu-Natal access to clean water and sanitation services. The plan prioritised investments in infrastructure development, including constructing new dams, treatment plants, and distribution systems (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022).

The reconfiguration aims to create a more efficient and effective organization that can better respond to the needs of customers and stakeholders across the province. Regionalisation allows for more significant economies of scale, improved coordination, and enhanced service delivery (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023). Decentralisation is a crucial principle of good governance, which allows for greater autonomy and decision-making authority at the local level (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023). Regionalisation enables municipalities to own their water service delivery, improving accountability and responsiveness (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The reconfiguration aims to improve service delivery by streamlining processes, reducing bureaucracy, and increasing transparency. Thus, this will enable the utility to respond more effectively to customer needs, improve water quality, and reduce

waste. Regionalisation can lead to increased efficiency through reduced duplication of effort, improved resource allocation, and better utilisation of skills and expertise (Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The critical component of the regional water utility is the creation of regional offices, which will allow for greater decentralisation and decision-making authority at the local level (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Integrating water supply, wastewater collection, and stormwater management will enable a more holistic approach to service delivery and decent sanitation. Stakeholder engagement is critical to ensuring that customers, communities, and other stakeholders are involved in reconfiguring (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Capacity-building programs should be implemented to ensure that employees have the necessary skills and expertise to operate in a regionalised environment. By understanding these reasons behind the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility, we can better appreciate the complexities involved in this significant transformation initiative (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

However, according to Bhavani and Mahalakshmi (2023) and Gronvad, Abildgaard, and Aust (2023), organisational change is rarely seamless, and resistance to change is a common phenomenon that can hinder successful implementation. Organisational change is a complex and challenging process that requires careful planning, execution, and management. Despite the best efforts of leaders and change agents, resistance to change is a common phenomenon that can hinder successful implementation. Employees naturally resist change because they are still determining the future and how it will affect their jobs, roles, or benefits. Change leads to losing control or autonomy, which can be unsettling for some individuals. Organisations may undergo multiple changes quickly, leading to change fatigue and overwhelm. Resistance to change initiatives occurs when employees feel they have not been involved or consulted in the change process. (Kamugisha, 2013). The leadership at all levels of an organisation may adopt various strategies to eradicate resistance to change initiative efforts. Clear and transparent communication is essential to:

- Address concerns, provide information, and build trust, to increase ownership and buy-in,
- To engage employees in the change process through various communication channels such as workshops, focus groups, or task forces.
- Highlight the benefits of the change, such as improved service delivery of essential services to unserved communities, improved efficiency, better work-life balance, or increased job opportunities.
- Identify and address specific concerns and fears by providing reassurance and support.
- Offer training and support to help employees adapt and build new skills.
- Celebrate small victories along the way to demonstrate progress and build momentum.

Leadership should model the behavior they expect from others, demonstrate a commitment to change, encourage others to do the same, and regularly monitor progress and adjust the change plan to ensure successful implementation.

Consequently, resistance to change is an inherent aspect of organisational transformation. Organisational leadership increases the likelihood of successfully instituting organisational change by comprehending the motivating factors behind employees' resistance to change and implementing effective strategies to mitigate this resistance. It achieves lasting positive results (Gronvad et al., 2023). Effective communication and change management are critical to mitigating employee resistance and ensuring a smooth transition. This study examines the change management methods and investigates how effective communication strategies can be employed to manage employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. In this way, the context of the study is uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility, with a head office situated in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, which provides bulk potable water and sanitation services to its customers within the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Chapter One presents the background of the study as well as research problem, research objectives and research question. Thereafter, the chapter shifts to focus on the motivation and significance of the qualitative study and the delimitation and outline of the chapters in this thesis before ending with a chapter summary.

1.2 Background of the study

Water services encompass the provision of water supply, sanitation, and wastewater management, which includes regional and local water systems, on-site sanitation facilities, and the collection and treatment of wastewater (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The primary entities responsible for delivering these services are the Department of Water Affairs, water boards, and municipalities (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Water boards in South Africa are State-Owned Entities that provide bulk water services to Water Services Authorities (WSAs) and retail water services on behalf of these authorities. Water Boards in South Africa are public entities established under the Water Services Act (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). They are overseen by the Minister of Water and Sanitation, who serves as shareholder and executive authority. Twelve Water Boards operate across South Africa (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022).

uMngeni-uThukela Water is a state-owned entity (SOE) and a water board that was established in 1974 and effectively from the 1st of July 2023, operates under its current name after the incorporation of uMhlathuze Water into Umgeni Water. The entity provides water and related services to other water services institutions and other customers in its gazetted service area of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Figure 1: (uMngeni-uThukela Corporate Plan 2024/26-2028/29). The organisation complies with

several laws, including the Public Finance Management Act (Act 1 of 1999), the Water Services Act (Act 108 of 1997), and others; hence, it is classified as a National Government Business Enterprise. The Board (Accounting Authority), its members, the Chairperson of the Board, and the Chief Executive all report directly to the Department of Water and Sanitation (uMngeni-uThukela Corporate Plan 2024/26-2028/29). The two water boards in KwaZulu-Natal Province have their supply areas gazetted as KwaZulu-Natal. (Figure 1.1). Umgeni Water annual report (2020-2021).

Regional Water Utility KwaZulu-Natal as Gazetted Supply Area

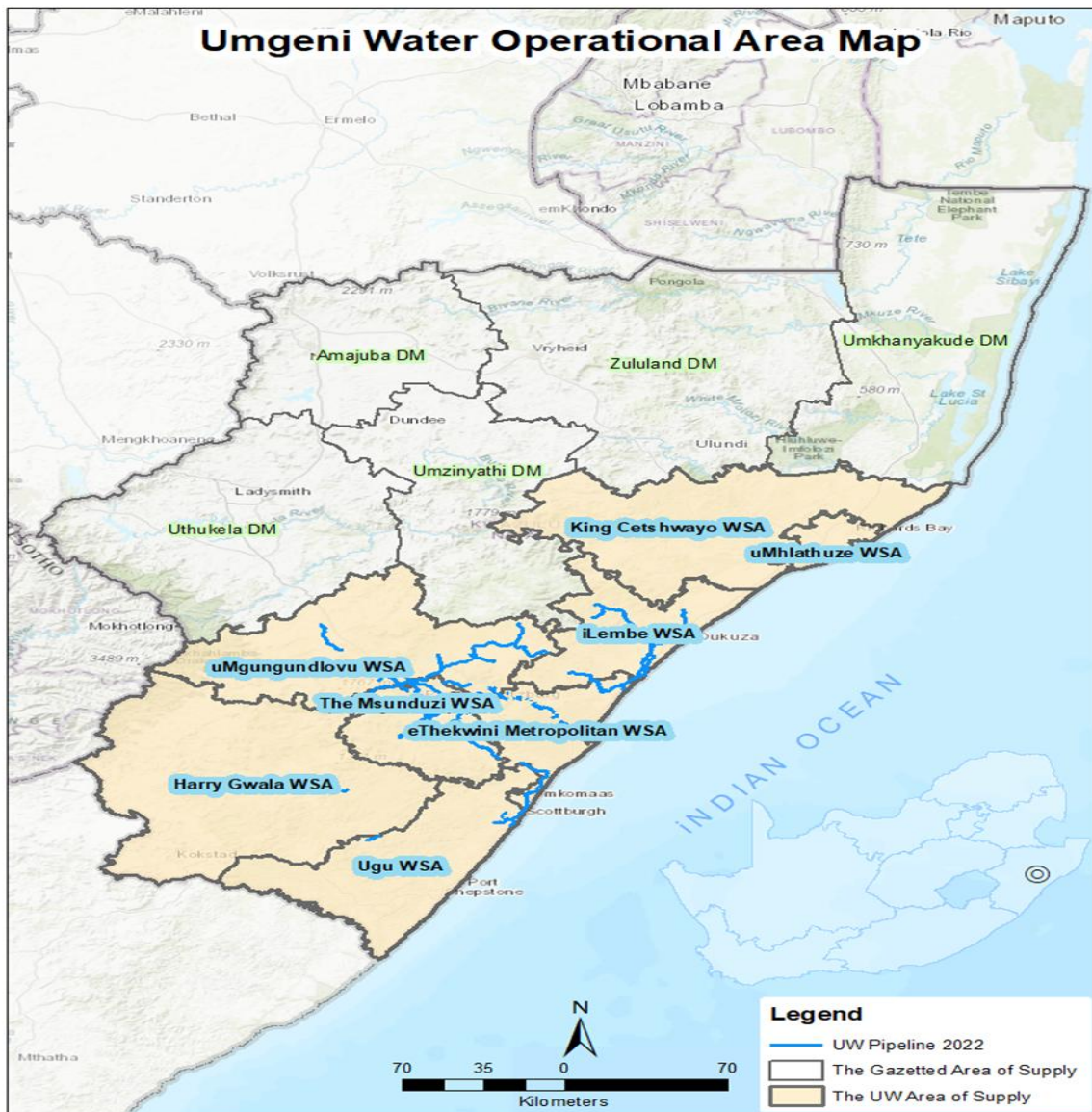


Figure 1.1: Operational of water boards under study has been augmented into the Regional Water Utility

Source: Umgeni Water Annual report (2022:3)

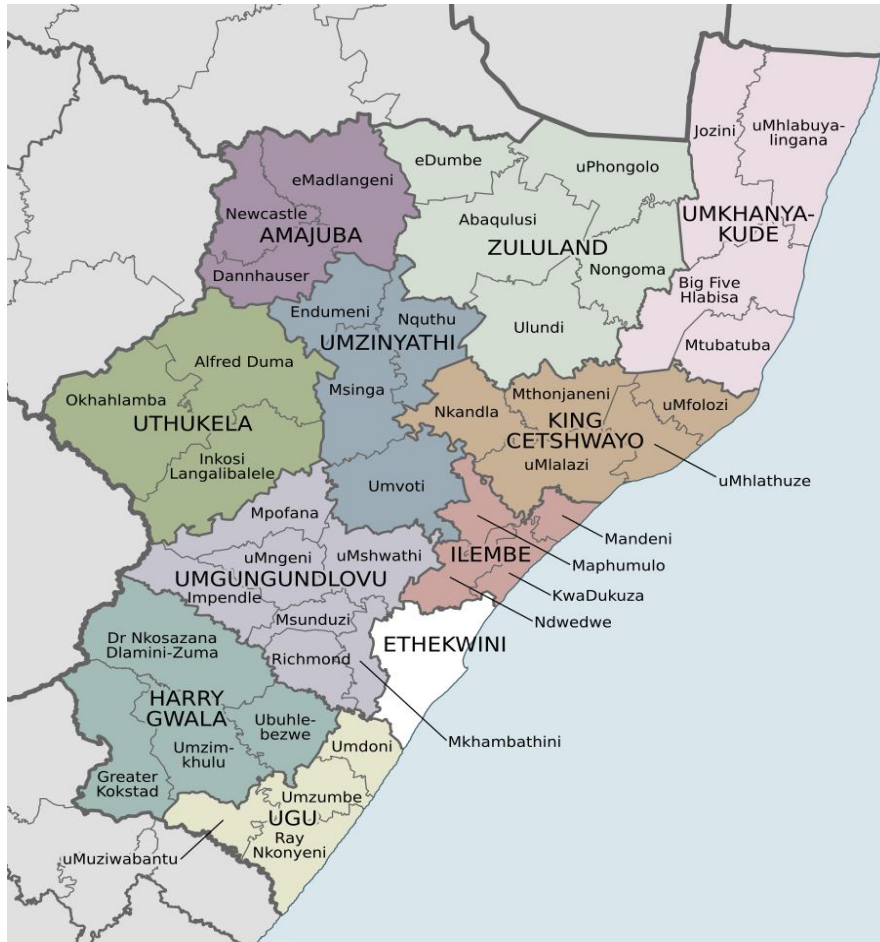


Figure 1.2 : Total supply serviced by the Regional Water Utility

Source: 2022, Report on the Reconfiguration of Umgeni and uMhlathuze Water Boards

The South African water sector is currently confronting a multitude of challenges, including inefficiencies, funding constraints, and a shortage of skilled personnel. These issues have necessitated reforms and the establishment of Regional Water Utilities (RWUs). Remarkably, South Africa is not isolated in this struggle; numerous European and African nations have encountered similar challenges, prompting significant reforms within their own water sectors. In Europe, the water sector in England and Wales faced considerable difficulties during the 1980s, leading to the implementation of the Water Act 1989. This legislation privatised the industry and established independent water companies, ultimately aiming to enhance efficiency and increase investment in infrastructure (OFWAT, 2020). A parallel example can be observed in France, where reforms in the 1990s aimed to inject competition into the water sector and improve overall efficiency (French Ministry of Ecology and Energy, 2020).

In the African context, Ghana’s water sector underwent significant reform in the 1990s with the intent of encouraging private sector participation and bolstering efficiency. This led to the creation of the Ghana Water Company Limited, responsible for providing water services in urban areas (Ghana Water

Company Limited, 2020). Similarly, Kenya initiated reforms in the 2000s, implementing a devolved approach to water management that resulted in the establishment of county water companies tasked with enhancing service delivery in rural areas (Kenya Ministry of Water and Sanitation, 2020). Another noteworthy instance can be found in Nigeria, where the government introduced the National Water Resources Master Plan, aiming to improve nationwide water supply, sanitation, and hygiene services (Nigerian Ministry of Water Resources, 2020). In South Africa, the government's reforms aimed at consolidating various Water Boards into larger RWUs echo these efforts found in both European and African contexts (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). The objective of these reforms is to foster improved efficiency, service delivery, and the attraction and retention of skilled personnel (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). The establishment of RWUs is envisioned as a critical step toward enhancing the management of bulk water and wastewater infrastructure while providing necessary services to municipalities and industries at a larger scale (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). In South Africa, water boards provide bulk water services to municipalities and other bulk water consumers. Their primary functions include bulk water supply, which entails the provision of raw water from sources such as rivers, dams, and aquifers to municipalities and industries; treating wastewater from municipalities and industries to prevent pollution and maintain environmental health; and distributing treated water to households, industries, and other consumers (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). Water Boards also manage water resources, including monitoring water levels, flow rates, and water quality. The Water Boards faced several challenges that led to reforms and the establishment of Regional Water Utilities (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). There were many small-scale Water Boards, which led to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts. They faced funding constraints, which limited their ability to invest in new infrastructure and maintain existing facilities. The Water Boards struggled to attract and retain skilled staff, leading to a shortage of specialised skills (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). They operated independently, leading to inefficiencies in operations and maintenance, limited economies of scale, and poor service delivery. KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Water and Sanitation (2023) faces significant challenges, including rapid population growth, increasing demand for water, a critical need for infrastructure rehabilitation, widespread backlogs in water and sanitation access, and high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly in rural areas. These factors underscore the urgent necessity for affordable water and sanitation services (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022).

In light of the above challenges experienced by the Water Boards in South Africa, the South African government introduced water sector reforms to consolidate the Water Boards into larger Regional Water

Utilities (RWUs). The reforms aimed to improve efficiency and economies of scale, enhance service delivery, improve funding options, attract and retain skilled staff, and strengthen water resources management (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). The reforms aimed to create nine Regional Water Utilities, each responsible for managing regional bulk water and wastewater infrastructure. The RWUs would also provide services to municipalities and industries on a bulk scale while supporting local communities by directly providing services or contractual agreements with municipalities (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). Establishing Regional Water Utilities was seen as a critical step toward improving the efficiency and effectiveness of water services in South Africa (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The Department of Water and Sanitation is a sector leader responsible for policy development, regulation, monitoring, and support functions. The Minister has played a crucial role in forming the RWU in KwaZulu-Natal (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). The goal is to merge Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards into a single, more effective regional water utility called uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility to provide comprehensive and sustainable "wall-to-wall" water service coverage in the region (refer to Figure 2) (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The legislative and policy framework guides and aligns with regional water utilities' strategic goals, prioritising the reliable, sustainable, and effective provision of water services. The following laws and policies are the foundation for this response:

Constitution: The study on change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal is grounded in several key constitutional and legislative principles. Access to water is recognised as a fundamental right in the South African Constitution, which aims to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Specifically, Section 27 of the Bill of Rights guarantees every individual's right to sufficient food and water, highlighting the critical importance of water access. The reconfiguration of the water board to a regional water utility is governed by various legislative and policy guidelines intended to enhance service delivery to the community (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The National Water Act 108 of 1993 governs the operations of water boards, covering the abstraction of water from natural sources such as rivers, streams, and dams as well as the discharge of treated wastewater. The Act prioritizes cooperative governance and institutional frameworks for effective water resource planning and management. These principles are vital for developing Water Services Development Plans and Business Plans, ensuring the efficient delivery of water services to

communities. In the context of transforming the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, the Act will facilitate the integration of operations, thereby enhancing collaborative management and service delivery improvements (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

National Development Plan -Vision 2030- The reconfiguration of the Umgeni and uMhlathuze Water Boards into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal is aimed at enhancing water service delivery in alignment with South Africa's National Development Plan Vision 2030. This initiative aspires to provide affordable and safe drinking water for all citizens. Local governments will oversee water services, while the regional utility will support municipalities with limited resources. The move addresses inefficiencies in water provision and complies with legislative frameworks that protect the constitutional right to water, ultimately aiming to improve both access to and quality of water services in the region (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – South Africa as a member of the United Nations is dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 6, which aims to ensure universal access to clean water and sanitation. In light of the reconfiguration of the water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, this commitment underscores the necessity of addressing challenges related to water availability and reliability. The objective is to provide consistently managed water supply services to all residents in the region, ensuring fair access to this vital resource (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

Institutional Realignment Report - The Institutional Realignment and Reform (IRR) project has recommended the establishment of a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal to guide water sector reform in South Africa. This utility is responsible for managing regional water infrastructure, encompassing financing, project development, operations, and maintenance. In addition, it manages local infrastructure, traditionally the purview of municipalities and water user associations for both potable and non-potable water. Furthermore, the regional water utility provides capacity-building services for low-capacity municipalities, offers ad hoc interventions, and assists catchment management agencies (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy - The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Growth and Development Strategy acknowledges progress in providing basic water services while recognising ongoing challenges that must be addressed for sustainable development in urban and rural areas. Priority 5 of the strategy focuses on spatial integration, human settlements, and local governance, establishing

clear targets for reliable essential service delivery, particularly pertaining to water services. It emphasises the necessity to refurbish water-related projects to enhance the functionality and regulatory compliance of water treatment facilities, alongside coordinated evaluations of wastewater treatment to ensure adherence to Green Drop Regulations. This strategic framework supports the transformation of the water board into a regional water utility, aimed at improving service delivery and addressing the needs of unserved communities (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

KwaZulu-Natal- Provincial Water Services master plan - The KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Water Services Master Plan outlines a strategy for transforming the existing water board into a regional water utility. It assesses the current status of water services in the province, highlighting issues surrounding access to water supply and sanitation. While some regions do receive water services, significant inefficiencies in service delivery persist. The proposed regional water board seeks to address the challenges and concerns identified in the master plan (Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

On June 13, 2023, the Minister of Water and Sanitation issued three gazette notices, which were published on June 19, 2023, to initiate the disestablishment process of certain water management entities. These changes took effect from July 1, 2023, and include the renaming of "Umgeni Water" to "uMngeni-uThukela Water (Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The disestablishment of uMhlathuze Water, with all staff, assets, and liabilities transferred to uMngeni-uThukela Water. The boundaries of Umgeni Water have been expanded to include those of uMhlathuze Water. These modifications contribute to the reconfiguration of the regional water board in KwaZulu-Natal, which is founded on four central pillars: scope, scale, process, and governance (Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The regional water utility is responsible for the abstraction and transport of raw water, water treatment, and the distribution of potable drinking water.

Furthermore, wastewater sanitation services encompass the collection, transportation, and treatment of sewage. The scale pillar delineates the geographic scope of the regional water utility, which encompasses areas served by the 14 Water Service Authorities (WSAs) in KwaZulu-Natal. It also identifies the primary schemes for water supply and sanitation services within these regions. The current landscape of water service delivery remains marred by historical inequalities, leaving millions of individuals without access to conventional water supply systems or safe drinking water (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). The regional water utility aims to tackle water-related challenges in KwaZulu-Natal by ensuring equitable access to water and wastewater services, ultimately striving for comprehensive "wall-to-wall" coverage. Every household should have access to clean drinking, cooking, and hygiene water. Every business ought to have sufficient water for operational needs and sanitary facilities (Prins, Etale, Ablo,

& Thatcher, 2022). Every community must have access to reliable water supply and wastewater management services (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Thus, the objective is to achieve universal access to water and sanitation services, thereby eliminating inequalities and guaranteeing that all residents of KwaZulu-Natal enjoy equal access to this essential service (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The water sector in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, has undergone significant changes in recent years, shifting from a traditional water board model to a regional water utility. This transformation has aimed to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of water service delivery. However, such changes often encounter resistance from employees who may need more clarification about the impact on their roles, responsibilities, and prospects (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Effective change management is crucial to ensuring the successful reconfiguration of an organisation. It involves a structured approach to planning, implementing, and monitoring changes to minimise disruption and maximise benefits. In the context of the water sector, change management is critical to ensure that employees are equipped to adapt to new systems, processes, and technologies (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The research objectives of this qualitative study are to examine the change management methods, identify the communication channels used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, and identify the root causes of employees' resistance to change. The complexity and magnitude of the planned organisational changes involved underscore the need for effective change management in the water sector. Water utilities are critical infrastructure providers that require not only highly trained and skilled personnel to operate and maintain complex systems but also water-related infrastructure and organisational architecture (e.g., strategy, structure, systems, shared values, skills, staff, leadership style). Any disruptions or inefficiencies in the organisational architecture of a water utility can significantly affect public health, environmental sustainability, and economic development (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

The question of how change management was implemented in the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal is interesting, mindful that such change seeks to achieve a variety of outcomes such as improved service delivery, increased efficiency, and better governance. More importantly, organisational reconfiguration is transformational as it consolidates resources, reduces costs, and enhances customer service through improved maintenance and repair services. However, such changes often face resistance from employees concerned about job security, role

changes, and potential losses of benefits. Resistance can manifest in various forms, including lack of cooperation, absenteeism, and turnover (Grønvaad, Abildgaard & Aust, 2024; Ali-Alwal, 2019). If not managed effectively, employee resistance can hinder the success of planned organisational change initiatives. As such, it is imperative that organisations adopt effective change management strategies that engage employees at all levels to mitigate resistance and ensure successful reconfiguration. In this regard, creating a shared understanding of the reasons for change, communicating effectively with employees, and providing training and support to equip employees with new skills and knowledge are important for change readiness (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

Various scholars such as Kotter (1996), Beer and Nohria (2000), Kahn (2018), Armenakis, Harris, and Field (1999), and Kotter and Cohen (2002) suggest that effective change management requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates multiple elements, including communication, training, engagement, and leadership. For example, communication is a critical component of change management at the organisational level as it helps to create a shared understanding of the reasons for change and ensures that employees are informed about the impact on their roles and responsibilities (Kotter, 1996; Beer & Nohria, 2000). Additionally, leadership support and capacity-building initiatives are essential for equipping employees with new skills and knowledge required for successful change implementation (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders play a crucial role in leading change by providing clear direction, setting expectations, and demonstrating commitment to the transformation (Kotter, 1996; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kahn, 2018). Engagement is another critical aspect of change management, as it helps to build trust and foster a sense of ownership among employees (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). This qualitative study investigates the change management methods, communication channels used, and the root cause of employee resistance and how this could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.3 Problem Statement

Effective management of change in the water sector is critical as water is central to human needs, equitable growth, and development, yet little scholarly research has been conducted to understand change management methods and communication channels and evaluate the root causes of employees resistance to the change process during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. As highlighted earlier, water is one of the critical drivers of sustainable economic growth through contribution to activities such as agriculture, manufacturing, mines, energy, and transport (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Water also contributes to social activities such as the productive use of water within households (poverty alleviation), water for drinking, sanitation, and health (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane

& Mazibuko, 2022). Therefore, water should be managed in a manner that is sensitive to and supportive of the many competing demands placed on it. South Africa's water scarcity and inadequate sanitation infrastructure are significant obstacles to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal six, which aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. The country's semi-arid climate, growing population, and industrialisation have created a precarious situation, with urban water demand expected to surpass supply by 2030. Climate change predictions indicate that South Africa will receive less rainfall than the global average, exacerbating the problem (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022).

Water boards play a crucial role in the water delivery value chain, primarily responsible for purifying raw water from sources, supplying portable water to municipalities, and ensuring public access to water services (Department of Water and Sanitation, 2023; South African Human Rights Commission, 2022; Ngubane & Mazibuko, 2022). Against this backdrop, the Department of Water and Sanitation has embarked on a plan to reconfigure the Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) to improve water service governance and institutional performance (Hellberg, 2020; Serdeczny, Adams, Baarsch, Coumou, Robinson, Hare, Schaeffer, Perrette, & Reinhardt, 2019).

Organisational change is a complex process involving multiple factors, stakeholders, and dynamics, making it challenging to manage and implement (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, & Regner, 2017). Change affects various aspects and levels of the organisation, including people, processes, and systems. People are a critical component of any organisation, and change requires transforming their behaviours, attitudes, and values to align with the desired outcome. Change also requires transforming processes to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, quality, and systems to support the new processes and outcomes. Cook, Mankin, and Anchukaitis (2018) highlight the need for long-term planning to ensure water security, especially in water-stressed areas. Matchaya, Nhamo, Nhlengethwa, and Nhemachena (2019) emphasise the importance of addressing inequities in access to water and sanitation.

While the reconfiguration of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards is a crucial step towards achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 and ensuring the provision of quality water for human health, economic development, and constitutional rights in South Africa, scholars have not examined change management during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. In this light, the current study is a response to the call for exploratory qualitative study to fill this scholarly gap by uncovering the nature of change management methods and communicational channels and gaining insights into the root causes of employees' resistance and their respective solutions necessary to ensure an effective and efficient change process during the reconfiguration of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards into a uMngeni-uThukela regional

water utility in KwaZulu-Natal according to executive committee members, middle managers, employees, and members of organised labour.

1.4 Research objectives

The main research objective of this exploratory qualitative study is to examine change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The specific research objectives are outlined below:

1. To understand change management methods to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.
2. To identify communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.
3. To evaluate the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

1.5 Research questions

Based on the above research objectives, the following were the relevant research questions:

1. What change management methods were used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?
2. What communication channels, for clarity of messaging that were used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?
3. What were the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process, and how could these have been avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility?

1.6 Motivation of the study

This exploratory qualitative study is motivated by three important aspects. The first is the research gaps, which reveal the need to examine the management of change in the Water Board in KwaZulu-Natal. There has not been any study that qualitatively focuses on examining change management methods, effective communication channels for clarity of messaging during the change at an organisational level, and the root cause of employees' resistance to transformation efforts, especially at the Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Exploratory research investigates research questions that have not previously been studied in depth or is used when the data collection process is challenging for some reason. As such, this exploratory qualitative study has the potential to offer new insights to managers, especially

in the water sector, regarding how to implement complex change by using communication to ensure change readiness, minimal disruption, and employee resistance. The readiness for change refers to the organisation's willingness and ability to adapt to new circumstances, processes, or technologies. It is a critical factor in determining the success of change initiatives. A high level of readiness for change is often characterised by a clear understanding of the reasons for change and the desired outcomes (Johnson et al., 2017).

Second, the exploratory qualitative study is also motivated by the need to understand the nature of employee resistance to reconfiguration process and outcome and how to develop managers in the water sector capable of executing effective and efficient planned organisation change (Bhavani, Mahalakshmi, 2023).

Lastly, the study is motivated to find answers to the question of what change management methods and communication channels were used in reconfiguring the water boards into a regional water utility in KwaZulu Natal. Elving (2015) argues that effective communication fosters a sense of community, helping employees feel connected and committed to the organisation during times of change. Effective communication is crucial for successfully implementing change, as it serves as a tool for announcing, explaining, and preparing people for it. Clarity on the nature and use of communication channels in executing organisational change in the water sector is one of the motivations of this study.

The qualitative seeks to understand the interface between change, the change management method adopted to guide the change process, the communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility, and the root causes of employees resistance to the change process and how these could have been avoided during the transition process.

1.7 Significance of the study

This exploratory qualitative study is significant to managers, employees, citizens, scholars and policy makers of change management in the water services sector in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. First, the study is significant to managers because it provides them with critical insights into the nature and complexity of planned organisation reconfiguration and a critical understanding of how change management methods and communication channels were effectively or ineffectively used in the planned organisational reconfiguration of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards into uMngeni-uThukela regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

Second, this exploratory qualitative study is significant to the leadership of uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility at all levels, from the executives, middle management, employees, and organised labour representatives, as it unveils the nature of employee resistance to change and potential solution if an organisation is to pursue reconfiguration smoothly, effectively, and efficiently. Effective change

management is a cornerstone of smooth change at an organisational level, as it is a process of planning, implementing, and monitoring changes within an organisation to ensure minimal disruption to business operations and maximise the chances of successful transformation. Change management involves a structured approach to managing change's people, processes, and technology aspects. It aims to mitigate the negative impacts of change, such as resistance to change, and ensure that employees are equipped to adapt to the new circumstances. Effective change management helps organisations achieve their business goals by ensuring employees can adapt to the new state and continue operating effectively. It is arguable that this study is also significant to citizens who may benefit from the outcomes of a successful re-configuration of the previous two water boards into the new organisation known as uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility.

Thirdly, this exploratory qualitative study is significant to scholars of planned organisational change management as it has revealed not only the multi-level nature of change but also context-specific critical success factors that should be considered during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. While we know much about organisational reconfiguration in general, situating this concept within the water sector is critical for research on planned, large, and complex organisational change in water service providers in South Africa. Academics employ exploratory research to investigate a research question when there is limited knowledge or understanding of the topic or phenomenon under study. Last but not least, this exploratory qualitative study is significant to scholars of planned organisational change management as it has revealed not only the multi-level nature of change but also context-specific critical success factors that should be considered during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. While we know much about organisational reconfiguration in general, situating this concept within the water sector is critical for research on planned, large, and complex organisational change in water service providers in South Africa. Academics employ exploratory research to investigate a research question when there is limited knowledge or understanding of the topic or phenomenon under study.

Last but not least, the significance of this study extends to policymakers in South Africa, as it provides empirical evidence and practical recommendations that can inform policy decisions regarding organisational reform in the water services sector. By understanding the dynamics of change management and the experiences of employees during this process, policymakers may develop frameworks and strategies that ensure more effective governance and improved service delivery in water management. This study highlights the necessity of considering the socio-political context in which such reforms occur, guiding policymakers in creating a more resilient and responsive water services sector that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This study is delimited in four keyways. The first delimitation issue of this study is that it is purely qualitative and exploratory in nature because it focuses on an area that has been understudied, and there is limited research on how change management actually unfolded at uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility. The exploratory study focuses on examining three interrelated aspects of change management, namely change methods, communication channels, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Second, the study seeks to get integrative and internal views on the organisational reconfiguration, as such only focuses on the perspectives of executive members, middle managers, employees, and organised labour at uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility. Employees working at the time when the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility occurred participated in this study as they had an insight into how change was communicated, unfolded, and implemented, while those employees who were on leave were excluded due to a lack of lived experience of this change. External views of consultants, government officials, and water-related regulators were deliberately excluded in this study, which exclusively focused on internal stakeholders.

Third, the study theoretical delimitation establishes the research boundaries, focusing exclusively on change management processes relevant to the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The research primarily employs established frameworks and theories in change management, specifically focusing on three key organisational change models: Kurt Lewin's Three-Step change management model, Kotter Eight-Step Change management model, and Prosci's ADKAR change management method. These models emphasise critical aspects of organisational change, such as effective communication, strong leadership, and active employee engagement. While acknowledging the value of other perspectives, such as emergent theories and complexity theory, the study intentionally excludes them to maintain a focused examination of structured models that offer practical guidance for practitioners involved in the change initiative. This approach ensures a clear and concise analysis of the change management process within the specific context of the Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Lastly, the delimitation issue relates to geographical choice, as two water boards in KwaZulu-Natal are operated by the Department of Water and Sanitation in South Africa. The current study is confined to the Regional Water Utility of the uMngeni-uThukela Water Board, which came into effect as a result of the disestablishment of the uMhlathuze Water Board and the extension of Umgeni Water boundaries. The head office of the newly formed Regional Water Utility is based in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Other water boards that also underwent organisational reconfiguration in South Africa are not part of this exploratory qualitative study.

1.9 Thesis structure

This exploratory qualitative study comprises six chapters, which are outlined below:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research and provides an understanding of the study's background, motivation, problem statement, key questions, and objectives in this exploratory study, which examines the management of change from a water board into a regional water utility in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, according to the views of executive members, middle managers, employees, and organised labour.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter provides a review of the pertinent literature related to the study. It defines key concepts and traces literature on change and change management at an organisational level, paying much attention to the Water Boards as South African government entities. The chapter also discusses the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The chapter presents the methodological processes used in conducting the study. It discusses the research design, approach, and instruments used in collecting the data. The presentation and analysis of the research findings reflect the data analysis approach.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

The chapter presents and analyses the critical findings gleaned from the participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The chapter offers a detailed discussion of the findings. It reflects on the interactions between the literature, theory, and the participants' views. It draws conclusions and implications from the results of the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The chapter concludes the research. It presents the summary of findings and chapters and offers recommendations that can be utilised to address the challenges and guide future studies.

1.10 Chapter summary

Chapter One embarked upon a journey into the intricate landscape of change management within the water sector, setting the stage for a comprehensive investigation into the transformation of KwaZulu-Natal's water services towards a regional utility model. This exploratory, qualitative study delved into the multifaceted nature of organisational change as South Africa's water industry underwent a significant shift. The chapter provided a foundational understanding of change management principles and their application within the context of KwaZulu-Natal's evolving water services landscape.

The chapter commenced with a summary of the history of water service delivery in KwaZulu-Natal province, highlighting changes brought about by population expansion, climate change, and the increasing demand for improved service delivery. It further outlined the challenges facing the water industry, including scarce water resources, deteriorating infrastructure, and the significant impact of climate change on water supplies. The chapter delved into the important regulatory changes that had influenced the water industry since the end of apartheid, emphasising key pieces of legislation such as the KwaZulu-Natal Water Services Act and the National Water Act.

The reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility was presented as a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing service delivery, efficiency, and governance within the region. The discussion highlighted that staff members' concerns regarding job security, their new roles, and their lack of participation in the change process often led to resistance to organisational change during complex transformations. Given the critical importance of employee buy-in and engagement for successful change, the significance of effective communication and proactive management strategies to mitigate resistance was underlined.

The chapter then delved deeper into the study's focus on the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility, its objectives, and the underlying problem statement, which underscored the dearth of empirical research on change management practices within this specific context. Specifically, the study sought to examine the change management methodologies employed, the communication channels utilised, and the root causes of employee resistance to the reconfiguration process. The research questions designed to guide the investigation were presented, along with a rationale for the study's motivation and significance to various stakeholders, including managers, employees, and scholars. The study's delimitations were described, outlining its qualitative and exploratory focus, emphasising the target group of internal stakeholders, the study theoretical delamination established the research boundaries and the geographic boundaries of the two water boards that formed part of the utility. The chapter concluded with a summary of the research structure and the contents of the subsequent chapters. The chapter two will examines the theoretical framework and empirical research surrounding change management to understand the change management methods, communication of change and communication channels, nature of resistance to change, and how it is managed to ensure effective change management processes and achieve desired outcomes of planned strategic change in an organisation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review relevant literature on change management to understand the change management methods, communication of change and communication channels, nature of resistance to change, and how it is managed to ensure effective change management processes and achieve desired outcomes of planned strategic change in an organisation. In this regard, the chapter also delves into the communication channels that are utilised to clarify messages during the change process, particularly those related to organisational reconfiguration. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the concept of employees' resistance to change management efforts and how these could be overcome during complex planned organisational change in an organisation. It begins by defining the concept of change and examining its various types before shifting to change context, specifically the diagnosis of change, the dynamics of contextual factors that shape change implementation options, as evident in the change kaleidoscope, and also the driving and restraining forces of change elaborated in forcefield analysis. Thereafter, the chapter focuses on the meaning of change management, different levels where change occurs, and change objectives before discussing change communication plan, communication channel, and mix. Subsequently, the chapter discusses key change management models before focusing on previous research on change management and providing a chapter summary.

2.2 Unpacking the concept of change and types of change

Change in an organisation refers to transforming or modifying the organisation's culture, structure, processes, systems, or aspects of its architecture to better achieve a specific goal or objective. Thus, change is sometimes about an alteration, adjustment, or modification to make something work better. Various scholars, such as Kotler and Keller (2021) and Armenakis and Harris (2020), have defined the concept of change in different ways. For instance, Kumarasinghe and Dilan (2021) characterise change as a fundamental concept in organisational studies, frequently marked by the introduction of new practices, technologies, or structures that transform an organisation's operations. Introducing new practices can change organisational culture, values, and behaviour as employees adapt to new norms and expectations. Introducing new practices, technologies, or structures can have positive and negative outcomes for organisations (Armenakis & Harris, 2020; Klein & Knight, 2005; Kotter, Brown, Martin, & Rigby 2021). Positive outcomes of change include increased efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. Adverse outcomes related to change include resistance, job losses, and disruption to normal operations (Hiatt, 2006). However, organisations must manage change effectively to minimise disruptions and maximise benefits.

Transformational change is a powerful tool for making significant and lasting organisational changes. Boonstra (2022) defines change as a complex, multifaceted process that involves the transformation of an organisation's people, processes, and systems to achieve a desired outcome. Different types of transformational change and structural transformation exist, such as mergers, acquisitions, or reorganisations. Cultural transformation is exemplified by adopting a new mission statement or changing employee behaviour (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Systemic transformation may entail implementing a new software system or updating business processes. Value-based transformation is evident in adopting a new strategy or focusing on sustainability (Todnem By, 2005; Hughes, 2022; Musaigwa, 2023). Change is a complex process involving multiple factors, stakeholders, and dynamics, making it challenging to manage and implement. Change affects various aspects of the organisation, including people, processes, and systems (Todnem By, 2005; Hughes, 2022; Musaigwa, 2023). People are a critical component of any organisation, and change requires transforming their behaviours, attitudes, and values to align with the desired outcome. Leadership should provide training, development, and communication initiatives to ensure employees are equipped to adapt to new processes, systems, and technologies.

Kotter (2019) states that change is a natural part of organisational life, and internal or external factors, such as technological advancements, shifts in market demand, or changes in leadership, can trigger it. Thus, organisations must adapt and respond to change triggers to remain competitive and successful. Adaptation ensures that the organisation's internal and external environment fits its goals and objectives well. Adaptation requires flexibility and resilience, as organisations must be able to respond to changing circumstances and adapt to new situations. Change is an evolutionary process, as organisations must continually adapt to changes in their internal and external environment (Senge, 2016). Hence, change management is essential to ensure organisations can effectively manage and implement change initiatives. Effective change management involves communication, stakeholder engagement, and training to ensure that employees are equipped to adapt to new situations.

Adaptation is a critical component of organisational change, as it allows organisations to respond effectively to changing circumstances and achieve their goals and objectives (Khaw, Alnoor, AL-Abrow, Chew, Sadaa, Abbas & Khattak, 2022). Increased competitiveness, enhanced employee engagement, and better decision-making are benefits of organisation adaptation. While adapting to change, organisations experience resistance to change and need more resources, such as money, time, and expertise, to effectively adapt to change. Uncertainty and risk may be prevalent as the organisation needs to learn how to respond to changing circumstances (Albrecht, Connaughton, & Leiter, 2022). An organisation that is adapting to a change process can respond quickly to changing circumstances. An organisation must learn from its experiences and adapt accordingly. Adaptation can lead to enhanced employee engagement, as employees are more likely to be invested in the organisation's success when

involved in the adaptation process. Improved customer satisfaction means an organisation is better equipped to meet changing customer needs and expectations.

Kotter (1996), Cameron and Green (2009), Olafenwa, Asikhia, Nneji and Owoeye, (2021) and Hayes (2014) state that change is a critical concept in organisational theory, and it involves the deliberate attempt to *modify* an organisation's strategy or structure, such as reorganising departments, creating new roles, or changing reporting lines or culture, such as adopting a new set of values or norms to achieve a specific goal or objective. Change can involve modifying an organisation's strategy, such as shifting its focus from one product to another or adjusting its pricing strategy. Organisations can better plan and manage change initiatives to achieve their desired outcomes by understanding change's deliberate and intentional nature.

Doe and Smith (2015) say change is a critical concept in strategic management, and it involves transforming an organisation's strategy, structure, or resources to achieve a competitive advantage. Organisational leadership must understand the different types of change within an organisation; organisations can better plan and manage change initiatives to achieve their desired outcomes. Todned (2005) states that various types of change in an organisation involve changing the organisation's overall strategy or direction in response to changing market conditions or stakeholder needs—structural change involves changing the organisation's internal structure or hierarchy, such as restructuring or reorganising departments. Cultural change involves changing the organisation's culture or values, such as promoting a more agile or innovative work environment. Technological change involves implementing new technologies or systems to improve efficiency, productivity, or customer satisfaction. Understanding different types of change is essential as it enables organisations to develop effective change management strategies, minimise resistance, achieve desired outcomes, enhance employee engagement, build trust, improve communication, reduce uncertainty, enhance learning and development, improve leadership, and enhance organisational agility. Strategic (Doe & Smith, 2015).

Change is described as the *transition* to a new or different situation or state of affairs, implying the shedding off of the status quo for something new or unusual (Kotter, 1996). Organisations need to identify where they need to be in the future and how to manage the changes required to get there. Organisations are subject to many pressures for change due to the complexity of events and the rapidity of technologies in the environment, which come from external sources like technology and government, as well as internal sources such as shareholders and employees (Aninkan, 2018). During transitional periods in business, organisations change from the initial position to the final stage.

In a slightly different vein, the notion of organisational change spectrum measures the magnitude of change in the organisation, depicting adaptive change on one end of the spectrum and transformational change on the other (Williams & Lewis, 2019). Concisely, adaptive changes are small, incremental

adjustments that organisations and managers make to adapt to daily, weekly, and monthly business challenges (e.g., adding a new payment option for customers who complete an order online; adding a new page to an existing website). Change is viewed as an incremental process, where each step is built upon previous ones gradually and incrementally (Burke, 2017). Each step builds on the previous one, and the process is designed to achieve a specific goal or outcome (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Adaptive change requires learning, creativity, and collaboration to find potential long-term solutions. The role of these changes is to fine-tune existing processes, products, and company culture rather than fundamentally change the organisation as a whole. Transformational change fundamentally changes the organisation (Burnes, 2004).

Transformational change profoundly alters the condition, nature, or character of something. Transformational change refers to changes that are typically much grander in scope than incremental, adaptive changes (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). Transformational change refers to a dramatic evolution of some basic structure of the business itself—its strategy, culture, organisation, physical structure, supply chain, or processes. There is also change that falls in between the transformational and adaptive types. While adaptive change happens incrementally over time, transformational change is often sudden and dramatic. Below is Figure 2.1: the view of change from adaptive, transitional, and transformational change.



Figure 2.1: Adaptive, transitional and transformational change

Source: Adaptation from Thornton and Manasfi (2010)

Change is a process, a movement from one state to another; change involves a transition from one state or condition to another (Todnem By, 2005; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). This can be a change from one organisational structure to another, from one business model to another, or from one set of processes to another. The process-orientated approach involves a series of steps, phases, or stages (Hammer & Champy, 1993). Kotter (1996) identifies specific phases or stages of change as unfreezing, changing, and re-freezing. Change can be viewed as a linear process, where each step builds on the previous one predictably and sequentially

(Lewin, 1951). Alternatively, change can be viewed as a non-linear process, where multiple factors and outcomes that influence each step are unpredictable (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1993; Styhre, 2019; Todnem By, 2005; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Change is often context-dependent, meaning that the effectiveness of the process depends on the specific circumstances and environment in which it is being implemented (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Understanding change as a process is crucial for successfully navigating organisational change initiatives (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010). Decision makers' top-level executives, middle managers, and team leaders have the authority and responsibility to make decisions about the change to enable organisations to respond to changing circumstances, create new opportunities, and stay competitive in a rapidly changing world (Todnem By, 2005) and develop innovative solutions to address complex problems or opportunities. Change as creation is often associated with transformational change, which is creative destruction, where old ways of doing things are discarded and replaced with new ones. Change is viewed as either a deliberate, calculated decision made by the organisation to achieve specific goals or as an unavoidable, natural process that occurs in response to external factors and internal pressures (Musaigwa, 2022). In the former approach, change is seen as a strategic and rational process where the organisation intentionally chooses to adapt and improve. In the latter, change is seen as an evolutionary process, where the organisation is forced to adapt to changing circumstances and external pressures, often with resistance from individuals who are reluctant to change their habits and routines (Todnem By, 2005; Cameron & Green, 2020). Change is a continuous process, meaning that it is ongoing and never-ending. Organisations must constantly adapt to changing circumstances to stay ahead of the competition (Musaigwa, 2022). While leadership cannot always predict the future or anticipate specific circumstances, it is better to create an environment that fosters adaptability and resilience (Cameron & Green, 2020). Team dynamics, roles, and interactions significantly impact the change process. Hence, effective teamwork, communication, and collaboration are essential for successful change implementation (Cameron & Green, 2020). Below is Table 2.1, which depicts selected definitions of change and core constitutive elements to enrich conceptual understanding.

Table 2.1: Selected different definitions of change

Author	Definition	Core element
Hubbart (2023)	“Organisational change defined as a process in which an organization alters minor to major structural components to address operational costs, productivity, and/or service quality deficiencies, identify new growth opportunities, or achieve other organizational goals”.	Process-orientated, structural alterations, Purpose-driven, multi-faceted, and goal-orientated
Cameron, & Green (2020)	“Organizational transformation is defined as "the process of fundamentally changing the way an organization operates	Fundamental change, operational processes, value

	and delivers value to its stakeholders, and may require major changes in the way work is done."	delivery, stakeholder focus, dynamic work practices.
Kotter (2019)	"Change is a process that requires a sense of urgency, a guiding coalition, and the development of a vision to follow."	Urgency, coalition, vision
Kotter, Akhtar, & Gupta (2021)	"Change is the strategic process organizations undertake to advance from their current reality to a preferred future state."	Strategic process, current reality, preferred future
Fragouli & Tourlaki (2020)	"Organizational change is a highly complicated psychosocial process which affects individuals' emotions. The change process provokes negative emotions to the individuals like stress, fear, denial, anxiety, cynicism".	Complexity process, psychosocial in nature, negative impact on employees, individual level effect.
Christo & Piller (2024).	"Organizational transformation is defined as "the process of fundamentally changing the way an organization operates and delivers value to its stakeholders, and may require major changes in the way work is done".	Fundamental change, major structural changes, future-oriented, strategic alignment, stakeholder involvement.
Syamsuri, Halim, & Sarkum (2019)	"Organizational transformation is a directed effort in creating a new vision for the organization aimed to responding to the environmental changes or initiate change".	Directed efforts, broader and more impactful, new vision created, triggered by external environment.
Musaigwa (2022)	"Organizational change is an ongoing process that involves strategic modifications made by organizations to respond to external pressures and internal needs, ultimately aimed at enhancing overall performance".	Continuous nature of change, Intentional strategic modifications, adaptation to external pressures and internal needs, Goal of enhancing performance

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

In light of the various definitions discussed, this study adopts Cameron and Green's (2010) definition of change, particularly relevant for this qualitative research focused on the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Their definition of change, which describes it as "the transition from a current state to a desired future state within an organization," aligns well with the aims of this exploratory qualitative study. The investigation into change management methods that facilitate a smooth transition from a water board into a regional water utility is essential. Effective change management involves organising and implementing change management plans designed to mitigate potential causes of employee resistance, enhance employee involvement, and ensure that the organisational change efforts are aligned with the organisation's vision and strategic goals (Musaigwa, 2023).

2.2.1 Types of change

Types of change can be classified based on different criteria (Burnes, 2004; Davenport, 1993). First change is typified by scope, resulting in categories of organisational change, technological change, cultural change, and environmental change. Second, change is typified based on impact. Thus, there is incremental change, operational change, strategic change, and directional change. Third, type of change can be based on cause (Kotter, 1996; Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). In this context, there are four types of changes: incidental, reactive, anticipatory, and planned (Nwachuku, A. (2023; Cummings & Worley, 2005).

Change in the context of organisational change management is a multifaceted concept, with scholars distinguishing between planned and emergent change based on their characteristics, processes, and outcomes (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010). This distinction is crucial because it helps the organisation to understand the nature of the change and develop strategies to manage it effectively. The literature suggests two primary approaches to change management: planned and emergent. According to various authors (Cummings & Huse, 1989; Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992; Lewin's, 1958; Cummings & Huse, 1989; Bamford & Forrester, 2003), the planned change approach, which has dominated the field for the past 50 years, is based on the work of Kurt Lewin and involves a structured process of moving from one fixed state to another through a series of pre-planned steps. This approach recognises that old behaviours must be discarded before adopting new behaviours, and only then can new ones be fully accepted. Planned change is a deliberate and structured approach to implementing new organisational strategies, processes, or structures, typically led by top-down leadership. This approach involves a predetermined plan and is often associated with Lewin's three-stage unfreezing, changing, and re-freezing model. Planned change is essential for organisations to achieve their strategic goals and maintain a sense of direction. It involves deliberate planning, decision-making, and implementation of strategies to achieve specific objectives. Planned change is often necessary for organisations to make significant changes, such as restructuring, downsizing, or implementing new technologies (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010).

While planned change has its supporters, it also has its critics. Garvin (1994) and Bamford & Forrester (2003) argue that planned change is unsuitable for today's fast-paced business environment, where sudden and unpredictable changes are expected. Planned change can be slow and inflexible, making it less effective in dynamic and complex environments. Additionally, it may be prone to inadequate communication about the vision and stakeholder resistance. Schein (1985) and Bamford & Forrester (2003) criticise planned change for its focus on isolated changes rather than radical transformations and for its assumption that everyone within the organisation will work towards the same goal without disagreement. In reality, however, differences of opinion among individuals are inevitable and can lead to challenges in implementing planned change.

The proponents of emergent change argue that the uncertainty of the environment makes planned change impractical. Change might be a more manageable process if organisations operate in stable and predictable environments. However, because organisations are connected to their environment, including internal and external factors, they are influenced by external factors to a certain extent. The extent to which the environment drives changes within an organisation versus the organisation being in control of its own change processes is a question that many researchers on organisational change seem to neglect (Bamford & Forrester, 2003).

A significant development of emergent change emphasises bottom-up action rather than top-down control in commencing and implementing organisational change. The rationale behind this is that the pace of change is so rapid and complex once it occurs that it is impossible for leadership to identify, plan, and implement every action required. Therefore, the responsibility for change becomes more devolved, necessitating significant changes in the roles that leadership plays. They change from being a controller to a facilitator. Pettigrew and Whipp (1993) believe there are no universal rules with regard to leading change. It involves linking action by people at all levels of the business (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Arguably, emergent change is a more spontaneous and adaptive process that emerges naturally within an organisation, acknowledging the unpredictability and flexibility inherent in organisational life. This approach focuses on continuous adjustments, adaptations, and modifications rather than pre-existing plans, leading to significant transformation. Emergent change emphasises the importance of stakeholder involvement, bottom-up problem-solving, and the ability to navigate unexpected challenges and opportunities. It is seen as more effective in modern organisations, where complexity and interdependence are the norm, valuing constant learning, real-time experimentation, and adaptability (Bamford & Forrester, 2003).

Bamford & Forrester (2003) emphasise that emergent change approaches recognise that change is inherently messy and unpredictable and that organisations must be able to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. This approach to organisational change has crucial features that encourage experimentation and innovation, fostering a culture of learning and continuous improvement, building solid relationships and networks within the organisation, and developing capabilities for adaptability and resilience. The strengths of emergent change approaches include greater flexibility and adaptability, increased innovation and creativity, improved collaboration and engagement, and enhanced ability to respond to changing circumstances.

The increasing complexity, interconnectedness, unpredictability, and competitiveness of the business world make it difficult for organisations to achieve stability and succeed. The challenge for decision-makers is balancing the need for planned change with flexibility and agility. This requires a nuanced approach recognising the importance of deliberate planning and rapid adaptation. By adopting a

balanced approach that combines planned and emergent change with flexibility and agility, organisations can better navigate the complexities of the business world and achieve sustained success (Bamford & Forrester, 2003).

2.2.2 The concept of planned emergence

The concept of planned emergence suggests that organisations should adopt a balanced approach that combines the benefits of planned change with the flexibility and adaptability required for success in a rapidly changing world (Burnes, 2004; Cummings, Bridgman & Brown, 2015; Karasvirta & Teerikangas, 2022). This approach acknowledges that organisations are constantly evolving and shaped by intentional decisions and emergent, spontaneous changes (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Özan, Yaraş, & Yıldırım, (2021)Özan, Yaraş, & Yıldırım, (2021)). By combining elements of planned and emergent change, organisations can achieve a balanced approach that addresses their strategic needs and their need for adaptability. This approach recognises that organisations are constantly evolving and shaped by intentional decisions and emergent changes. The concept of organisational becoming highlights the importance of acknowledging the dynamic nature of organisations and the role that both planned and emergent change play in shaping their identity and trajectory. Organisational becoming emphasises the importance of continuous learning, adaptation, and evolution in response to changing circumstances (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Özan, Yaraş, & Yıldırım, 2021; Çakmak, 2023).

Recent research (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Rose & Murphy, 2015) has underscored the necessity for a balanced approach that combines elements of planned and emergent change, referred to as "planned emergence." This paradigm advocates for organisations to adopt a holistic approach that merges deliberate strategies with the adaptability essential to survival in a rapidly evolving environment. At the core of this approach is the concept of organisational becoming, which acknowledges that organisations are in a state of constant evolution, shaped by intentional decisions as well as emergent and spontaneous changes (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Rose & Murphy, 2015; Özan, Yaraş, & Yıldırım, 2021). The planned emergence can be achieved by adopting a hybrid approach combining planning and emergence elements. Organisations can set clear goals and objectives through strategic planning while allowing adaptability and experimentation. Leaders can empower employees to take ownership of their work and make decisions in response to changing circumstances. Organisations can prioritise continuous learning and professional development to stay ahead of the curve. Leaders can foster a culture of innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking to encourage emergent change. By embracing planned emergence, organisations can create a dynamic and adaptive environment that allows them to thrive in a rapidly changing world (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Bamford & Forrester, 2003).

While planned change offers a structured framework for organisational transformation, emergent change provides a more flexible and adaptable approach to navigating the complexities of modern organisational landscapes (Karasvirta & Teerikangas, 2022). However, it is essential to recognise the limitations of planned approaches and consider the potential benefits of emergent change approaches. Organisations can better navigate the complexities of modern business environments by adopting a more adaptive and responsive approach to change (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Bamford & Forrester, 2003). Recent scholarship advocates for synthesising these approaches, emphasising the importance of adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and continuous learning in effectively managing organisational change (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Karasvirta & Teerikangas, 2022).

2.2.3 Types of strategic change

Johnson et al. (2017), Kumarasinghe & Dilan (2021), Kotler (2012), and Kotter (2014) state that strategic change refers to how organisations alter their strategies to adapt to new environments, technologies, market conditions, or internal challenges. This involves significant shifts in how an organisation operates, its products or services, or its competitive positioning. Understanding the level and scope of change brings into the fore the concept of strategic change. (Araujo, Reis & Morais, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017) Extrapolating into the future by using the existing models is ineffective in a VUCA context characterised by rapid change, the value of each strategy decaying over time irrespective of how brilliant the strategy was in the first place, but also strategy drift. It is crucial that organisations explore the drivers of change and strategize according to which aspect is most likely to affect the firm in the future. Johnson et al. (2017) contributed to understanding strategic change, offering unique perspectives on its nature and implications. Strategic change alters an organisation's goals, strategies, or operational processes to achieve a specific outcome or benefit. Internal or external factors, such as legislative changes, market trends, technological advancements, or leadership changes, often drive strategic change. While strategic change encompasses the idea that organisations need to adapt, evolve, or transform themselves to remain competitive and relevant in a dynamic business environment, it is also premised on identifying and paying attention to key drivers of change and the importance of flexibility and responsiveness in managing organisational change effectively (Sundaram, Ziade & Quinn, 2020; Johnson et al., 2017; Jalagat, 2016).

According to Balogun and Hope Hailey (2005) and Johnson et al. (2017), strategic change is distinct as it is purposeful and driven by a specific goal or objective; it is planned and executed with deliberate intention; it affects multiple parts of the organisation and significantly impacts the organisation's future. Organisations that implement strategic change often experience challenges; employees may resist changes due to uncertainty or fear; change often involves complex systems and processes; there is some degree of uncertainty about the outcome of strategic change; and strategic change may require

significant resources (Kotter, 1996; Pettit, Balogun, & Bennett, 2023). The organisation must understand the concept of strategic change and the best practices an organisation may adopt to navigate the challenges of strategic change better and create a more resilient and adaptive organisational culture (Day, Balogun, & Mayer, 2023; Johnson et al., 2017). Balogun and Hope Hailey (2005), Johnson and Scholes (2005), Hunsaker & Knowles (2020); Lewin & Weigelt (2021); Pettit et al. (2023) assert that strategic change can be categorised into four types, namely adaptation, reconstruction, and revolution, based on the dimensions of the nature of change (e.g., incremental or big bang) and scope of change, which are discussed below.

2.2.3.1 Adaptation

The strategy development is often incremental, building on what has already been done in the past. This type of change is commonly referred to as adaptation (Pettit et al., 2023). Adaptation refers to organisational strategy changes that build upon existing practices, products, or methods (Johnson et al., 2017; Lewa, Mburu, & Murigi, 2022). This can include updates to product design, changes in production methods, or the launch of new products or related diversification. This type of change is typically gradual and evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Adaptation is the most common form of change in organizations. It is a natural part of the evolution of an organisation, as it allows for the refinement and improvement of existing strategies and practices. However, there are times when organisations may need to undergo more fundamental changes, which are often referred to as transformational changes (Johnson et al., 2017; Lewin & Weigelt, 2021). Transformational change involves a significant shift in an organisation's strategy, culture, or business model. Hunsaker & Knowles (2020) say this type of change is less common and typically requires more radical leadership and support from top-level executives. Lewin and Weigelt (2021) assert that transformational change includes an organisation shifting from a product-focused strategy to a service-focused strategy, entering a new industry or market, undergoing a significant restructuring or downsizing, and adopting a new business model or organisational structure (Lewin & Weigelt, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017).

Lewa et al. (2022) say transformational change requires strong leadership and a clear vision from top-level executives to drive the change and ensure all stakeholders are aligned with the new direction. In contrast, internal factors such as market conditions or technological advancements often drive adaptive change. It is often incremental and evolutionary, with minor adjustments made over time to stay competitive. While adaptation is the most common type of change in organisations, transformational change is rare but essential for organisations to stay competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing business environment (Hunsaker & Knowles, 2020). Adaptation refers to minor modifications made within the existing framework of an organisation's strategy (Pettit et al., 2023). These changes are typically reactive and aimed at adjusting to immediate challenges or opportunities without fundamentally altering the organisation's core operations or strategic direction (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2005; Lewin & Weigelt, 2021). Below is figure 2.2, which categorises strategic change on basis

of the nature of change (e.g., incremental or big bang) and the scope of change, which depicts the end result of realignment or transformation.

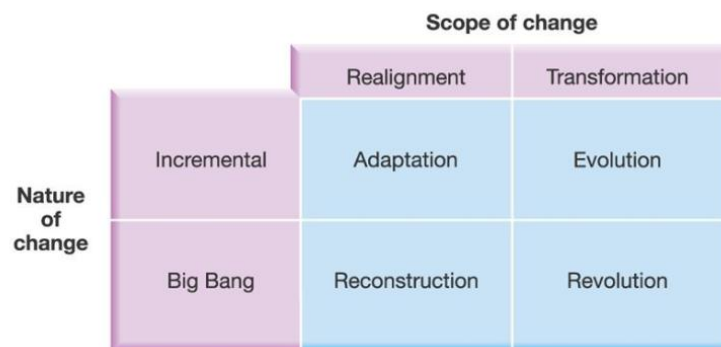


Figure 2.2: Types of strategic change

Source: Adapted from Muravu (2020:83)

2.2.3.2 Reconstruction

Reconstruction refers to rapid change involving significant upheaval within an organisation but still maintaining its fundamental culture and business model (Johnson et al., 2017; Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2005). This type of change includes adjustments to organisational structure, cost-cutting measures, or even acquisitions or divestments of businesses (Johnson et al., 2017; Pettit et al., 2023). Reconstruction often addresses significant challenges or crises that threaten the organisation's survival, such as radical performance decline. In these situations, the organisation often employs a turnaround strategy to rapidly improve its financial performance (Johnson et al., 2017; Hunsaker & Knowles, 2020). In these situations, turnaround strategies prioritise quick and significant improvements through a combination of cost reduction and revenue generation (Johnson et al., 2017; Lewin & Weigelt, 2021). The first critical element of turnaround strategies is crisis stabilisation, which entails the immediate goal of regaining control over the deteriorating situation by reducing costs and increasing revenue (Johnson et al., 2017; Kotter, 1996). This involves implementing short-term measures to stabilise the organisation and prevent further decline (Johnson et al., 2017; Pettit et al., 2023). Johnson et al. (2017) and Hunsaker & Knowles (2020) argue that operational efficiency improvements focus on long-term improvements in direct operational costs and productivity rather than just cutting overhead costs like research and development or marketing expenses. Cost reduction includes identifying and eliminating unnecessary costs, streamlining operations, and reducing waste (Johnson et al., 2017; Lewin & Weigelt, 2021). Revenue enhancement identifies new revenue streams, improves pricing, and increases sales. Strategic reorientation evaluates the organisation's strategic direction and makes necessary adjustments to align it with changing market conditions (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2005; Johnson et al., 2017).

Hunsaker & Knowles (2020) say turnaround strategies often contrast with adaptive change, a more gradual process that builds upon existing practices and culture. Conversely, reconstruction is a more radical approach that requires swift and decisive action to address a crisis or significant challenge (Johnson et al., 2017; Pettit et al., 2023). Odonkor, Urefe, Agu, and Obeng (2024) and Lewa et al. (2022) assert that in a crisis, rebuilding trust and communication with key stakeholders is crucial to ensure their support and cooperation. According to Johnson et al. (2017) and Adom and Simatele, (2022), providing clear, transparent, and timely information to stakeholders is vital in a turnaround situation. The key stakeholders in the water utility industry, including Water Service Authorities, ultimate users, households, businesses, industries, the Minister of Water and Sanitation, suppliers, local community organisations, charities, and advocacy groups, and the media and press, need to be engaged to rebuild trust and gain support for the recovery plan (Langsdale & Cardwell, 2022; Johnson et al., 2017).

Freeman (2010) and Dong, Yin, Liu, Hu & Li (2020) state that an organisation may identify which stakeholders have the most influence over the organisation's recovery. In a turnaround strategy, it is essential to thoroughly analyse the current market position and identify areas for improvement (Hunsaker & Knowles (2020); Johnson et al., 2017). There is a need for organisations to evaluate product lines and services to determine which are most profitable and aligned with the target market (Grant, (2024); Johnson et al., 2017). Developing a strategic plan that outlines goals, objectives, and tactics for achieving success in the target market and financial restructuring are critical aspects of an organisation's turnaround strategy (e.g., adjusting the mix of debt and equity to improve the organisation's financial flexibility, reduce reliance on debt, and secure new funding or refinancing existing debt) (Cavalier, 2020; Johnson et al., 2017).

2.2.3.3 Revolution

Revolutionary change in an organisation is often necessary when the existing strategy and culture have become outdated, inflexible, and unable to adapt to changing environmental or competitive pressures. The organisation faces a choice between significant transformation or risk of collapse. Strategic drift is when an organisation's strategy gradually becomes misaligned with its initial intentions, goals, and values over time (Johnson et al., 2017; Jabri & Jabri 2022). This can happen due to various internal and external factors, such as changes in the market, competition, technology, or leadership. A strategic drift can occur when an organisation's strategy loses focus; as an organisation grows and evolves, its strategy may become less focused and more diffuse, leading to a lack of clear direction. Changes in the market or industry can render an organisation's strategy obsolete, making it necessary to adapt or risk becoming irrelevant. Failure to regularly review and update the strategy can lead to drift, as an organisation may not be aware of changes that require adjustments (Iruthayasamy, 2021). Organisational politics,

personal agendas, or bureaucratic inertia can cause a strategy to deviate from its original intent and miss opportunities for growth or innovation or fail to adapt its strategy to changing circumstances (Dutta, 2022).

In such circumstances, revolutionary change is characterised by the need for rapid and significant strategic and cultural changes that are not incremental or evolutionary. Extreme external pressures, such as takeover threats, financial crises, or significant market shifts and legislative reforms, often trigger revolutionary change. The organisation's current strategy and culture have become so entrenched that even incremental changes are insufficient to address the emerging challenges (Fahey & Saint-Onge 2024). An organisation requires revolutionary change when it cannot innovate or adapt to changing market conditions, leading to stagnation and decline. The organisation's culture resists change, and employees are unwilling to adopt new ideas or processes. Employee morale is low, and the organisation has a sense of despair and hopelessness. The organisation is facing significant external threats, such as a takeover bid, financial crisis, or regulatory changes (Bird, 2022).

When an organisation recognises the need for revolutionary change, it must be prepared to change its strategy, culture, and operations significantly. These changes include bringing in new leaders capable of driving change and implementing new strategies and culture change (Wongleedee, 2024). Redesigning business processes to improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance customer value and developing new skills and capabilities within the organisation to support the new strategy and communicate the need for change clearly and transparently to all stakeholders are key aspects of revolutionary change. Revolutionary change is not without risks, however. It can be challenging to implement and may require significant investments in resources and training (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022).

Additionally, employees accustomed to the traditional methods may exhibit resistance. It requires significant effort and investment but can be a powerful way to transform an organisation and ensure its long-term survival and success (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022; Bhavani & Mahalakshi, 2023).

Revolutionary change differs from turnaround or reconstruction strategies in two significant ways, making it particularly challenging to manage. Rapid strategic and revolutionary changes often require a profound organisational culture shift. This entails altering deeply ingrained values, norms, and behaviours that have evolved over time, a task that can be challenging due to people's resistance to altering their ways of thinking and working (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). In contrast to the turnaround strategy, where the problems are often more apparent and acknowledged by everyone, revolutionary change may be less evident to people within the organisation. This can lead to a lack of urgency or motivation to change. These challenges are often rooted in strategic drift and the need for clear direction (Wongleedee, 2024). For the leadership to effectively lead in such an environment, a strategy should be formulated to create a compelling reason for change by highlighting the organisation's current

situation and the need for transformation. Share the vision for the future and involve employees in the change process to build trust and engagement.

Revolutionary change can be monitored successfully by using a combination of metrics and methods that capture the complexity of cultural change. These methods include surveys and feedback mechanisms regularly collecting valuable insights into the pace of cultural change and identifying areas where further effort is needed (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). Conducting regular cultural audits aimed at identifying areas where cultural change is lagging and providing a framework for addressing these issues. Sharing stories of successful examples of cultural change in action can help to inspire and motivate others and reinforce new behaviours. Leadership at all levels plays a critical role in modelling the new behaviours and values that are being promoted, and their actions should be closely monitored to ensure consistency with the desired cultural norms. (Johnson et al., 2017; Bhavani & Mahalakshi, 2023).

2.2.3.4 Evolution

Evolution represents a gradual and continuous process of change that reflects the natural development of an organisation over time. Unlike adaptation, evolution is proactive, aiming for long-term growth and sustainability through incremental improvements and innovations. As mentioned, this type of change involves incrementally building on and exploiting existing strategic capabilities while developing new ones (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022; Bhavani & Mahalakshi, 2023). However, many organisations may resist change due to the comfort and familiarity of their historic bases of success, making it essential to identify ways to facilitate the effective evolution of strategy. An approach to achieving evolutionary change strategy is through organisational ambidexterity. Organisational ambidexterity refers to the ability of an organisation to simultaneously pursue both exploration and exploitation strategies (Volberda, van den Bosch, & Heijltjes, 2019; Johnson et al., 2017). Exploration involves searching for new opportunities and developing new strategic capabilities, while exploitation involves refining and improving existing capabilities (Johnson et al., 2017; Chowdhury & Shil, 2022).

To cultivate organisational ambidexterity, organisations may create separate units or teams for exploration and exploitation, which can help to reduce conflicts between these two competing demands (Volberda, van den Bosch, & Heijltjes, 2019; Bavani & Mahalakshi, 2023). It can also encourage collaboration between exploration and exploitation teams to exchange knowledge, resources, and experience, as well as a culture of experimentation and failure learning, allowing employees to put new ideas and techniques to the test. Furthermore, it offers adequate resources and support for both exploration and exploitation efforts, ensuring that they have the appropriate financing, staff, and infrastructure. These teams can guarantee that executives are in sync with the organization's broader strategy and priorities, giving a clear path for both exploration and exploitation initiatives. They can foster a culture of continuous learning and growth by empowering people to learn from their

experiences, exchange expertise, and adapt to changing situations (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). Furthermore, regularly review the organization's progress towards its strategic goals and change its approach as needed to ensure that both exploration and exploitation are consistent with the overall strategy. By nurturing organisational ambidexterity, businesses can effectively evolve their strategy over time, remaining ahead of competitors while responding to changing market conditions (Johnson et al., 2017; Bavani & Mahalakshi, 2023).

The concept of organisational ambidexterity highlights the importance of striking a balance between two seemingly contradictory approaches: exploitation and exploration (Volberda et al., 2019; Cao, Gallagher & Yin, 2018). Exploitation refers to the process of refining and improving existing capabilities, which is essential for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. An approach that leads to incremental change as organisations rely on established ways of doing things. On the other hand, exploration involves searching for new capabilities and innovation, which is necessary for achieving transformational change. An exploration approach requires organisations to be open to new ideas, take calculated risks, and be willing to challenge existing assumptions. Organisational ambidexterity suggests that successful organisations need to develop both exploitation and exploration capabilities simultaneously. According to Volberda, van den Bosch and Heijltjes (2019), it's crucial to maintain a careful equilibrium between these two strategies, as placing too much focus on one can result in unfavorable outcomes.

The exploration approach to change focuses on refinement and improvement that lead to incremental change, which may not be sufficient to keep up with a rapidly changing environment. Over-reliance on established ways of doing things can make it difficult for organisations to adapt to new circumstances. Exploration approaches to change, on the other hand, embrace an organisation that searches for new capabilities, which can be uncertain and unpredictable, leading to high levels of risk and uncertainty. Exploration may lead to wasted resources and efforts if the organisation is not careful in selecting the right opportunities. In addition, organisational ambidexterity requires a culture that encourages both exploitation and exploration in order to create an environment where employees feel comfortable taking calculated risks, learning from failures, and continuously improving processes.

Organisational ambidexterity is a complex and challenging concept because it requires the organisation to navigate conflicting demands. On one hand, exploitation requires focus, efficiency, and a backward-looking approach to build on existing strengths and refine existing capabilities. On the other hand, exploration demands flexibility, innovation, and a forward-looking approach to seek out new opportunities and create new capabilities. In order to achieve ambidexterity, organisations must strike a delicate balance between these opposing pressures, embracing both the stability of exploitation and the uncertainty of exploration. An organisation may adopt these strategies to manage ambidexterity (Volberda et al., 2019). These may include structural ambidexterity, in which an organisational design

allows organisations to maintain a balance between exploitation and exploration by creating separate units or teams that are optimised for each type of activity (Johnson et al., 2017; Wongleedee, 2024).

The exploratory units can learn from failures and successes without affecting the core business. The exploratory units can operate with more autonomy, allowing for faster decision-making and adaptation to changing market conditions (Johnson et al., 2017).

There are various challenges associated with the structural ambidexterity approach; integrating the results from the exploratory units into the core business can be challenging; challenge of resource allocation; and different cultures and mindsets may conflict. However, the balanced approach can help organisations stay competitive in an ever-changing market while driving innovation and growth (Johnson et al., 2017). Leadership needs to demonstrate and promote ambidexterity, encourage diversity of views and behaviours, and balance the organisation's need for direction and decision-making and create an environment that encourages experimentation, learning, and adaptability while providing direction and guidance.

Leaders face a challenge when one type of change leads to another, requiring a shift in leadership style. This can happen in stages, where a short-term turnaround sets the stage for longer-term evolutionary change, necessitating a transition from transactional to transformational leadership. However, even small-scale changes can have unintended consequences, destabilising the organisation and leading to larger-scale changes that may not have been planned or anticipated.

2.4 Diagnosing change context

The effectiveness of different leadership styles is shaped by the organisational context in which change is to occur. As this study focuses on change management methods, it is important to understand the change context and how it significantly influences leaders' approaches and strategies to manage change. In this regard, the concept of the change kaleidoscope and forcefield analysis are insightful to understand and assess organisational receptiveness to change and diagnose the types of change required.

Leaders can use the change kaleidoscope and forcefield analysis to diagnose the types of change required in an organization. If the organisation has a substantial cultural value of innovation and a flexible organisational structure, it may be more receptive to radical changes. If the organisation has a high level of bureaucratic complexity and resistance to change from employees, it may require more incremental changes. If the organisation operates in a rapidly changing external environment, it may require more adaptive changes (Leonelli, 2024).

2.4.1 The Change Kaleidoscope

The kaleidoscope is traceable to the Greek words kalos (beautiful), eidos (form), and scopos (watcher). Thus, kaleidoscope translates to “beautiful form watcher” (Balogun & Hailey, 1999). Balogun and Hailey (2004) introduced the change kaleidoscope, which sets: i) The overall organisational change context to be considered to avoid quick fixes to change problems. ii) Eight contextual features (time, scope, preservation, diversity, capability, capacity, readiness, and power). And iii) Six design choices (change path, change start-point, change style, change target, change roles, and change levers) as reflected in the change kaleidoscope (Muravu, 2020; Badru, 2022).

Change kaleidoscope was developed by John and Hailey in 2004 as a model or method for pulling together and arranging the extensive variety of logical highlights and usage choices that require thought amid change (Balogun & Hailey, 1999; Hailey & Balogun, 2002). The change kaleidoscope is a diagnostic tool used to assess and design change strategies. It provides a framework for understanding the contextual features of a change situation and determining the most appropriate change approach. It is a visual representation of the organisational context, which can be thought of as a kaleidoscope with multiple constantly shifting features (Muravu, 2020). The change kaleidoscope contains an external ring that is concerned with the highlights of the change setting that can either empower or impede change, and an inward ring that contains the menu of usage choices open to change agents (Balogun & Hailey, 2004; Muravu, 2020). An organisation needs to examine contextual constraints and enablers to change in order to evaluate its change ability and consider implementing choices of path, start point, style, target, interventions, and roles. The distinctive feature of the Change Kaleidoscope is its flexibility and adaptability but also reliance on understanding change context first to grasp the reason why design choice is appropriate or inappropriate to particular context (Balogun & Hailey, 2004, Muravu, 2020). By considering multiple contextual features, Change Kaleidoscope helps ensure that the chosen approach is appropriate and effective. Figure 2.3: below depicts the eight contextual features and the design choices.

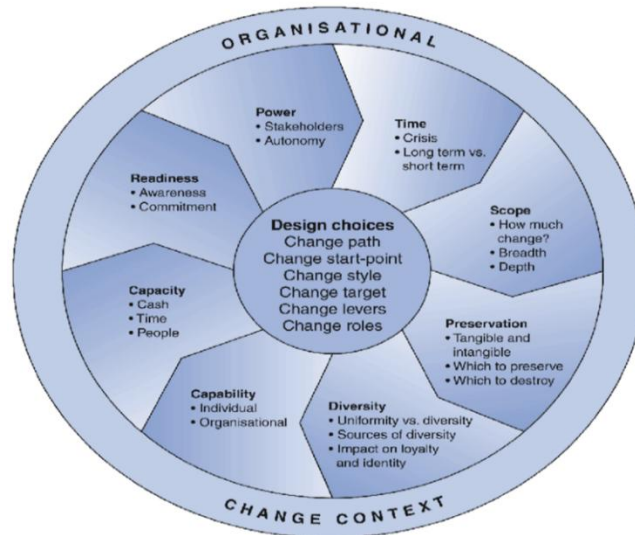


Figure 2.3: Change Kaleidoscope

Source: Adapted from Muravu (2020: 84)

Below is a discussion of the various aspects of the change kaleidoscope as shown in figure 2.3.

2.4.1.1 Organization Contextual Features

To implement change successfully, organisation context needs to be analysed in order to select appropriate implementing options (Balogun & Hailey, 2004).

Time: The pace of change is critical in the changing context. Organisations must consider the time frame for implementing changes, the adoption speed, and the change's urgency. The timeframe for change can vary significantly, presenting distinct challenges for leaders. On the one hand, a business may be facing an imminent crisis, such as a rapid decline in turnover or profits due to sudden changes in its market, requiring immediate and decisive action. In this context, leadership responds swiftly to mitigate the impact of the crisis (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020; Balogun & Bailey, 1998).

On the other hand, an organisation may face a need for change that is not pressing, with the management having time to plan and execute the change over a more extended period. Thus, this provides an opportunity to develop a more deliberate and strategic approach to change, allowing for careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and gradual implementation. In both contexts, leaders must adapt their approach to the unique circumstances, recognising that the pace and urgency of change can significantly impact the success of the transformation (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

Scope: The scope of change can vary depending on its extent and complexity. One dimension is the breadth of change, which refers to the number of areas or functions within an organisation that need to be impacted. For instance, a global company with multiple brands may require a broad transformation that affects many departments and teams. In contrast, a smaller organisation may only need to change

a few areas. Another dimension is the depth of change, which refers to the level of cultural transformation required. For example, an established organisation with a long history and strong cultural identity may need to undergo a deeper transformation that changes its fundamental values, norms, and behaviours. This type of change requires more significant shifts in mindset, behaviour, and leadership approach (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020; Balogun & Baley, 1998).

When implementing change, it is essential to balance the need for transformation with preserving certain aspects of the organization. This may involve building upon existing strengths and capabilities to drive change while abandoning or phasing out outdated or inefficient processes. This delicate balance is often referred to as organisational ambidexterity, where an organisation simultaneously explores new opportunities and exploits existing ones. This approach enables the organisation to maintain its core business while also driving innovation and growth (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

A diverse and inclusive organisation can be a catalyst for change, as it brings together individuals with different perspectives, experiences, and opinions. This diversity can foster creativity, innovation, and the development of new ideas. Organisation homogeneity leads to a lack of fresh perspectives, making it more challenging to adapt to new situations and challenges (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

Capacity: The capacity for change regarding available resources is a significant consideration. When implementing changes, organisations may require additional resources, such as financial resources, training, or technology, which can be costly. The change process requires significant managerial attention, taking away from other responsibilities and duties. Human capital is critical, as change may require retraining or upskilling employees, which can be time-consuming and costly. Leadership must provide the necessary resources to ensure the success of changes at an organisational level. Leadership support to employees throughout the change entails clear communication of the necessity for change and the resources needed to facilitate it. Furthermore, it comprises prioritising of the modifications to ensure that resources are distributed efficiently. Additionally, it involves giving appropriate financial resources to assist the execution of the changes and the provision of managerial support and direction to guarantee that changes are executed properly. Opportunities for training and development must be offered to support employees in their new roles (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020; Balogun & Hailey, 2004).

Suppose the leadership fails to capacitate the employees and all relevant stakeholders during the change process. In that scenario, employees may become frustrated as they lack the necessary skills or resources to implement the changes effectively. Employees may resist change, believing they lack the necessary skills or resources to manage the changes. Delays in implementing changes can lead to missed opportunities and decreased competitiveness. Changes may not be implemented effectively, resulting

in less than ideal outcomes. Hence, the capacity for change in terms of available resources, including financial, management, human, and infrastructure resources, to ensure that changes are implemented effectively and efficiently (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

Capability: Managing change is indeed a complex process, and organisations need to have the necessary capabilities to navigate the change process effectively. The organisation needs to have access to skilled and experienced change managers who can help navigate the complexities of change. Change managers possess the skills and knowledge to develop and implement change management strategies, ensuring that changes are implemented smoothly and with minimal disruption to business operations. They develop effective communication plans to engage stakeholders, including employees, customers, and partners, ensuring everyone is informed and aligned with the change. They have the know-how to identify potential risks associated with change and develop strategies to mitigate them, reducing the likelihood of adverse outcomes. They have the necessary skills and expertise to develop programs to support employees during the change process, address concerns, and provide training and development opportunities. They provide leadership and guidance to organisation leadership, ensuring that executive, senior, and middle management are equipped to lead the change process and make informed decisions (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

Employees who have been capacitated and capable of handling the change process at an organisational level benefit the organisation in several ways. When employees are familiar with the change process, they are less likely to resist change as they understand the benefits and potential outcomes. Employees experienced with change are more likely to be engaged in the change process, as they understand the importance of adapting to new circumstances. A workforce experienced with change can adapt quickly to new circumstances, allowing the organisation to respond rapidly to changing market conditions (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

In-house organisation development professionals or external consultants can provide the necessary expertise to manage change. However, it is also essential for an organisation to develop its internal capabilities in change management. Providing training and development opportunities for employees to develop their change management skills. They are establishing a standardised change management framework that outlines the process for managing change. They encourage sharing best practices and lessons learnt from previous changes to improve future change management efforts and identifying and empowering employees who are champions of change within the organisation. An organisation that manages to combine skilled and experienced change managers, an experienced workforce, and internal capabilities in change management can effectively navigate the complexities of change and achieve successful outcomes (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

Power: The question of who is empowered to effect change is a complex one, and it can sometimes be clearer-cut. In many organisations, it's often assumed that the chief executive has the power to effect change. However, this may not be the case as resistance to the organisation emanates from different angles: resistance from below, external stakeholders, and a perceived lack of power from the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer may have the authority to implement change. However, he may face resistance from employees reluctant to adapt to new change efforts, such as reconfiguring the regional water utility. External stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, or regulators, may resist changes that impact their interests. There are instances where the chief executive officer may not have the power to effect change. They may assume that others in the organisation have the power or authority to make changes, but in reality, this may not be the case (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020; Balogun & Hailey, 2004).

Readiness: The readiness for change refers to the organisation's willingness and ability to adapt to new circumstances, processes, and legislative changes (Johnson et al., 2017; Balogun & Hailey, 2004). It is a critical factor in determining the success of change initiatives. A high level of readiness for change is often characterised by a clear understanding of the reasons for change and the desired outcomes. (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

2.4.1.2 Design or Implementing Choices

The inner ring of Change Kaleidoscope contains elements of usage choices open to change specialists to respond to change context.

1. Change Path – The types of changes can be categorised into four types based on nature and result of change, which are Evolution, Adaptation, Revolution, and Reconstruction (Hailey & Balogun, 2002).
2. Change Start Point – Change start point indicates where the change is initiated. The model recognises that there are four possible change start points which are top down change (change initiated from top management), bottom-up change (change initiated from bottom line), pockets of good practice (change initiated by taking advantage of good practice in individual parts of the organisation as the model for the remaining parts), and pilot sites (change that is initially implemented in only one individual part of the organisation) (Hailey & Balogun, 2002; Muvaru, 2022).
3. Change Style – focuses on the way to manage the process of change. This relates to five different styles of managing changes, which include:

- (a) Education and Delegation – Small group briefing and discussing change applied to gain change support from employees (Hailey & Balogun, 2002; Muvaru, 2022; Balogun & Hailey, 2004).
 - (b) Collaboration – High employee involvement in the decision of “what” and “how” to change.
 - (c) Participation – Limited employee involvement in the decision of how to deliver the desired change.
 - (d) Direction – Directing and controlling change from the change leader.
 - (e) Coercion – Imposing of change with authority.
4. Change Target – There are three types of change targets, which are outputs, behaviours, and values.
 5. Change Levers – The level of levers and intervention needed for organisation change. For example, the cultural web can be applied to identify organisation culture and current change barriers. From the culture web, intervention into all components of the culture web which are symbols, power structures, organisational structures, control systems, routines and rituals, and stories, can be designed and executed to change successfully.

Even though change kaleidoscope can be implemented in different change circumstances, it is most appropriate for planned change that aims to achieve a goal (Johnson et al., 2017; Muravu, 2020).

2.4.1.3 Four practical steps of using change kaleidoscope

In the current study, which focuses on change management methods, communication channels, and resistance to change and its root cause, the change kaleidoscope is insightful to understand the role and interaction of contextual factors in enabling or constraining design choices regarding the change path and selecting other change choices during the reconfiguration of the two water boards into the new organisation known as uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility. Table 2.2 depicts the four steps and respective activities in each step when using the Change kaleidoscope.

Table 1.2 : Four steps use of change kaleidoscope

Step 1: Assess the Contextual Features	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a Contextual Analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assess each of the eight contextual features to understand the specific characteristics of the change situation. ○ Use interviews, surveys, and document analysis to gather data. 2. Map the Contextual Features:
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create a visual representation of the contextual features using the Change Kaleidoscope diagram. <p>Identify any patterns or relationships between the features.</p>
<p>Step 2: Design the Change Strategy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a Tailored Change Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Based on the contextual analysis, design a change strategy that addresses the specific characteristics and needs of the change situation. ○ Ensure that the strategy is flexible and adaptable to changing conditions. 2. Engage Key Stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Involve key stakeholders in the design of the change strategy to ensure their input and support. ○ Use workshops and collaborative sessions to develop the strategy together. 3. Align with Organizational Goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure that the change strategy is aligned with the organisation’s overall strategic goals and priorities. ○ Communicate the alignment to build commitment and support.
<p>Step 3: Implement the Change Strategy</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an Implementation Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create a detailed plan that outlines the steps, timelines, and resources needed to implement the change strategy. ○ Assign responsibilities and establish clear accountability for each task. 2. Provide Training and Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offer training programs to ensure that employees understand and can effectively use the new processes and practices. ○ Provide the necessary resources and tools to support implementation. 3. Monitor and Adjust: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continuously monitor the implementation of the change strategy to track progress and identify any issues. ○ Use feedback and performance data to make necessary adjustments to the strategy.
<p>Step 4: Embed the Change</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate New Practices:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Embed the new practices and processes into the organisational culture to ensure sustainability. ○ Use policies, procedures, and performance metrics to reinforce the change. <p>2. Foster Continuous Improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage ongoing feedback and innovation to sustain the change. ○ Provide continuous learning and development opportunities to build the capabilities needed for sustained success. <p>3. Evaluate the Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the change strategy and its impact on the organisation. ○ Use the insights gained to inform future change initiatives.
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Source: Adapted from Balogun and Hailey (2004:41)

While the change kaleidoscope model also gives insights on the steps to implement change, one needs to be critical to decipher the change methods, communication channels, and nature of resistance in each of the three steps of change identified. Kanter (2018) argues that while models like the Change Kaleidoscope offer structured approaches, they may oversimplify the complexity of change in dynamic environments. Kanter (2018) emphasises the need for flexibility and adaptability, suggesting that rigid adherence to a model can hinder responsiveness to unexpected challenges.

Burnes (2004) highlights that the Change Kaleidoscope, like many models, may not fully account for the cultural and political nuances within organisations. He suggests that understanding the unique context of each organisation is crucial for effective change management. Kotter (1996) stresses the importance of clear and consistent communication throughout the change process. He critiques models that do not prioritise communication, arguing that a lack of transparency can lead to resistance and mistrust among employees. Pettit, Balogun, and Bennett (2023) note that the Change Kaleidoscope's focus on contextual features is beneficial, but they argue that it should place more emphasis on the role of communication in aligning stakeholders and managing expectations.

Lewis (1947) suggests in Lewin's Change Management Model that managing resistance through unfreezing, changing, and refreezing stages is a natural part of the change process. Critics argue that the Change Kaleidoscope does not provide sufficient strategies for overcoming resistance, particularly in the unfreezing stage. Hunsaker and Knowles (2020) point out that resistance can stem from deeper organisational issues such as lack of trust in leadership or fear of job loss. They argue that models like

the Change Kaleidoscope should incorporate more comprehensive strategies for addressing these underlying concerns.

2.4.2 Forcefield analysis

According to Lewin (1947), Forcefield Analysis is a valuable tool for understanding the dynamics of change and developing effective strategies to overcome resistance and drive successful implementation. This concept, introduced by Kurt Lewin, a German-American psychologist, identifies the driving forces of change (e.g., new ideas, opportunities, crises) and restraining forces (e.g., fear of the unknown, habits, traditions) that influence an organisation's ability to change. Driving forces are the positive forces that influence or support the change initiative. These are the real reasons that bring out change in an organisation. Restraining forces are the negative forces that are against the change initiative. These forces tend to maintain the status quo and restrict implementing new ideas or change. Lewin's Force Field model is presented in Figure 2.4 with clarity on the current situation and forces that drive and resist change.

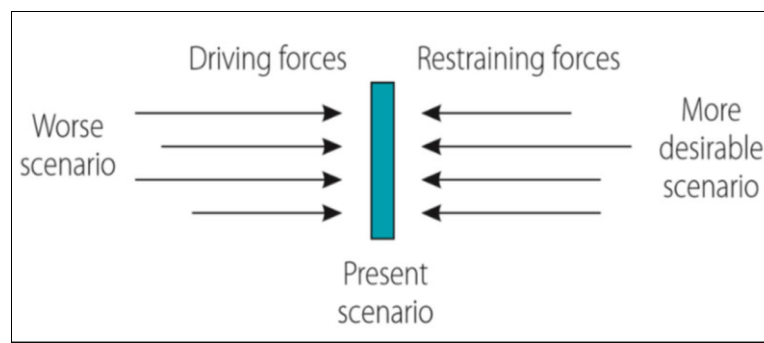


Figure 2.4: Lewin Forcefield forces

Source: Lewin's (1951:50)

The purpose of Lewin's Forcefield analysis is to help individuals and organisations understand the dynamics of a situation or problem and determine the best approach to making changes. By analysing restraining and driving change forces, leadership teams can develop strategies to strengthen the driving forces and weaken the restraining forces, facilitating successful change. This approach is particularly useful in reconfiguring an organisation, such as the water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, as suggested by Kotter and Schlesinger (1979). The forcefield analysis balances forces working in opposing directions, with driving forces promoting change and restraining forces opposing it. This model of change management assists in understanding the dynamics of change and the importance of managing both driving and restraining forces from achieving successful change management at an organisational level (Kamugisha, 2013). The forcefield forces are crucial in understanding the variety of forces that were enabling or impeding the reconfiguration process and outcomes in the course of

transition from two water boards into the new organisation known as uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The forcefield analysis also aids in pinpointing the type and origin of change resistance encountered during this reconfiguration process, both in the context of the change and in the resulting outcomes.

In the context of organisational transformation, such as the conversion of two separate water boards into KwaZulu-Natal's uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility, Lewin's Force Field Analysis is better discussed in light of critical viewpoints. Critics argue that Force Field Analysis may oversimplify complex organisational dynamics by presenting change as a balance between two forces (driving and restraining). For example, Burnes (2004) and Jalagat (2016) contend that this model fails to account for the multi-dimensional nature of change, which can involve intricate interactions among various stakeholders with differing motivations and perceptions. The binary model may overlook nuances like organisational culture, individual emotions, and historical context, which influence change outcomes (Burnes, 2004). Another critique is that Lewin's model fails to sufficiently account for the fluidity of forces during the process of transformation and is rather static (Jalagat, 2016).

Shafaghat, Zarchi, Nasab, Kavosi, Bahrami, and Bastani (2021) point out that change is frequently nonlinear and may encounter constantly changing restrictions that call for dynamic responses as opposed to a fixed point of balance. New driving forces may surface when change occurs, and old ones may wane, requiring a more flexible strategy. Maes and Van Hootegem (2022) and Jalagat (2016) argue that it fails to capture the dynamic and iterative nature of change, characterised by ongoing power struggles, coalition building, and negotiation, which are intrinsic to organisational environments. Despite the conceptual attraction of the framework, there is conflicting empirical evidence about its practical application in dynamic contexts. Although force field analysis sheds light on stakeholder dynamics, Cummings et al. (2016) contend that there is insufficient empirical evidence to support its systematic prediction of change initiative results. This presents questions about its suitability for a variety of organisational settings, including those characterised by high complexity and unpredictability, such as water boards in KwaZulu-Natal. Heyden, Fourne, Koene, Werkman, Ansari (2016), and Jalagat (2016) highlight the model's shortcomings with regard to the change implementation stage. Power dynamics can complicate interactions in bureaucratic environments; thus, while force field analysis can detect forces, it is not able to offer specific recommendations for reducing resistance or strengthening driving forces. Instead of using static assessments, Heyden et al. (2016) emphasise the necessity for adaptive leadership that responds to a changing environment. Additionally, Maes and Van Hootegem (2022) and Jalagat (2016) argue that force field analysis might primarily focus on identifying and addressing surface-level forces (like resistance from specific groups or resource constraints). It might not adequately address deeper, systemic power dynamics (like ingrained cultural norms or power imbalances embedded in organisational structures) (Maes & Van Hootegem, 2022; Jalagat, 2016). While the forcefield analysis model recognises cultural and belief factors, it does not fully consider the

influence of meaning in shaping perceptions and driving change. Critics point out that dominant groups can manipulate symbols, language, and ideology to legitimise their perspectives, thereby controlling the narrative around change initiatives. This oversight can undermine the understanding of how meaning shapes resistance and acceptance within organisations.

According to Shafaghat et al. (2021) and Jalagat (2016), organisational culture resilience has a big influence on how well change initiatives work out. If leadership teams fail to recognise and address the underlying cultural barriers, even the strongest driving forces may fail to overcome deeply ingrained resistance rooted in employee attitudes and beliefs. While Lewin's forcefield analysis provides a core framework for understanding change dynamics, critical discussions highlight its limitations and the importance of incorporating alternative views into the change management process. By recognising the limitations of the forcefield analysis, leadership teams at uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility can more effectively anticipate challenges and develop comprehensive strategies that account for the complexity of organisational changes. Researchers of change management may be interested in identifying the driving and restraining forces, the balance of forces, but also how change in the form of the reconfiguration of the Water Board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

2.5 Defining the concept of change management

According to Samuel (2013), the change management concept is rooted in the early 20th century. In the 1920s, a Harvard Business School professor, Elton Mayo, studied worker behaviour and motivation. He found that employees were more productive when involved in decision-making and felt valued. This led to the development of human relations theory, which emphasised the importance of employee engagement and communication in organisational change. In the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of organisational change management began to take shape. Management consultants such as Kurt Lewin and Harold Leavitt developed theories and frameworks for managing change, including "unfreezing" and "refreezing" organisational norms.

Moran and Brightman (2001) discuss the evolution of change management from the 1970s to the 1990s. During this period, change management practices became more formalised and widely adopted by various sectors. In the 1970s, change management was primarily focused on large organisations, particularly in the manufacturing and industrial sectors. Companies began to recognise the need to adapt to rapidly changing market conditions, technological advancements, and globalisation. In the 1990s, change management strategies began to be embraced in the public sector and non-profit organizations. As these entities faced budget cuts, regulatory changes, and shifts in public demand, they tended to change management practices to better navigate external pressures. The dramatic technological advances during the 1980s and 1990s prompted technology companies to adopt change management principles to implement new systems and processes effectively. As awareness of change management grew, it became a focus in business education and corporate training programs. Universities and

professional organisations began to offer courses and workshops on change management, further disseminating knowledge and best practices. The growing recognition of the importance of managing organisational change in a structured and planned manner was driven by the increasing complexity of business environments and a need for organisations to remain competitive and responsive to change.

The evolution of change management from the 1970s to the 1990s was marked by significant contributions from prominent authors and frameworks that shaped how organisations approached change. Peters and Waterman's (1982) analysis of successful American companies identified key themes that helped them thrive in a changing environment. They emphasised the significance of corporate culture, employee engagement, and adaptability—themes that remain foundational in change management. Their work helped many organisations recognise the link between effective change management practices and organisational success. Kotter (1996) John Kotter's work, particularly "Leading Change," provided a structured framework for understanding and implementing change in organizations. He introduced an eight-step process for managing change, which emphasised the importance of creating a sense of urgency, building guiding coalitions, and anchoring new approaches in the organisation's culture. Kotter's principles gained widespread acceptance and established a fundamental basis for modern change management strategies.

The 1980s saw the rise of re-engineering as a popular change management approach led by authors such as Michael Hammer and James Champy. This approach emphasised the need for radical change and transformation in organizations. Re-engineering, popularised by Michael Hammer and James Champy, introduced a radical approach to organisational change for a complete overhaul of business processes to achieve significant improvements in efficiency and effectiveness. Key elements of this approach included radical process redesign. Organisations were encouraged to fundamentally rethink how work was done to achieve dramatic improvements in critical performance measures. The approach placed significant focus on comprehending customer requirements and adjusting processes accordingly, leveraging technology to facilitate and sustain transformation. This approach came at a time when businesses were facing increased competition, globalisation, and a rapid pace of technological advancement, prompting a need for organisations to reinvent themselves fundamentally.

Edward Deming's principles emphasised continuous improvement and statistical quality control. His teachings influenced management practices in the manufacturing sector and beyond, highlighting the significance of organisational change in achieving quality and performance. Luhn (2016) introduced the concept of the learning organisation, emphasising the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning and systemic thinking to adapt effectively to change. Kanter (1983) explored how leaders can effectively manage change within organisations. She highlighted the roles of innovation, collaboration, and leadership in transforming organisations. Bridges (1991) is known for his work on transition management with a specific focus on the human side of change, emphasising the

psychological transitions individuals undergo during organisational change. Schein's work on organisational culture and change is critical to understanding the social dynamics of change processes. His insights into organisational culture are essential for navigating change effectively. According to Bekmukhambetova (2021), the concept of change management has been around for thousands of years, shaped by authors, and their contributions have been instrumental in formalising change management as a discipline, providing frameworks, models, and insights that organisations continue to rely upon today. This foundation laid the groundwork for the sophisticated change management practices employed by organisations today.

In the 21st century, there has been a growing emphasis on the use of change management methods that act as a guiding tool, enabling organisations to navigate the change process at organisational, team, and individual levels by providing a clear framework for implementation, identifying key factors that impact change management, and outlining the strategies necessary for successful change management processes and outcomes (Parry et al., 2013; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005). Parry et al. (2013) argue that a processual model outlines the specific steps to follow when implementing and managing change at an organisation level.

Chowdhury and Shil (2022) state that change management continuously improves an organisation's capabilities, direction, and structure to meet the ever-changing demands of internal and external customers. According to Gwaka (2016), the practice of continuously updating an organisation's skills, direction, and structures to meet the constantly shifting demands of both internal and external consumers is known as change management (Chowdhury & Shil, 2022). Because change affects both persons and organisations, Kanter (2020) indicates that for an organisation to thrive, it must look to the future and discover new individual and organisational-level benefits. Change management encompasses a wide range of activities, including assessing the need for change, developing a change strategy, communicating it to stakeholders, managing resistance, and evaluating the effectiveness of the change initiative. It requires collaboration and coordination across different departments and levels of the organization. Bekmukhambetova (2021) states that change management is the leadership and direction of organisational transformation, especially about human aspects and overcoming resistance to change. Anyiena, Bcom and Campus (2019) further argue that change management means planning, initiating, realising, controlling, and standardising organisational and personal change processes. Table 2.3 presents a variety of definitions of change management to reveal the lack of definitional consensus but also aspects that are evident in existing change management definitions.

Table 2.3: Summarising various definitions of change management used in previous research

Author	Definition of change management	Change element emphasised
Bekmukhambetova (2021)	Change management is "a process of planned and coordinated efforts to	Process Planned and coordinated effort

	implement changes in the organization's strategy, structure, systems, processes, and culture to achieve organizational goals and objectives" (p. 12).	Achievement of organisational goals and objectives
Moran & Brightman (2001)	Change management is "a systematic approach to transition individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state, involving the management of people, process, and technology" (p. 3).	Systematic approach Transition from the current to the desired future. Involve people management, process, and technology.
Gwaka (2016)	Change management is "the process of designing and implementing changes in an organization's strategies, structures, processes, and culture to achieve its goals and objectives" (p. 45).	Process of designing and implementing change Change in strategies, structures, processes, and culture Goal and objective achievement
Kanter (2020)	Change management is "a strategic process that involves managing the people side of change by creating a shared sense of purpose, building trust, and empowering employees to adapt to new situations and conditions" (p. 10).	Strategic process Managing people side of change Employee empowerment to adapt
Kotter (1996)	"Change management is the process of leading and enabling individuals, teams, and organizations to transition from a current state to a desired future state"	Process of leading and enabling Transitional change at different levels
Beer & Nohria (2000)	"Change management is a disciplined and systematic approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state"	Systematic approach Transitional change at different levels
Jick (1993)	"Change management is the process of managing the transition from an old to a new state, involving the management of people, processes, and technology"	Process of managing transition Managing people, processes, and technology

Cameron & Quinn (2006)	"Change management is the process of creating and implementing strategies to ensure that employees are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to adapt to organizational change"	Process of creating and implementing strategies Building skills, knowledge, and competencies to adapt
Huber (2002)	"Change management is the process of anticipating and managing the effects of change on employees and the organization"	Anticipatory process Managing effects of employee and organisational level change
Kanter (1983)	"Change management is the process of helping individuals and organizations to adjust to new situations and conditions"	Process of helping individual and organisational levels change Adjustments to new situations and conditions
McFarlan (1984)	"Change management is the process of planning, organizing, and controlling changes in an organization's systems, structures, and policies"	Process of leading change in a system, structure, and policies
Burnes (2004)	"Change management is a process that involves planning, implementing, and evaluating change initiatives in an organization".	Process of planning and implementing Evaluating change initiative
Davenport (1999)	"Change management is a set of activities aimed at altering the culture, structure, or processes of an organization".	Set of activities Altering culture, structure, or process
Nevis et al. (1995)	"Change management is a process that involves the use of knowledge, skills, and abilities to bring about changes in an organization's culture, structure, or processes"	Process Use knowledge, skills, and abilities to bring about changes

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

Given the different definitions of change management, it is key to state that for the purpose of this study, change management is defined as a process of leading and enabling individuals, teams, and organisations to transition from a current state to a desired future state. This process occurs in a systematic manner and involves the designing and implementing of changes in the organisational architecture (e.g., strategies, structures, system, staff, style, and culture) to achieve desired goals and

objectives of change. (Kotter, 1996; Gwaka, 2016; Moran & Brightman, 2001; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kanter, 2020; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Kanter, 1983; McFarlan, 1984).

The chosen definition combines several vital and common elements in the different definitions of change management. For example, it embraces the aspect of transitional change, enabling change at different levels of the individuals, teams, and organisations; the holistic and systematic nature of the process, which affects all elements of the organisational architecture (Kotter, 1996; Bekmukhambetova, 2021).

This definition is relevant and suitable for this study in two key ways. First, the definition emphasises the importance of transition, which is crucial in this study as it examines the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Second, the chosen definition is relevant to this study because it highlights the need for a structured approach to change management while emphasising the importance of effective communication and managing resistance to change. This will be particularly important when examining the change management method implemented during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, as effective communication and resistance management are key aspects in this exploratory qualitative research.

As change occurs at different levels, it is crucial to discuss change at the individual level and organisational levels before understanding change objectives.

2.5.1 Change at an individual level

Change management is a systematic approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organisations from a current state to a desired future state. It involves a structured methodology to manage and direct the change process, ensuring minimal disruption to business operations and ensuring that the intended outcomes of the change are achieved and the expected returns on investment are realised (Prosci, 2012). The success of organisational changes is directly dependent on individual employees' willingness to adapt and change their daily work habits. A well-designed process, technology, or job role will not yield positive results if employees do not implement and utilise them. Therefore, the key to realising a change's benefits is getting employees on board and committed to adopting the new way of doing things (Prosci, 2012).

Change management is a crucial process that helps employees adapt to changes, ensuring the organisation's strategic goals and future state aspirations are achieved (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). It serves as the link between implementing solutions and achieving desired outcomes. It is ultimately centred on people's ability to work together to transform changes into positive outcomes for the organisation (Musaigwa, 2023). A fundamental principle of managing change is that an organisation can imagine a future that diverges from the present and transforms into that state to attain a specific and desirable goal (Prosci, 2012).

The reasons for change are numerous and diverse, encompassing goals such as providing water services to the unserved communities, revenue growth, improved customer satisfaction, and reduced costs (Musaigwa, 2023). Change efforts are initiated to address specific opportunities or problems, aiming to improve performance and service delivery to the public in a significant way through employee performance. The underlying assumption of change is that it is possible to achieve something different and better than the current state through an effective people-driven change management process (Prosci, 2012). Actual change only happens when employees within the organisation start working in new ways, exhibiting new behaviours, using new tools, following new processes, and adopting new values (Kanter, 2020). The transformation of individual behaviours is the foundation of change, and when many individual changes are combined, the organisation ultimately reaches its desired future state (Prosci, 2012).

Thus, organisational change is not just about implementing new processes or systems but also requires individual employees to adapt and modify their behaviour (Kanter, 2020). While reconfiguring the regional water utility can be implemented at the organisational level, they ultimately depend on individual employees altering their work habits to achieve the desired outcome. Not all employees within the organisation will respond to a change effort similarly; some will embrace change, some will resist change, some will move swiftly, and some will move slowly (Bekmukhambetova, 2021). Fundamentally, the success of change, regardless of its magnitude, hinges on each individual's response to the change initiative. In other words, the effectiveness of a change is directly linked to the individual's ability to adapt and change (Errida & Lotfi, 2021).

2.5.2 Change at an organizational level

Organisational outcomes are the collective result of individual change. Hence, the success of a change at an organisational level will depend on the individuals embracing and adopting the change effort (Prosci, 2012; Bekmukhambetova, 2021). Organisational changes may include restructuring, process improvements, organisational redesign, change in leadership, cultural transformation, technological, new business models, outsourcing, and change in mission or purpose. Failure to manage the people side of change within the organisation will result in failed change efforts (Musaigwa, 2023). There must be more than implementing new systems and organisational structures to drive success. Instead, the employees must change and develop new capabilities to achieve a new future state and the desired business outcomes. The collective result of individual efforts ultimately drives the organisation's overall outcome (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Enablers of change at an organisational level include but are not limited to the optimisation of business processes, new technologies, improved processes, better tools, and new organisational designs; these are all changes the organisation adopts to improve performance, capture an opportunity, or resolve a problem.

It is a common pitfall in organisational change management that executive members tend to focus solely on designing and implementing change efforts at an organisational level without considering the human side of the change (Prosci, 2012; Alawi, 2018). This leads to a lack of employee engagement and buy-in, which can ultimately derail or constrain change. When employees lack knowledge, skills, and support to adapt to the change, they may resist or not fully embrace the change efforts, resulting in a range of adverse outcomes, including decreased productivity, reduced morale, employee resistance, and increased turnover (Musaigwa, 2023; Bekmukhambetova, 2021; Grønvad, Simonsen, Abildgaard & Aust, 2024). In order to overcome resistance to change, it is crucial to engage employees in the change process and ensure that they understand how the change will impact their roles. Strategies that enhance the likelihood of success of change efforts and realisation of tangible benefits from the change efforts include communicating clearly and transparently about the reasons for the change and how it will impact each employee; providing training and support to help employees adapt to the new solution; encouraging feedback and open communication throughout the process; recognising and rewarding employees who are actively engaged in the change process; and fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among employees by giving them autonomy and responsibility for implementing the change (Prosci, 2012; Kanter, 2020).

Change management should not be seen as a way to minimise employee resistance or mitigate potential adverse outcomes. Instead, it is a strategic framework that empowers individuals to acquire new values, skills, and behaviours, ultimately driving business results (Grønvad et al., 2024). Effective change management is about energising employees around a shared vision, making the change an integral part of their daily work and habits. Change at an organisational level can be led through a combination of tools and processes for individual and organisational change management. The executive team, middle management, employees, organised labour, and other relevant stakeholders are key players in executing a change management plan at an organisational level (Kanter, 2020).

2.6 Change management objectives

The primary purpose of change management is to ensure that an organisation can successfully adapt to and integrate changes necessary to achieve its goals and objectives. Managing the people side of change is critical for an organisation to embark on the change management process to minimise disruption and uncertainty, ensure business continuity during the change process, and maximise employee engagement and productivity. Table 2.4: depicts a summary of the main change management objectives along with relevant authors who contributed to the field.

Table 2.2: Main objectives of change management

Change management objective	Description	Relevant authors
Facilitating successful change implementation	Employ effective change management methodologies to ensure a seamless transition at the organisational level.	Kotter (1996), Cummings & Worley (2009); Bekmukhambetova (2021); Errida & Lotfi (2021); Hubbart (2023); Lewis (2011);Kotter (2019)
Enhance Communication clarity	Identify and implement clear communication channels that effectively disseminate information to all employees throughout the change process.	Kotter (1996), Cummings & Worley (2009); Errida & Lotfi (2021); Hubbart (2023); Hillary (2022)
Addressing Employee Resistance	Assess the underlying causes of employee resistance and devise strategies to alleviate these issues, thereby encouraging acceptance of the change.	Lewin (1947), Kotter (1996), Cummings & Worley (2009); Bekmukhambetova, (2021); Errida & Lotfi (2021); Hubbart (2023)
Promoting Stakeholder Engagement	Engage stakeholders to ensure their active involvement and support for the change initiative, fostering a collaborative environment.	Doppelt (2003), Kotter (1996); Kanter et al. (1992), Bennis (1966), Morgan (2024); Cummings & Worley (2009); Errida & Lotfi (2021) Bekmukhambetova, 2021); Hubbart (2023); Hillary (2022)
Fostering Organizational Commitment	Nurture a sense of commitment among employees towards the change initiative to enhance morale and mitigate resistance.	Kotter (1996); Cummings & Worley (2009); Errida & Lotfi (2021);
Evaluating the impact of change at an organisation level	Establish metrics to assess the efficacy of change management strategies and their influence on employees and organisational performance.	Morgan (2024); Cummings & Worley (2009). Errida & Lotfi (2021); Kotter (1996);

Change Readiness and capacity for change	The importance of preparing the organisation and individuals for change.	Errida & Lotfi (2021); Todnem By (2005)
Leadership and sponsorship	The critical role of strong leadership and sponsorship in driving the change initiatives at an organisational level.	Errida & Lotfi (2021); Hubbart (2023) Todnem By (2005)
Ensuring sustainable change	Integrate changes in the organisational culture to guarantee lasting benefits and reduce the likelihood of future resistance.	Lewin (1947), Kotter (1996); Morgan (2024); Cummings & Worley (2009); Errida & Lotfi (2021)

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

With reference to the above change management objectives drawn from literature on change management, it is clear change management helps to minimise resistance to change by addressing concerns, building trust, and communicating change. Organisations can maintain their competitive edge and achieve their goals by minimising disruption and ensuring business effective strategic change and continuity. (Kotter, 1996; Cummings & Worley, 2009; Bekmukhambetova, 2021; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Hubbart, 2023; Kotter, 2019). Gaining insight into the root reasons of resistance enables management to create targeted strategies that alleviate concerns while promoting change acceptance. Errida and Lotfi (2021); Hubbart (2023); and Hillary (2022) assert that effective change communication promotes open and transparent interactions, which helps to build trust, reduce rumours, and foster a positive work environment.

Cummings and Worley (2009), Errida and Lotfi (2021), Bekmukhambetova (2021); Hubbart (2023), and Hillary (2022) stated that by involving stakeholders in the change process, organisations can make more informed decisions that align with their strategic change goals and values. Kotter (1996), Cummings and Worley (2009), and Errida and Lotfi (2021) asserted that fostering organisational commitment is essential for enhancing employee morale and loyalty towards the new operational framework. The success of the transition heavily relies on the extent to which employees feel committed to the change initiative. Effective change management encourages a culture of innovation, experimentation, and continuous improvement. By minimising disruption and improving employee productivity, organisations can reduce costs associated with training, recruitment, and retention (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012; Kotter, 1996). Effective change management at the organisational level is influenced by several key factors that are essential for facilitating successful transitions, i.e., a framework to guide transitions with greater efficacy (Kotter, 1996), transparent communication

(Hillary, 2022), resistance mitigation strategies (Hubbart, 2023), an internal and external stakeholder collaboration approach (Errida & Lotfi, 2021), strong leadership with clear direction (Todnem By, 2005), and sustainable change (Morgan, 2024; Errida & Lotfi, 2021).

2.7 Types and sources of resistance to change

Resistance to change is defined as the unwillingness to adapt to altered circumstances, manifesting in both overt and covert forms and occurring at individual or organisational levels. Resistance to change is a wide word that encompasses a variety of emotional, psychological, and social variables that make it difficult for employees to adapt during organisational change (Levine & Cohen, 2018; Habart, 2022). Overt resistance can be evidenced through a variety of actions, including criticism, sarcastic remarks, missed meetings, unfulfilled commitments, protracted arguments, and acts of sabotage of the organisational change. Habbart (2022) characterises resistance as a natural employee response to change, which disrupts established routines, fosters fear of the unknown, and fosters uncertainty. Jeffrey et al. (2012) further assert that employee resistance is a standard and instinctive reaction to change influenced by a range of emotional responses, personal situations, and the overarching organisational culture.

When implementing strategic changes, such as the reconfiguration of water boards into a regional water utility, it is, indeed, naïve to presume an absence of resistance. Bhavani and Mahalakshmi (2023) identify individual resistance as a substantial barrier, often arising from fear of the unknown, comfort with the status quo, and a lack of trust or confidence in the change process, leadership, or the organisation as a whole. Individuals may resist change as they grapple with uncertainties regarding its potential impact on their job security, skills, and future career prospects, as noted by Ford et al. (2008).

Further to this, resistance may stem from individuals' comfort with existing routines, processes, and familiar methods of operation, as articulated by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999). Additionally, a perceived lack of trust or confidence in the change process, leadership, or the organization's capacity to manage change effectively can further contribute to resistance (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023). In essence, resistance can be categorised into rational and emotional forms. Rational resistance arises when individuals lack the requisite knowledge or information about the changes being implemented. This form of resistance typically diminishes when relevant information is disseminated. McKenna (2020) and Jabri & Jabri (2022) emphasise the importance of leadership to provide support and resources to assist employees to cope with these emotions and embrace organisational change implemented. Emotional resistance, on the other hand, is linked to psychological challenges such as fear, anxiety, suspicion, and insecurity and is often best addressed by assuring employees of the positive outcomes associated with change. Moreover, it is essential to recognise and

distinguish between various types of resistance, including active and passive resistance, as well as covert and overt resistance (Hubbart, 2023).

Active resistance refers to instances where employees overtly oppose change, such as engaging in strikes or vocalising their dissent during meetings and through other communication channels (Hubbart, 2023). On the other hand, passive resistance takes the form of hidden negative emotions towards the change. Levine & Cohen (2018) state that this insidious form of resistance requires change leaders to be particularly vigilant in order to identify and address it; while employees may outwardly express agreement and consent to the change, they often exhibit reluctance when it is implemented by employing delaying tactics and other covert means.

Aggressive resistance denotes actions that actively undermine or seek to eliminate the change initiative, with signs potentially including violent protests. Covert resistance involves deliberate opposition to change, occurring without direct attribution; employees may appear to be receptive to change while actually resisting it in a concealed manner (Levine & Cohen, 2018; Hubbart, 2023). In contrast, overt resistance is characterised by open challenges to the change initiative, and when employees are united in voicing their concerns, they tend to be unreserved in articulating their objections. Organisational leadership plays a pivotal role to ascertain who is resistant to change and the underlying reasons for such opposition, enabling them to address root causes of resistance effectively and enhance the likelihood of successful implementation of smooth and impactful change (Hubbart, 2023).

2.7.1 Organisational, team and individual level resistance

Organisational resistance to change is a pervasive phenomenon that can significantly impede an organisation's capacity to adapt and evolve effectively. As articulated by Hubbart (2023), such resistance is often grounded in a desire to maintain the status quo, particularly when existing practices no longer serve the organisation's best interests. Several factors contribute to this inertia, including entrenched structures, processes, and norms that solidify existing routines and inhibit the adoption of new initiatives. Rigid hierarchies and bureaucratic frameworks can entrench resistance, making it arduous to implement transformative ideas (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Todnem By, 2005).

Moreover, the unique cultures developed within organisations can embody substantial resistance to change, particularly when proposed adjustments challenge established values or threaten the existing cultural framework. The influence of prominent leaders within an organisation further complicates this landscape; when such figures oppose change, their authority can propagate a pervasive atmosphere of resistance among employees, thus undermining efforts to garner support for change initiatives (Tagulao & Marques, 2022; Errida & Lotfi, 2021); Todnem By (2005). Effective leadership is, therefore, critical

in facilitating organisational change, as leaders must articulate a clear vision, communicate its benefits, and inspire an understanding of the underlying rationale for change among employees.

To counteract resistance, Timming (2021) and Hubbart (2023) highlight the importance of comprehending the root causes of such resistance. Leaders must engage in open communication with employees and actively cultivate support for change initiatives. Modelling the desired behaviours and exhibiting a willingness to embrace change themselves can also foster an environment conducive to transformation. By investing in the creation of high-quality jobs and equitable working conditions, leaders can cultivate a culture that is receptive to change, enhancing overall employee satisfaction and motivation, and thereby increasing the likelihood of success in future change initiatives (Timming, 2021).

Furthermore, the presence of inflexible hierarchies, excessive bureaucracy, and resource limitations can present significant barriers to the implementation of new initiatives (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Resistance is often magnified when proposed changes are perceived to conflict with the organisation's established cultural norms and values. Past negative experiences with change can engender skepticism, resulting in a reluctance to embrace future alterations. Consequently, the organisational history significantly influences attitudes toward change, necessitating that leadership—both at the executive and middle management levels—effectively comprehend and manage resistance across the organisational landscape (Gronvad et al., 2023).

Resistance to change is often an instinctual reaction, yet understanding its underlying causes allows organisations to tackle it proactively, enhancing the acceptance of change initiatives (Hubbart, 2023). Leaders hold a pivotal role in shaping a culture that accepts change; they must convey the rationale for change adeptly, provide necessary resources and support to employees, and remain responsive to employee concerns. Cultivating an inclusive and equitable work environment is imperative; when employees feel valued and supported, their willingness to engage with change initiatives significantly increases (Hubbart, 2023).

At the team level, resistance is substantially shaped by established norms, dynamics, and power structures (Hubbart, 2023). Teams develop distinct modes of collaboration, establishing informal rules and rituals that govern their interactions. These norms can engender a sense of comfort, yielding resistance when changes threaten established patterns (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023). The pressure to conform and maintain group harmony may compel individuals to align their perspectives with the prevailing sentiment, thus stifling dissenting opinions and inhibiting candid dialogue regarding the proposed changes.

Moreover, individual resistance often arises from psychological factors, personal circumstances, and individual perceptions of the change initiative (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Change inherently necessitates stepping outside one's comfort zone and confronting uncertainty, which can induce anxiety or apprehension among those who favour predictability. Individuals may fear the prospect of adapting to a new environment or acquiring new skills, which may exacerbate concerns surrounding job security. The phenomenon of loss aversion further complicates this dynamic; individuals may fixate on perceived losses associated with change—such as familiar routines, established relationships, or a sense of control over their work—rather than recognising the potential benefits (Hubbart, 2023; Aninkan, 2018).

Resistance may also stem from a lack of trust in organisational leadership or the legitimacy of the change rationale. Should individuals believe that a proposed change is not in their best interest or that the organisation is not forthcoming about potential ramifications, they are likely to resist (Hubbart, 2023). Additionally, personal factors such as family obligations, stress, or health issues can reduce an individual's capacity or willingness to embrace change.

A comprehensive understanding of these multi-faceted levels of resistance is essential for the effective management of change initiatives. Leaders and change agents must employ targeted strategies to address the specific concerns and challenges at each level (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Aninkan, 2018). For instance, at the organisational level, addressing cultural inertia may involve revisiting the organisation's mission and values, articulating the necessity for change in alignment with these core principles, and facilitating opportunities for employee input regarding the future direction of the organisation (Hubbart, 2023). At the team level, fostering open dialogue, addressing power dynamics, and encouraging constructive dissent can alleviate resistance (Hubbart, 2023). Meanwhile, at the individual level, effective communication, empathy, and support are crucial for building trust and alleviating anxieties, thereby promoting a more receptive atmosphere for change initiatives.

2.7.2 Internal and external dimension of resistance

Forces of change, which are the causes or reasons of change or resistance, can take place because of various internal and external causes. Internal forces are the forces that exist within an organization. In short, these forces are under the control of the organisation (e.g., change in leadership, implementation of new technology, a decline in profitability, changes in employee profiles and union actions, etc.). External forces are the forces that are present outside the organisation and are beyond the control of the organisation (e.g., government policies, changes in the economy, competition, cost of raw materials, technological advancement, scarcity of labour, social pressures, legal requirements, etc.).

2.8 Managing Resistance to Change

People are always reluctant to embrace change. They may resist change by showing various symptoms, such as poor performance, disinterest in the work, increased absenteeism, shutdowns, and strikes. No organisation can implement change successfully without the consent of employees. Therefore, it is important for organisations to manage resistance to change. Organisations use various ways to manage resistance to change. Some of them are as follows:

- **Facilitation:** Managers/leaders should facilitate change by working with employees and helping them to adapt to change easily (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021).
- **Education:** Managers/leaders should make employees aware of the reasons for change, the benefits of the change to be implemented, the skills required to implement the change, etc. (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021).
- **Involvement:** Managers/leaders should involve employees in planning and implementing change by asking for their valuable suggestions and ideas (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021).
- **Negotiation:** Managers/leaders should always have a discussion with employees for reaching a mutual agreement to change (Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021).
- **Training programs:** People should be well-trained to implement the change. Regular meetings, communication, team building, and coaching should be arranged so that employees can accept the change easily (Hubbart, 2023).

2.9 Communicating change in an organization

Ifedayo (2023) defines communication as the process through which individuals interact with one another and their environment, using verbal and nonverbal methods. Communication involves exchanging information within an organisation through various forms and channels, formal or informal. Change communication is the process of sharing information and conversing about an upcoming or current change in the workplace. It is vital to understand that change communication helps employees and other stakeholders understand the importance, scope, and impact of new initiatives. The three key elements of change communication are (1) explaining what the change will mean for the organisation and why it is necessary; (2) outlining the goals of the change; and (3) describing how employees' roles will be affected.

Malek and Yazdanifard (2012) and Piercy and Underhill (2021) have conducted several recent studies that indicate that many organisational change initiatives fail due to shortcomings in internal communication. Indeed, inadequate communication generates confusion, uncertainty, rumors, and a

lack of awareness. Managers must make serious attempts to communicate the nature and impact of the proposed changes. Informative communication is critical to ensuring readiness for change (Elving, 2015; Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Elving (2015) argues that effective communication fosters a sense of community, helping employees feel connected and committed to the organisation during times of change. Effective change communication is crucial for successfully implementing change, as it serves as a tool for announcing, explaining, and preparing people for it. Effective change communication ensures that information is shared, participation is encouraged, compliance is achieved, and feedback is gathered, leading to a more engaged change process. Communication aids in the psychological transition that individuals go through during change, helping them to understand and support the new direction. Ifedayo (2023) highlights that leadership's inability to effectively deliver and receive communications, recognise communication barriers, and take proactive steps to avoid them can hinder successful change communication at an organisational level. Lack of managerial communication skills can significantly hinder successful organisational change. Conveying inaccurate or incomplete information can result in misunderstandings, mistrust, and resistance to change. Managers may need help articulating the reasons for a change to avoid employee confusion and uncertainty.

According to Ifedayo (2023), it is very crucial for leadership at all levels to effectively manage communication during the change process in order to ensure the successful adaptation of employees and a smooth transition during the change process. Effective change communication informs and educates employees about changes, builds trust, and fosters a sense of community. Communication helps reduce uncertainty, encourages employee participation, and addresses concerns about job security and motivation (Ifedayo, 2023; Hubbart, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Effective change communication requires a strategy that aligns with the stages, pre-change, change, and post-change of the change process (Ifedayo, 2023). During the post-change phase, leadership at all levels of the organisation celebrates successes, acknowledges challenges, and evaluates outcomes (Ifedayo, 2023). Multiple communication channels reach a broader audience and reduce reliance on one channel. Effective communication is the cornerstone of successful change, as inadequate communication can lead to resistance, confusion, and, ultimately, the failure of the change initiative.

2.9.1 Change communication plan, communication channel and mix

A change communication plan is a strategic approach to inform and engage stakeholders about an upcoming change initiative, its goals, tools, benefits, and expectations (Piercy & Underhill, 2021). It provides a structured framework for communication tasks, transforming an abstract concept into a concrete and actionable plan. Elving (2015) and Malek and Yazdanifard (2012) assert that a change communication plan provides a structured approach to managing communication activities, ensuring that all efforts align with the change management objectives. It transforms abstract ideas into actionable

tasks, making understanding and executing the communication strategy easier. The change communication plan includes environment analysis (e.g., understanding the internal and external environment), goal setting (e.g., setting a clear, unambiguous vision and specific goals for each message in the communication plan), crafting key messages (e.g., identifying the audience (e.g., their needs, expectations, and profile) essential to segmenting audiences to address their specific concerns effectively), and selecting appropriate media channels (e.g., the right media channels for message delivery). The communication method should reflect the message's importance and the level of impact it has on the audience. The communication plan integrates these elements to effectively convey and receive messages, thereby facilitating a smoother change process (Elving, 2015; Ifedayo, 2023).

According to Hirschfield (1999); Piercy and Underhill (2021), effective organisational change management communication should be forthright, easily understood, and free from condescending tones. Thus, it is crucial for the leadership at all levels of the organisation to ensure that each communication piece has a clear purpose and identifies a specific target audience. The central purpose of a communication plan is to share essential information with the target audience and do so at the correct time. In other words, a well-crafted communication plan assists leadership within the organisation to share the right information with the right people at the right time, thereby preventing conflict and resistance and promoting a smoother change management process (Rashad, 2012). According to Robin Mayhall (2009) and Rashad (2012) and Piercy and Underhill (2021), the four crucial activities involved in creating and implementing a change communication plan are:

- Identify the prevailing situation and determine the need for communication by gathering relevant information and data.
- Define the goals and objectives of the communication plan and identify the target audience, including their needs, interests, and preferences.
- Carry out the communication plan using various channels and strategies to convey the message to the target audience.
- Assess the effectiveness of the communication plan by measuring its impact, gathering feedback, and determining the success achieved in reaching the intended goals and objectives.

2.10 Understanding the meaning of communication channel and its features

It is crucial to emphasise that the current study specifically focuses on communication channels, which are clearly part of the communication plan. With the rise of smartphones, social media, and various digital communication platforms, scholars such as Jiang, Cameron, and Opoku-Mensah (2023) are focusing on the notion of multi-communicating (MC), especially that individuals are simultaneously engaging in multiple communication tasks using information and communication technologies. Communication channels can be defined in various ways that people in an organisation, workplace, or

regular life interact with one another and communicate (Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Researchers and practitioners of change management need to be aware of the common practice of people in the workplace, social gatherings, educational settings, or even during leisure time engaging in multiple conversations simultaneously across various channels, which has an influence on the choice of communication channel to deliver the message to the target audience effectively and efficiently (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023).

The variety of communication channels as the methods that are used to communicate include phone calls, text messages, emails, and face-to-face conversations, among others. It is prudent to acknowledge that communication channels can be categorised in many different ways, such as by their purpose, which may be to inform, request, give feedback, or build relationships. It is argued that the most common communication channels are verbal communication (e.g., face-to-face conversation, telephone calls, and video conferencing). Notably, there are also nonverbal communication channels such as body language, facial expressions and gestures, and written communication (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023). Written communication takes a variety of forms, such as email, text messages, and social media posts. Identifying the most effective communication channel for message delivery is crucial for ensuring the success of change communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has further reinforced individuals' reliance on and comfort with digital communication due to businesses' swiftly adapting to remote work arrangements and individuals' increasing proficiency in using digital communication tools for virtual interactions. Thus, there is a rise in digital channels or IT-mediated communication in the workplace useful for change communication (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023; Piercy & Underhill, 2021). However, our ever-present smartphones inhibit the ability to remain focused on a task, an issue that is critical in communication channel selection and mix to effectively communicate change. There are communication tasks with interleaved turns where the focal communicator (the person engaged in multi-communicating) switches back and forth between different communication threads, which can include one-on-one IT-mediated conversations, virtual or in-person group meetings, back-and-forth texting, and even rapid email exchanges.

Internal communications teams are responsible for disseminating various messages, yet they often fail to select the most efficient channel for this purpose. Too often, they fall into the trap of trying to get an important message out quickly rather than taking time to consider how it fits into their overall communication strategy as well as how the identified channel best supports the targeted change and communication objective (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023). As channels are also categorised into formal or informal types, it is salient that change leaders and change communicators are familiar with key characteristics of these two types of communications. Formal communication is characterised as structured and uses official channels that are established by the organisation, such as memos, emails, or meetings. On the other hand, informal communication is the grapevine or unofficial and spontaneous

informal networks that develop naturally within an organization. (e.g., watercooler conversations or instant messaging, informal gatherings, and social media interactions) (Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Another key characteristic of informal communication channels is that they are not established or regulated by the organisation as they emerge through social interactions and informal relationships among employees (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023).

While formal channels provide clear guidelines and structure, informal channels allow for more spontaneous and unfiltered conversations. Another characteristic of formal communication channels is that they are often documented, leaving behind a paper trail or digital record, making it easier to track and reference past communications (Jiang, Cameron, and Opoku-Mensah, 2023). Documentation helps in maintaining accountability and serves as a reference for future decision-making. While formal communication channels provide structure and clarity, they can sometimes be slow and rigid (e.g., adherence to certain protocols, use predefined format), and information may take time to trickle down, resulting in delays in decision-making or implementation (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023). In short, formal communication hinders spontaneous and creative conversations necessary for the generation of new ideas or innovative solutions. Informal channels do not follow a predefined hierarchy but can flow in any direction, regardless of the organisational structure. These channels are characterised by their informality, flexibility, and ability to adapt to the changing needs of individuals or teams.

One of the defining characteristics of informal communication channels is their speed and agility. Information can spread rapidly through informal networks, allowing for the quick dissemination of news, updates, or rumours. This agility can be advantageous in situations where immediate responses or informal feedback are required (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023; Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Another characteristic of informal communication channels is the personal nature of the interactions. Informal channels allow for more casual and relaxed conversations, fostering a sense of camaraderie and trust among employees. These channels enable individuals to express their opinions, concerns, or ideas in a less formal and more comfortable setting. The disadvantages of informal communication channels include a lack of structure and regulation, which may sometimes facilitate the spread of inaccurate or misleading information. As informal channels do not document messages, they create a challenge to track or reference past conversations or decisions made through informal communication (Jiang, Cameron, & Opoku-Mensah, 2023).

Piercy and Underhill (2021), Jiang, Cameron, and Opoku-Mensah (2023) asserted that when determining the most effective communication channels to connect with stakeholders of planned change, it is crucial to consider three factors: (i) understanding of stakeholder (internal and external)

preferences and characteristics; (2) clarity of the context of information to communicate; and (3) accessibility and inclusivity of the communication channel.

First, there are stakeholder preferences, characteristics, behaviours, and attributes that shape reference. Notably, preferences may vary, with some favouring in-person interactions and others leaning toward digital communication (Piercy & Underhill, 2021). A clear understanding of how issues such as age, profession, and cultural background can further shape their preferred communication methods is key in change communication. The phrase "start where your audience is" highlights the significance of understanding an organisation's target audience's needs, interests, and preferences when communicating change (Rashad, 2012; Jiang, Cameron & Opoku-Mensah, 2023). Second, context of information to communicate is key, as some messages may be sensitive or complex to convey to some stakeholders. Is the issue solely related to regular updates and announcements? It is critical to consider the urgency and time-sensitivity of what is being communicated. How urgently must the message be delivered? Is the message time-sensitive? Or is this more routine and considered low urgency? Some communication channels can take time to plan, set up, and launch. When an urgent message is required, change leaders and change communicators need to make sure they have the tools to deliver (Jiang, Cameron & Opoku-Mensah, 2023).

Third, accessibility and inclusivity are key in selecting a communication channel to ensure that the chosen communication channels are accessible to all stakeholders. Some stakeholders may encounter language barriers, physical limitations, or technical constraints. It is key to ensure the provision of alternative channels or accommodations to foster inclusivity.

2.10.1 A channel mix plan

One channel does not fit all when communicating change in an organization. Not all communication channels are considered equal. While each has its own set of advantages, some modes of communication are naturally stronger and effective for powerful dialogue and discussion (e.g., staff meetings, informal and formal settings, virtual or in-person town hall meetings arranged when leadership or management wants to talk to all of employees, panel discussions), whereas others allow one-sided detailed communication (Jiang, Cameron & Opoku-Mensah, 2023; Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Organisations can build a small website or web page to communicate with their employees and other key stakeholders about change initiative and process.

Twitchell (2020) contends that email is generally the best communication when one needs to send quick updates about change in a way that does not want to waste time with scheduling face-to-face meetings. This method of communication is ideal for transmitting structured official announcements of organisational change, especially when conveying important messages down the chain of command

(Piercy & Underhill, 2021; Jiang, Cameron & Opoku-Mensah, 2023). Organisations must avoid making the costly mistake of simply relying on one communication channel, such as e-mail or the company website.

Stakeholders of change require information in a different format to comprehend it properly. Once change information has been developed, it is important to make several communication pathways and channels available for use in change communication (Piercy & Underhill, 2021; Jiang, Cameron, and Opoku-Mensah, 2023). Organisations are only now beginning to use social media as a change communication tool. Social media is most associated with engaging with individuals outside of the workplace. While clarity of communication channel and its characteristics are crucial, it is equally vital to understand how channels are categorised to achieve change communication objective. Change communication is also categorised into two groups: external change channels (e.g., targeting customers, prospects, suppliers, and investors) and internal channels for communicating with employees and departments within the organisation (Twitchell, 2020).

A channel mix plan for change communication is a strategic document that pinpoints the most effective communication channels for reaching the priority audience, as well as the optimal combination of channels to enhance the messages' reach and effectiveness (Piercy & Underhill, 2021). Without a well-developed channel mix plan, messages may not reach the priority audience, resulting in wasted resources.

- Information on what channels is most effective for the priority audience, based on past impact, audience needs and preferences, and channel availability.
- Recommendations for how the program should combine different channels based on the advantages and disadvantages of each, the fit between the message and the channel, as well as the appropriate timing and scheduling of the messages.
- Information on resources available and how they will be allocated to different channels.

The channel mix selected for the change depends on the communication landscape, audience characteristics, the change objectives and messages, reach and intensity, and budget. Knowing how to employ the best communication channels for change management is crucial for the success of change initiatives. Every communication channel has its own advantages and disadvantages (Piercy & Underhill, 2021; Twitchell, 2020). Change leaders must use them wisely for their benefit and avoid using the wrong channel to minimise the risk of failure of change communication.

2.11 Models of change management and insights on change methods

Organisational change management literature has revealed various models and theories of change. However, in this exploratory qualitative study the focus is on insights from three well-known organisation change management models or frameworks, namely (i) Kurt Lewin's model, (ii) Kotter's Model, and (iii) Prosci's Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (ADKAR) model.

Change management models or frameworks act as a guiding framework that assists organisation leadership and employees in navigating and leading change efforts by outlining the necessary steps and processes to follow, identifying the key factors that influence change, and determining the most effective strategies and levers to use for successful change management (Parry et al., 2013). This section discusses the change management model with the view to understanding change methods that help in the successful implementation of the change efforts.

2.11.1 Kurt Lewin's Three-step Change Management Method

Kurt Lewin's Change Management Model, also known as the Three-Step Change Management Method or the Unfreezing-Change-Refreezing Model, is a well-known and widely used method for implementing organisational change. German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin developed it in the 1940s and 1950s. Kurt Lewin was a pioneer in the field of organisational behaviour and organisational development. The change management method came about because Lewin recognised that organisations often face significant challenges when implementing changes. He identified that individuals resist change because they are comfortable with their current habits and routines. To overcome resistance to change, Lewin proposed a three-step process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, which has the potential to reveal how the reconfiguration of water boards unfolded, the change methods and communication channels used, as well as the nature of resistance and its root causes at the unfreeze, change, and refreeze phases. The model is in figure 2.5 and discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

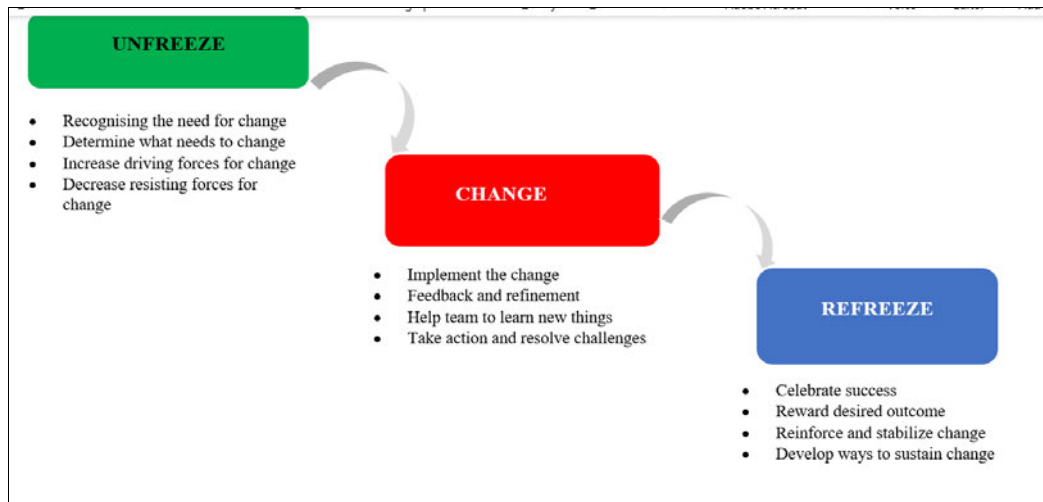


Figure 2.5 : Kurt Lewin's Change management model

Source: Hussain et al (2018:24)

Parry et al. (2013) contend that the first step, "unfreezing," involves disrupting the current state and creating a sense of urgency for change while building support and preparation for the upcoming change. This stage is critical in driving the change effort and setting the tone for the entire process. According to Lewin (1951), "unfreezing" requires a deep understanding of the organisation's current state, including its strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. This stage addresses potential resistance to change by building trust and establishing a shared purpose. Various authors, such as Bhavani and Mahalakshmi (2023), Rumelt (2017), Lewin (1951), Piderit (2000), Burke (2017), Parry et al. (2013), Nwachuku et al. (2023), and Siddiqui (2017), emphasised the importance of effective communication in the "unfreezing" stage. The second step, "change," is about moving toward the desired future state.

The second stage, "changing," involves implementing the actual changes. Rumelt (2017) argues that effective communication is critical in building trust and creating a shared purpose. This stage requires careful planning, execution, and monitoring to ensure successful implementation. According to Lewin (1951), "changing" involves introducing new behaviours, processes, and systems that align with the organisation's change management strategic goals and objectives. Communication can take various forms, including written, verbal, and observed behaviours, and can be used to reinforce already underway changes. It is essential to use a range of communication channels, such as presentations, one-on-one conversations, and organisational newsletters, to reach all stakeholders and ensure that everyone is informed and aligned with the change (Kotter, 2012).

Leaders should communicate frequently and transparently about the reasons for the change, its impact on the organisation and its employees, and the steps being taken to implement it. This aids in alleviating the uncertainty and anxiety that frequently surface during the introduction of changes.

The final stage, "refreezing," involves consolidating the changes and ensuring they become permanent (Kotter, 2012). According to Lewin (1951), "refreezing" involves reinforcing new behaviours, processes, and systems to ensure that new behaviour becomes ingrained in the organisation's culture. Hartley (2015) argues that leaders should build organisational capacity and capability to ensure successful implementation and sustainability. Lewin's three-stage model offers a comprehensive framework for comprehending effective change management. Organisations can drive smooth change efforts and achieve lasting success by understanding the importance of effective communication, minimising resistance, and change readiness.

Nwachuku (2023) has identified weaknesses and drawbacks of the Lewinian change models. First, critics argue that the model needs to be more flexible as it fails to account for the complexity and uniqueness of each organisational context. Others argue that the model oversimplifies the change process, neglecting essential factors such as organisational culture, power dynamics, and stakeholder interests. Critics also add that the model does not account for emergent properties, such as unexpected consequences or unanticipated outcomes, which can arise during the change process (Nwachuku, 2023). In the model, there is an overemphasis on individual behaviour, neglecting the importance of organisational culture and structural factors in driving change. Notably, there is the assumption that individuals make decisions based on rational thinking, which may not be the case in real-world situations where emotions, politics, and biases play a significant role in how decisions are made. The question of how the model considers the impact of power imbalances and organisational politics, which can influence the change process is unclear. Nonetheless, the model provides researchers and change management practitioners not only the notion of a stage-based and sequential process of change but also directs them to analyse change methods, communication channels, and resistance evident in each of the three stages.

2.11.2 Kotter's Eight-Step Change Management Method

Dr. John Kotter developed the eight-step change management model as a response to the consistent mistakes and missteps observed—such as a lack of urgency, ineffective communication, insufficient empowerment, and premature celebrations—that can undermine even the most well-conceived initiatives. Understanding these pitfalls is essential for leaders and practitioners striving to navigate the complexities of change successfully (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023). By following Kotter's steps and avoiding these frequent mistakes, organisations can cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Kotter aimed to provide a reliable roadmap for managing significant organisational changes through a structured approach. It considers challenges, dynamics, and human elements involved in transitions.

Kotter's model emphasises the importance of leadership in driving change, having a clear and compelling vision, communication, employee engagement, and recognition of resistance to change (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). The change management model provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring a successful change management process. The widely-used model considers all aspects of change and provides actionable steps. Skipping any of these steps can lead to difficulties during the change implementation process (Yandarbaeva, 2022). Below in figure 2.6 is the eight-step model of change management with the three different major activities as proposed by John Kotter.

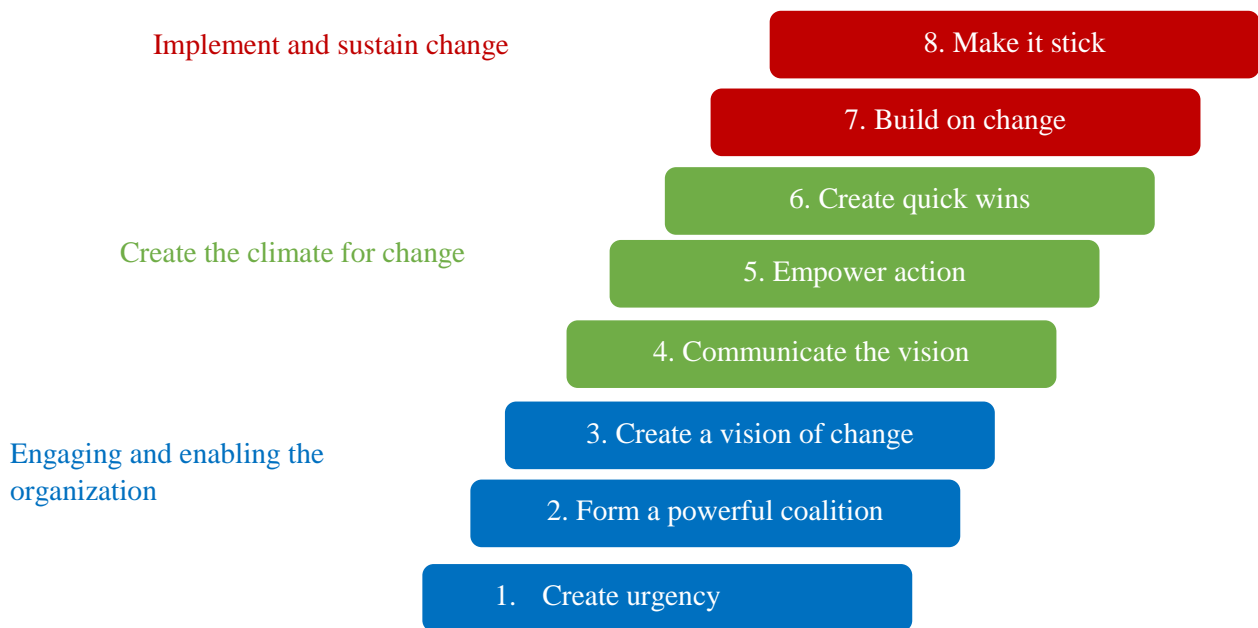


Figure 2.6: Kotter Eight-Step Change Management Model

Source: Adopted from Kotter, (1996:23); Appelbaum et. al, (2012)

Kotter's Change Model emphasises the importance of engaging employees in the change process to ensure successful adoption (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). The eight stages are:

In step (1), leadership creates a sense of urgency by convincing all organizational stakeholders of the importance of change, emphasizing the need for change. Inspire people to act with passion and purpose to achieve a bold, aspirational opportunity build momentum that excites people to pursue a compelling (and clear) vision of the future together is key. In step (2) the focus is on building a powerful and guiding coalition to lead the change effort and ensure everyone is aligned and working towards the same goal and aware of what are the change benefits. Step (3) is about creation of the vision of the change.

Clarifying how the future will be different from the past and get buy-in for how you can make that future a reality through initiatives linked directly to the vision is important. The change vision depicts the desired future state. The guiding coalition develops a clear and compelling vision of what the future state will look like after implementing the change. As shown in figure 8, it is clear that these initial four steps together are about engaging, and enabling by removing barriers in the organization, and creating sense of urgency and clarity of change vision.

The subsequent three steps in the Kotter model of change focus on creating the climate for change. In this regard, step 4 is specifically about communication and the formulated change vision. Step 5 is about empowering stakeholders to take action and execute change. Enabling action by removing barriers or obstacles that slow things down or create roadblocks to progress. Clearing the way for people to innovate, work more nimbly across silos, and generate impact quickly is the focus of this stage. Step (6) is about generating short-term wins. Wins are the molecules of results; as such, they must be recognised, collected, and communicated—early and often—to track progress and energise volunteers to persist. Building momentum and demonstrating progress towards the vision are pivotal to energise stakeholders.

The last two steps dwell on implanting and sustaining change. Step (7) is build on change, which is simply about sustaining acceleration and pressing harder after the first successes. Thus, increasing credibility can improve systems, structures, and policies. Step (8) is about making change stick. It entails articulating the connections between new behaviours and organisational success, making sure they continue until they become strong enough to replace old habits. Evaluation of systems and processes to ensure management practices reinforce the new behaviours, mindsets, and new ways of working is critical in instituting change or embedding it in the organisation's culture, policies, and procedures, ensuring long-term sustainability (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023).

Nwachunu, Okereka, and Mukoro (2023) argue that the weakness of the model is that it oversimplifies complex situations and assumes a linear process from which reality often deviates. There is less emphasis on technical aspects as it is people-centric. Some authors (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021) argue that it lacks agility and adaptability. Critics highlight the need for context-specific adjustments. Others suggest combining it with other models for a holistic approach. Some argue that it lacks agility and adaptability (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). In summary, Kotter's model offers a valuable framework for analysing and implementing change, but its application requires thoughtful adaptation and consideration of organisational context (Errida & Lotfi, 2021).

2.11.3 The Prosci ADKAR Change Management Method

Haitt and Creasey (2013) developed ADKAR as an acronym for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. The model provides a framework for understanding the different stages of individual change and how to manage each stage effectively. The ADKAR Change Management Model was developed by Jeff Hiatt, a renowned change management expert, and his colleagues at Prosci (Prosci Inc.), a leading global change management organization. The model was first introduced in 2003 and has since become a widely accepted approach to managing organisational change. The ADKAR model was created to address the need for a practical, actionable approach to change management. The model is based on the principles of adult learning theory and the idea that individuals have a unique learning style, pace, and motivation. The ADKAR model aims to address these individual differences by providing a structured approach to managing change that focuses on the needs of each employee. The ADKAR model is a practical framework for managing change, consisting of five sequential stages:

- **Awareness of the Need to Change:** The organisation raises awareness about the need for change, providing reasons and explanations to justify the change. Awareness is built through effective communications and executive sponsorship to establish an urgency level needed by the change process and identify how the change aligns with the organisation's vision (Hiatt, 2006; Haitt & Creasey, 2013).
- **Desire to make the change happen:** Employees are motivated to change and make a conscious decision to support the change, recognising its necessity. Desire refers to an individual's willingness to engage in the change. Desire is influenced by personal circumstances and expectations regarding outcomes. To mitigate resistance to change, managers should focus on building desire by equipping leaders to lead the change, engaging collaborators in the process, and aligning incentives with the change goals. A critical component of this stage is developing a communication strategy that identifies key audiences and messages, determines the timing and anticipated outcomes, and clarifies what will happen during and after the change. By taking these steps, organisations can guide employees through the resistance to change and build momentum for successful implementation (Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt & Creasey, 2013).
- **Knowledge about how to change:** During this stage, employees learn how to adapt by acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding of what needs to be changed. Knowledge about change involves developing awareness of behaviours, processes, tools, skills, and roles. Knowledge is gained through various means, such as education programs, one-on-one coaching, and online forums. It is essential to continually assess knowledge levels during and after the change to identify skill gaps, allowing for targeted support and planning to ensure a smooth transition (Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt & Creasey, 2013).
- **Ability to change:** Employees demonstrate their capacity to implement the change, identifying potential barriers and obstacles that may hinder the process. During this stage, employees

demonstrate their ability to implement the change by identifying potential barriers and obstacles that may hinder the process and showing the necessary skills to implement the change. During this stage, employees are expected to develop the skills and abilities necessary to successfully adopt and maintain the change. These skills include communication, problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, collaboration, and teamwork. By identifying potential barriers and obstacles, employees can proactively address them and ensure a smoother transition to the new change (Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt & Creasey, 2013).

- Reinforcement to retain the change: The organisation provides support and reinforcement to help stabilise and adopt the change, using feedback, rewards, performance evaluation, and corrective action. Hence, this change stage includes the monitoring and evaluation plan (Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt & Creasey, 2013).

The ADKAR change management model assists organisations in guiding employees through the change process, ensuring a smooth transition and successful implementation of the change. Individuals become aware of the gap between their current situation and their desired future state. Employees begin to desire the change and see its benefits. They start to imagine what their life will be like after the change. With knowledge, employees gain a deeper understanding of the change and how it will affect them. They acquire the knowledge necessary to adapt to the new situation. Employees develop the skills and abilities necessary to implement the change. They learn how to apply new skills and knowledge relevant to change efforts. Employees reinforce their new behaviours and habits, ensuring they stick to their changes (Creasey, 2003; Oreg et al., 2011; Schwarz & Davidson, 2017; Lencioni, 2016; Goleman et al., 2013).

The ADKAR change management model recognises that individuals have different levels of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement and that these factors must be considered when implementing change. The change management model proposes a staged approach to change, where individuals go through distinct stages of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement (Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023). This approach helps to ensure that individual employees within the organisation are prepared for each stage of the change process. The change management method emphasises the importance of creating a supportive environment that encourages employees to adopt and adapt to changes. Leadership should provide necessary financial and nonfinancial resources and training. The model recognises the importance of employee engagement and motivation by involving employees in the change process and providing them with opportunities for growth and development.

It underscores the importance of clear and effective communication, using appropriate communication channels to reach a great audience, providing regular updates on the progress of the change, addressing employee concerns, and offering opportunities for feedback and input. (Creasey, 2003; Oreg et al.,

2011; Schwarz & Davidson, 2017; Lencioni, 2016; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013; Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023).

Bhavani and Mahalakshmi (2023) are explicit that the ADKAR change management model recognises the importance of sponsorship in successful change management. Sponsorship refers to the active support and involvement of senior leaders in the change process, which can help to build trust and credibility with employees. Additionally, the model also emphasises the importance of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the change process. This includes tracking progress against goals, identifying areas for improvement, and adjusting as needed. It also emphasises reinforcing new behaviours and habits after the change. The model recognises that each individual's journey through change is unique and may require flexibility regarding approach, resources, and support (Hiatt & Creasey, 2003; Oreg et al., 2011; Schwarz & Davidson, 2017; Lencioni, 2016; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013).

The limitations of the model are that it focuses too much on individual change and needs to include the broader organisational context. The model may not be suitable for large-scale or complex changes that require significant cultural or structural shifts. The success of the ADKAR model relies heavily on leadership support and sponsorship. With solid leadership buy-in and commitment, the model may be effective. The model needs to provide more guidance on addressing resistance to change. Thus, addressing resistance to change is a critical aspect of change management, as it can pose a significant obstacle to successful implementation (Bekmukhambetova, 2021).

As change management is a complex and multifaceted process, it is essential to understand a variety of perspectives, models, and approaches to sufficiently inform the examination of the change process to reconfigure the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Below is figure 2.7, which focuses not only on what is required but also the necessary actions at each stage towards the desired change and its sustenance.

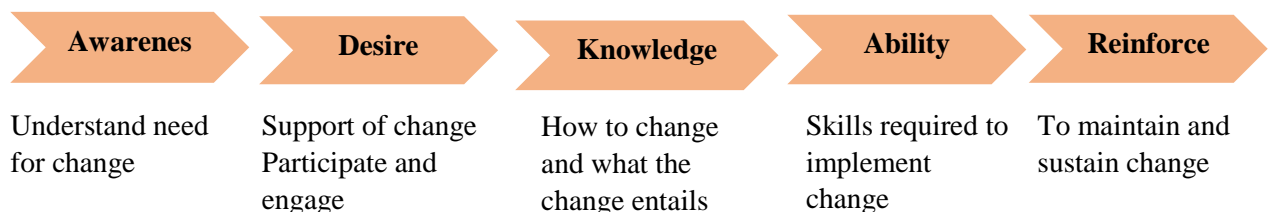


Figure 2. 7 : ADKAR Change Management Model

Source: Hiatt & Creasey (2013:26)

2.12 Institutional theory and organization change management

Institutional theory is a sociological perspective that focuses on the role of social institutions and their influence on human behaviour and organisational structures (Kuipers, Higgs, Kickert, Tummers, Grandia & Voet, 2014). The theory was developed by American sociologist John W. Meyer in the 1970s and 1980s, who was interested in understanding why organisations, particularly in the United States, were becoming increasingly similar and homogenous despite their different purposes and goals. He argued that this was due to the influence of social institutions, such as education, government, and media, which shape our perceptions and behaviours. Institutional theory provides a powerful explanation for why organisations are similar and respond similarly to environmental pressures. The theory can be applied to various organisations, including businesses, non-profits, and government agencies (Kuipers, 2014). Institutional theory helps explain how organisations adapt to changing environmental conditions and how they may resist or adopt new institutional norms (Van Wijk, Jakomijn, Zietsma, De Bakker, and Martí, 2019). Some critics argue that the theory overemphasises the uniformity of organisations and neglects individual differences. Institutional theory is often criticised for neglecting the role of power dynamics within organisations and their environments. The theory primarily explains organisational behaviour within Western societies; its applicability to non-Western contexts is limited (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Kuipers, 2014).

Institutional theory can be applied to understand the changes occurring in the reconfiguration of water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. For example, as water utilities in KwaZulu-Natal face increasing pressure from government regulations, environmental concerns, and changing consumer demands, they may adopt similar strategies and structures to conform to institutional norms. Institutional logic around sustainability, equity, and efficiency may drive the shift toward regional water utilities. Government policies, international standards, and public expectations around environmental stewardship may legitimise water utilities' reconfiguration (Kuipers, 2014). Critics argue that institutional theory oversimplifies complex organisational processes and neglects individual agency (Van Wijk et al., 2019). Some argue that the theory focuses too much on conformity and neglects innovation and creativity. Others criticise the theory for being too Western-centric and neglecting the unique characteristics of non-Western organisational contexts (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000).

Overall, the institutional theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the reconfiguration of a water utility in KwaZulu-Natal by highlighting the role of social institutions in shaping organisational behaviour and decision-making processes (Kuipers, 2014). In organisational change, institutional theory highlights the importance of institutional factors in understanding the factors that influence organisational change and effective management of the change process in public institutions such as regional water utilities (Paul & Walter, 2000; Van Wijk et al., 2019). The institutional theory

gives insights into institutional-level factors and how they actually or could shape change management methods and communication channels used, but also the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

2.12.1 Isomorphism

DiMaggio & Powell (2000) and Elgar (2022) contend that the concept of isomorphism has its roots in the work of sociologist Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, who introduced it in 1983; the concept is based on the assumption that organisations tend to adopt similar structures, practices, and norms due to institutional pressures from their environment, such as market pressures, regulatory requirements, or social norms. The isomorphism phenomenon came about as a response to the increasing complexity and uncertainty of organisational environments (Kuipers, 2014; Van Wijk et al., 2019). Organisations faced pressure to adapt to changing market conditions, technological advancements, and regulatory requirements, leading to adopting similar structures and practices across different industries. There are several types of Isomorphism, including Mimetic Isomorphism occurs when organisations adopt similar structures and practices because they believe it is the best way to achieve their goals based on the behaviours and structures of other organisations in their field (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Elgar, 2022). Coercive Isomorphism occurs when organisations are forced to adopt similar structures and practices due to external pressures, such as regulatory requirements, market pressures, or social norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000). Normative Isomorphism occurs when organisations adopt similar structures and practices because they share a standard set of values, norms, and beliefs about appropriate or desirable behaviour (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000).

Institutional theory assumes that organisations tend to conform to similar structures and practices due to environmental pressures and expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000). Thus, this could lead to similar responses to organisational change, adopting similar change management strategies, such as a top-down or a bottom-up approach, because they believe this is the best way to achieve successful change. Organisations may adopt similar best practices, such as a particular management philosophy or technology, because they believe this is the best way to achieve success. Organisations may adopt similar organisational structures, such as a particular organisational chart or reporting structure, because they believe this is the best way to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. (Elgar, 2022; DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Kuipers, 2014) argues that Isomorphism allows organisations to learn from each other's experiences and successes, facilitating learning and improvement and reducing the risk of costly mistakes. In examining change management during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility, Isomorphism could be used to adopt best practices from other successful water utilities that have undergone similar transformations. However, it is essential to adopt best practices while considering the unique circumstances and challenges the water board faces.

In contrast, DiMaggio & Powell (2000) and Elgar (2022) argue that Isomorphism limits innovation, as organisations may be less likely to innovate or try new approaches because they follow established norms and practices. Organisations may need more support to adapt to changing circumstances because they are constrained by established norms and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Kuipers, 2014). Isomorphism may not address the underlying issues driving the need for change; instead, it focuses on surface-level changes that may not lead to sustainable outcomes.

2.12.2 Path Dependence

Path dependence is a critical concept in institutional theory, and it suggests that organisational change management is influenced by the organisation's past experiences, decisions, and actions. In other words, the path an organisation has taken in the past shapes its future trajectory, ability to adapt to change, and the strategy adopted in management change (Elgar, 2022; Kuipers, 2014). Factors that influence path dependence include historical events such as leadership styles, significant events, and previous strategies that were adopted to manage change; institutional context, including its relationship with other organisations and stakeholders; and organisational characteristics such as leadership style, culture, and value (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000).

Path dependence can manifest in several ways; organisations may be reluctant to abandon investments or resources that have already been committed, even if they are no longer viable. Organisations may be influenced by the legacies of their early/previous leaders or previous decisions, which can shape their culture, values, and practices (Kuipers, 2014; Van Wijk et al., 2019). Organisations may develop relationships with other organisations, stakeholders, or institutions over time, which can influence their ability to adapt to change. Organisations may experience inertia, where they are slow to change because they are accustomed to doing things a certain way or because they are risk-averse (Elgar, 2022; Kuipers, 2014). Organisations may experience feedback loops, where past events or outcomes influence their current behaviour and decision-making processes (Van Wijk et al., 2019). It is crucial for leadership that is driving the implementation of the reconfiguration of a water board to a regional water utility to understand path dependence, as it is essential for understanding how organisations respond to change and how they can adapt to overcome challenges related to resistance to change and craft change management strategies that will overcome possible barriers to effective change management (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000).

2.12.3 Institutionalized Power

Institutionalised power is distributed and exercised within the organisation, often through formal structures, rules, and norms. Institutional theory is based on the assumption that power dynamics can influence change management at an organisational level (Elgar, 2022). For example, when decisions

are made by a small group of top-level managers with little input from others, this can limit the ability of others to contribute to the change management process. When decision-making authority is concentrated in a single person or department, this can stifle innovation and creativity. Adverse effects of institutionalised power can limit opportunities for innovation, creativity, and participation, leading to stagnation and resistance to change (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Kuipers, 2014).

Institutional theory suggests that cultural values and norms can resist change, making it difficult for an organisation to adopt and adapt to changes brought about by the reconfiguration of the regional water utility (Kuipers, 2014). Examples of cultural inertia: Employees resist new ideas or approaches because they are perceived as threatening to the organisation's status quo (Elgar, 2022). When employees become defensive when their practices or traditions are challenged, leading to resistance to change, and when employees lack trust in leadership or each other, it is difficult to collaborate and adapt to change. Slow adoption, limited creativity, and stagnation stem from cultural inertia, which hinders effective organisational change management. Institutional theory suggests that understanding and addressing institutionalised power and cultural inertia is crucial for an organisation's successful change and change management (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Elgar, 2022; Van Wijk et al., 2019).

Recognising the importance of path dependence and how it influences the organisation's ability to adapt to change—addressing institutionalised power dynamics and cultural inertia to create a more inclusive and adaptive change management strategy—is key when leading strategic change (Elgar, 2022; DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Kuipers, 2014). Institutional theory analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of organisational change management in a regional water utility context. By acknowledging the institutional factors that shape behaviour, leaders can develop more effective strategies to manage change and overcome potential barriers to success (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Van Wijk et al., 2019; Elgar, 2022).

The theories discussed above including institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000), isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000; Elgar, 2022), path dependence (Kuipers, 2014; Van Wijk et al., 2019), and institutionalised power (Elgar, 2022)—provide a nuanced framework for analysing the complexities of change management in the transformation of a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Institutional theory elucidates how social norms and external pressures shape organisational behaviours, which, in turn, influence the adoption and communication of change management strategies. Isomorphism suggests that organisations often mimic successful practices from their peers, thereby easing transitions through shared experiences. Path dependence highlights how historical decisions can constrain present responses to change, while institutionalised power dynamics reveal how decision-making structures impact stakeholder engagement during the change process. In tandem, the models proposed by Kurt Lewin (Errida & Lotfi, 2021; Bhavani & Mahalakshmi, 2023), Kotter (Bhavani &

Mahalakshmi, 2023; Errida & Lotfi, 2021) and Prosci offer structured methodologies that are crucial for effectively managing the change initiative. By focusing on key phases such as unfreezing current behaviours, creating urgency, and facilitating communication, these models further enhance the understanding of how to navigate resistance and ensure a smoother transition Lewin (1951), Piderit (2000), Burke (2017), Parry et al. (2013), Nwachuku et al. (2023), and Siddiqui (2017). Collectively, these theories and models enrich the study, providing critical insights into the communication strategies and dynamics underlying the water utility's reconfiguration journey.

2.13 Previous studies on change management in Water Utility, as public institutions

Existing research on change management has focused on a variety of themes, including elements of change management in public service institutions, employee readiness for change in the public sector, people, process, and communication in effective change management, and implementation of change management.

First, there are studies that have focused on uncovering the elements of change management in the public sector. For example, a conceptual study by Sithole (2023) aimed to review elements of change management in public service institutions. It focused on explaining the term "change management," its benefits, and the challenges faced in implementing change within public service sectors. Key findings of the conceptual study emphasise the importance of managing resistance to change by public sector employees who often resist change due to fear, uncertainty, and political motivations. Planning, dedicated teams, training, continuous engagement, and improved communication are key for effective change management. Enhanced productivity, reduced stress, and better decision-making are some benefits of effective change management. The paper suggests that future research explore strategies to mitigate resistance to change in public institutions. Future research also needs to unravel the role of leadership in successful change management and also examine how limited resources impact the implementation of change in public service.

In a different conceptual study, Fusch et al. (2020) studied people and processes in successful change management initiatives in the United States to understand organisational change through change management implementation to improve organisational performance, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conceptual study, which involved a literature review, concluded that effective communication is vital for successful change management implementation and dealing with resistance to change as a significant barrier. More importantly, the study highlighted that leaders must be adaptable and supportive and rely on detailed action plans as essential for successful change implementation. Fusch et al. (2020) assert that future research on how emerging technologies influence change management implementation is key. This is entreating with the rise of digital change

management, which refers to the process of effectively managing and implementing change within an organisation to adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape. It involves aligning people, processes, and technology to drive successful digital transformation initiatives.

Second, there are also studies that have focused on employee readiness for change. For example, Hameed et al. (2016) explored factors contributing to employees' readiness for change in public sector organisations in Pakistan. The empirical study focused on the role of communication and changing recipients' beliefs in developing change readiness. This study found that employees' beliefs and attitudes significantly impact the effectiveness of change management efforts and change readiness. The key findings encapsulate that communication positively affects employees' readiness for change.

Third, there are empirical studies that have focused on the actual implementation of change and use of models of change management. For example, Harrison et al. (2021) conducted an empirical study on where models for change management, improvement, and implementation were used in public institutions. The most commonly used models of change management were Kotter's Model (Yandarbaevac, 2022) and Lewin's Model (Erradi & Lofti, 2021). The study explicitly applies change management models at the local ward or unit level, institutional level, system level, and multi-system level. Future research needs to explore the prescriptive application of change management methodologies and how they can be tailored to specific settings in the healthcare and water sectors. Investigating the synergy between change management methodologies and implementation and improvement methodologies in healthcare contexts would be beneficial for change, which enhances service delivery.

Cunningham and Kempling (2019) conducted a conceptual study on implementing change in public sector organisations aimed to review the importance of various change principles in assisting change in three public sector organisations in Victoria, Canada. The current study revealed that a guiding coalition is crucial for successful change in public sector organizations. This coalition acts as champions, researchers, and facilitators. The coalition is key in guiding change, especially since resistance to change can vary and managing resistance requires a good understanding of the enablers and barriers in the changing context.

Studies on change management and implementation in the public sector have also focused on universities. For example, Voronina et al. (2023) utilised the structural-activity approach to study change management and implementation of changes in various Ukrainian universities. The empirical study highlighted the crucial role of change management in navigating uncertainties arising from volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts in the public sector organisation. Effective change management involves creating a culture of continuous learning, communication, and

collaboration. Developing strategies for managing resistance to change, building stakeholder trust, and ensuring all employees can adapt to new processes and technologies is necessary for public institution organisations to adapt to new circumstances. The study's key findings highlight three critical areas: adopting an agile approach to stay adaptable, implementing effective change management strategies to navigate uncertainty, and prioritising transparency and accountability to regain public trust. Future research should undertake an in-depth empirical study on the roles of leadership, communication, and stakeholder engagement in facilitating or hindering change processes in public institution organisations such as public universities.

Chemengich (2013) studied managing strategic change in the public sector. The study explored strategies for implementing strategic changes in the public sector, focusing on efficiency, equity, and sustainability. The research focused on public-sector organisations in Kenya, drawing on experiences from other African countries. The methodology included a literature review of research papers, conference materials, textbooks, and specific Kenyan experiences supplemented by the author's personal experience. The study found that strategic changes in the public sector can be either top-down, transformational, or strategic but incremental. Stakeholder involvement is important for managing strategic change in the public sector.

Third, there is also a stream of existing research that has focused on organisational change and resistance to change. For example, Aninkan (2018) conducted an exploration study on organizational change and resistance to change Nigerian public sector education institutions, including secondary schools. The study explored how change management determines the level of change resistance and the eventual organisational change. Key findings of this exploratory study in Nigeria stress that improved employee trust in the change process is linked to participation and communication. The study clearly indicates that the change implementation strategy significantly influences the acceptance and adoption of the change. Future research is required to investigate the role of human capital management experts in effectively implementing organisational change and reducing resistance. Human capital management experts are facilitators, navigators, and change advocates, and their role is key to ensuring there is a well-planned, communicated, and executed human side of organisational change, reducing resistance and enhancing success.

In terms of context, there are notable studies that specifically focus on change management within the water sector. It is interesting to note that a conceptual study similar to the current one was conducted in the USA in 1996 by Higbee, Menze and Dooley (1996). The study by Higbee, Menze and Dooley (1996) focused on the regionalisation of water utilities. Perspectives, a literature review, and an annotated bibliography aimed to explore the regionalisation of water utilities with emphasis on the structural and institutional changes in water and wastewater utility services. The study was conducted by the National Regulatory Research Institute at Ohio State University and involved a literature review

and an annotated bibliography, compiling books, reports, articles, and conference papers on regionalisation in the water sector. The conceptual study concluded that regionalisation offers technical and economic benefits but faces institutional challenges. There is a growing interest in watershed management and integrated resource planning. Future empirical studies should focus on overcoming institutional barriers, improving interdisciplinary approaches, and exploring new regionalisation strategies.

Another study in the water sector was conducted by Ntau (2013) on the change management in the Botswana water sector." The aim of the study was to assess how change management interventions during the Water Sector Reform Process were perceived by employees as helping them understand and embrace change. The quantitative study focused on employees of the Water Utility Corporation from various locations. The key findings of this quantitative study reveal that management interventions during the Water Sector Reform Process were negatively perceived by employees. Communication, leadership, and employee participation directly impacted how employees struggled to embrace change. Lack of training and development to enable and empower employees to act in line with change also influenced employees' support for change. The study concluded that effective leadership and management in change should prioritize clear communication, encourage employee participation, and build capacity through staff training and development.

Dini et al. (2024) conducted a study on reconfiguring the institutional landscape in South African water, which aimed at comparing the current institutional landscape in the South African water sector with the desired future configuration and also examined barriers to achieving this future state. The study focusing on the South African water sector found that the institutional landscape has been in flux since the 1998 National Water Act. Key barriers include limited harmonisation of sectoral development trajectories and resistance to institutional reform. The study suggests further research on the water-energy-food (WEF) nexus as a model for integrated policymaking and the need for strong leadership to overcome resistance to institutional reform.

It is interesting that there is also research that has focused on the incremental change in terms of digital aspects of water provision. Mensah et al. (2024) conducted a study on the introduction of digitalising water bill payments at Ghana Water Utility. The initiative was part of a broader digital transformation to improve bill collection and customer convenience. The mixed-methods study used the ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement). Key findings revealed that staff needed more knowledge of change management processes, while some employees felt apprehension and anxiety due to the digitisation drive. A lack of information and inconsistent communication causes resistance to change. The quality of communication varied across the organisation, and change was perceived as top-down. While change champions are crucial for driving change, it is crucial that the approach to change is transparent and allows learning from failures.

There are various gaps that exist from the presented empirical studies include population gap, theory gap, methodological gap and conflicting studies. Firstly, many empirical studies exhibit a limited geographic scope, focusing on specific locations like Pakistan (Hameed et al., 2016) or Botswana (Ntau, 2013), hindering the generalisability of findings to other contexts. Secondly, there is an over-reliance on established theories like Kotter's and Lewin's models (Harrison et al., 2021), neglecting the potential insights offered by emergent approaches such as complexity theory or systems theory. Thirdly, a methodological gap exists, with a predominance of qualitative or conceptual approaches (Sithole, 2023; Voronina et al., 2023), limiting the depth of analysis and the ability to validate findings empirically. Fourthly, conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of various strategies, such as the contrasting views on the role of communication in Fusch et al. (2020) and Mensah et al. (2024), necessitate further investigation to reconcile these discrepancies. Finally, the literature often overlooks the perspectives of lower-level employees, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and developing inclusive strategies. Addressing these gaps through broader, more inclusive, and methodologically rigorous research is crucial for advancing the field's understanding of change management dynamics within public water utilities.

2.14 Chapter Summary

The theoretical framework and empirical literature unpack the concept of change management, particularly in the context of reconfiguring a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, focusing on change management methods implemented by organisations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Change in an organisation involves transforming the organisation's culture, structure, processes, or systems to achieve specific goals. It can lead to both positive outcomes such as increased efficiency, serving the serviced communities with basic water services, and enhancing employees' engagement, and negative outcomes such as resistance to change efforts, job security, and disruptions of normal operations. Various types of change include transformational, structural, cultural, systemic, and value-based changes. Effective change management requires understanding these types and their impacts. Impact of change in individuals, teams, and organisations to assist employees in adopting and adapting to the change process effectively. Change management objectives, types of change management strategies discussed, types, and sources of resistance to change. Effective communication is the lever in driving effective change management within the organization. Effective communication often leads to the failure of change efforts. Critical success factors in driving effective organisational change management could be more balanced. Various change management methods to navigate change management include Kurt Lewin's change management model, Kotter's Eight Steps for change management model, and Prosci ADKAR change management method. The research methodology employed in the research study, the rationale for

employing such research methods, the method for gathering primary data, and the details of its administration will be detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed for this qualitative study, which aims to examine the management of change during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter begins by describing the research framework, research onion, that is widely used in research methodology, particularly in business studies and management. The researcher used an interpretivism philosophy in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the complex social phenomenon of managing change during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The study employs a qualitative, exploratory research design. The sampling strategy, participant selection, and data collection procedures are then detailed, including the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns within the qualitative data. The study adheres to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and securing ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter also covers the research process, including data analysis, quality control measures, and adherence to ethical standards. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed, and a summary of the research methodology is provided.

3.2 Research methodology framework

Saunders and Thornhill (2009), Saunders (2009:124), and Creswell and Creswell (2018), as well as various researchers concurred that the ‘research onion’ is a widely used conceptual framework in research methodology, particularly in business studies, developed by Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis, and Adrian Thornhill (Figure 3.1). This framework helps researchers systematically plan and justify their methodological choices by breaking the research process into multiple layers. The outer layers, which shape the research design, consist of the research philosophy and the approach to theory development. The philosophy refers to underlying assumptions and beliefs, such as positivism or interpretivism, while the approach involves choosing between deductive, inductive, and abductive research methods. The inner layers focus on specific methodological choices, including strategy, time horizon, and procedures and techniques. By working through each layer, the researcher ensures coherence in the research design and justifies the methodological choices employed for the study.

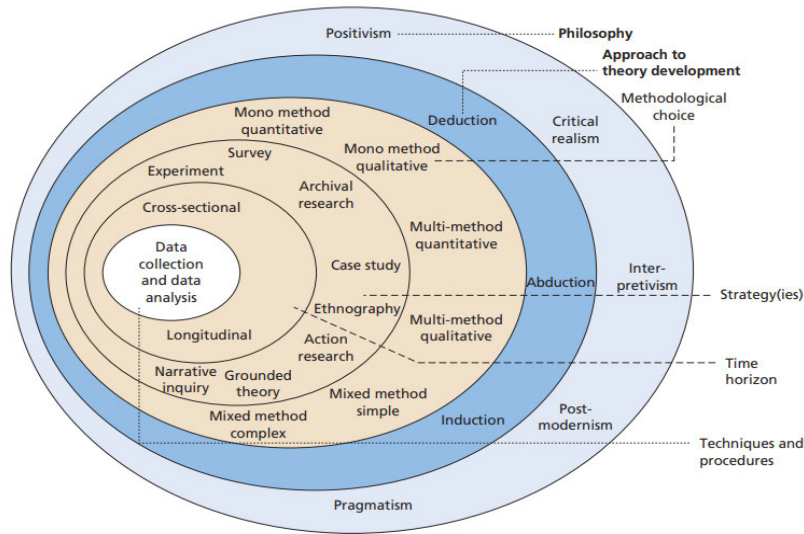


Figure 3.1 : Research Onion Framework

Source: Saunders (2009:129)

3.3 Research Philosophy

Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Saunders et al. (2012) state that research philosophy refers to beliefs and assumptions about knowledge development. Researchers have a set of philosophical assumptions that shape and guide their beliefs about research. These form what is termed a paradigm and constitute a set of wide-ranging and general philosophical assumptions that are shared by a community of scientists in a specified field or tradition (Saunders et al., 2012). There are three key elements of a paradigm that are crucial in guiding the research process, influencing the choice of methods, and shaping the interpretation of research results (Saunders et al., 2012). First, there is ontology, which answers the question, "What is reality?" (Saunders et al., 2012). Ontology is the study of perceptions of reality and the nature of being (Saunders et al., 2012). For instance, some researchers who believe in objective reality can be separated into parts and examined individually such that the researcher or knower can stand apart from whom or what is being studied. For example, some scholars researching change management may uphold that this objective reality affects everyone in the same way and exists independent of the researcher. Another researcher may view change management as a subjective reality; different people may have different meanings and be affected differently by the same change. These beliefs of reality or ontology affect how a study is conducted. Second, epistemology deals with the relationship between the knower, the would-be knower, and what can be known (Saunders et al., 2012). Fundamentally, the epistemological question is "What is the relationship between the researcher and the knower?" (Saunders et al., 2012). Finally, the methodological question is about how we know the world or gain knowledge of it. Methodology is a comprehensive approach to research that encompasses the abstract and concrete components of research design and implementation, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methods (Saunders et al., 2012). Research methodology answers the

question, "How do we go about discovering the answer or reality?" (Saunders et al., 2012). This includes the process of data collection and analysis and demonstrating that the findings are valid. In each philosophical approach, such as positivism or interpretivism, it is important for a researcher to understand the ontology of what is being studied, epistemology, and methodology (Saunders et al., 2012).

Research philosophy aids the researcher in choosing suitable research methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), as well as designing and analysing research methods that align with the researcher's perspective. Various authors, Saunders et al. (2012) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), discuss the main research philosophies within the field of business in detail in the table below:

Table 2.3: Comparison of the research philosophies in the field of business

Research Philosophy	Focus	Methodology	Goal
Positivism	Observable, objective reality	Quantitative data collection and analysis	Test hypotheses and theories through empirical evidence
Constructivism	Subjective meanings and experiences of individuals	Qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups)	Understand subjective experiences and meanings
Interpretivism	Subjective meanings and experiences of individuals	Qualitative research methods (e.g. interviews, observations)	Understand social phenomena and gain insights into human behaviour, culture, and interactions through the lens of individual perspectives and experiences.
Critical Realism	Objective reality influenced by social and cultural contexts	Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative)	Balance objectivity with subjective understanding
Pragmatism	Practical and flexible approach based on the research question	Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative)	Address complex problems with a flexible approach

Source: Adapted from various authors (Saunders et al., 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

In this study, the researcher used an interpretivist philosophy to gain a deeper understanding of the complex social phenomenon of managing change during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. This upholds the view that the same type of change

management as reality may be experienced differently by different people. This philosophy is well-suited for exploring the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals involved in the change process. The use of interpretivism allowed for selection of participants based on their relevance to the research question and enabled the gathering of rich, detailed data through qualitative methods, such as interviews. By adopting an interpretive approach, the researcher was able to capture the nuances and complexities of the change management process, including communication strategies, resistance to change, and individual perspectives, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3.3 Research Design

According to Saunders et al. (2016), a research design guides the conduct of a research project by outlining specific methods and procedures for collecting relevant information and structuring the approach to address the research questions and objectives. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) asserted that a research design is a detailed plan that enables researchers to systematically gather data in an accurate, economical, and trustworthy manner. As Creswell (2009) described, this plan funnels the various data collection, analysis, and interpretation activities into a cohesive and organised process.

There are three primary types of research design, each serving a distinct purpose. Exploratory research design is used when there is limited existing knowledge on a topic, allowing researchers to gain a deeper understanding and establish a foundation for future investigation. Descriptive research design aims to describe a population or phenomenon, answering the question "what, why" and offering a comprehensive overview of the subject (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 22). In contrast, explanatory research design seeks to uncover the underlying reasons behind a phenomenon, answering the question "why" and identifying cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2016: p22).

3.4 Exploratory Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2009), exploratory research aims to gain insights and understanding of a phenomenon and is flexible and adaptable as new insights emerge. It helps formulate hypotheses and guide future research directions. In this case, the study is conducted to gain new knowledge on reconfiguring a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, as there is no existing research on this specific context. The study explores the dynamics of change management, communication, and resistance to change in this unique organisational structure. Given the novelty of this phenomenon in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, an exploratory design is suitable to uncover the meanings and experiences of employees involved in the organisational change process of reconfiguring the water board into a regional water utility. Explanatory research design is a type of research that aims to explain why something happens or occurs (Kumar, 2014). Therefore, it will aid the research in

addressing the "what," "why," and "how" questions, thereby offering insight into the underlying causes and mechanisms of the phenomenon being studied (Babbie, 2013:33).

3.5 Research Approach / Strategy

There are three prominent widely used research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Aspers and Corte (2019) characterise qualitative research as an iterative process that helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena they are examining, enabling the identification of new and meaningful distinctions. This approach emphasises understanding the processes, experiences, and meanings people associate with different aspects of life. Common methods used in qualitative research include interviews, fieldwork, and participant observation. Early sociologists such as Weber, Durkheim, and Marx laid the groundwork for qualitative research, which gained broader usage in the 1970s.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe qualitative research as centring on participants' subjective experiences and viewpoints. Its goal is to capture the richness of human behaviour, beliefs, and emotions. Data collection in qualitative research often employs unstructured or semi-structured methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, which yield descriptive and narrative data. In contrast, quantitative research relies on predetermined variables and numerical data. This approach uses statistical analysis to test hypotheses and measure variables, with data typically gathered through surveys, experiments, or secondary data analysis. It focuses on objective measurements and seeks to quantify relationships between variables while testing established hypotheses. Quantitative data collection methods involve structured instruments like surveys and experiments, producing numerical data that can be easily analysed using statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Suter, 2012).

The mixed methods research approach combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies to comprehensively understand research topics. Integrating numerical data with rich contextual insights allows for both breadth and depth in research findings. The mixed methods approach aims to harness the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing researchers to tackle complex questions from various perspectives and offering a more complete view of the research issue. Data collection can occur in different formats, such as sequential or concurrent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Suter, 2012).

Qualitative research prioritises depth, context, and meaning, while quantitative research emphasises measurement, statistical analysis, and generalizability. The mixed methods approach serves as a bridge, providing both intricate insights and broader patterns. Qualitative research relies on words and detailed descriptions to represent the complexities of human experiences, whereas quantitative research focuses on numerical data to create datasets suitable for statistical analysis. Mixed methods combine both

qualitative and quantitative data for a well-rounded analysis. Qualitative research aims to explore meanings, comprehend lived experiences, and uncover underlying themes and patterns within participants' stories. In contrast, quantitative research aims to test hypotheses and establish relationships between variables, working towards findings that can be generalised to larger populations. The mixed methods approach seeks to integrate both methods, offering richer insights and validating findings through triangulation, whereby qualitative data helps interpret quantitative results and the reverse (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Suter, 2012).

In terms of research design, qualitative research is acknowledged for its flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt their questions and methods as new insights surface during the study. Conversely, quantitative research is characterised by its structured design, usually determined before data collection, which ensures consistency and reliability through standardised methods. The mixed methods approach combines the flexibility of qualitative research with the structured nature of quantitative research, which can complicate the research process while enhancing the ability to address questions from multiple angles. The choice of research approach largely depends on the study's specific objectives and the nature of the research questions being pursued (Suter, 2012). Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploratory investigations that aim for deep insights, whereas quantitative research works best for studies that require measurement and hypothesis testing. Mixed methods are instrumental in complex research situations that demand a multifaceted understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Suter, 2012). This exploratory study will use a qualitative approach as it seeks to gain in-depth insight into the viewpoint of participants in their natural setting while examining change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

3.5 Exploratory research methodology choice

Methodology involves researchers' strategies and approaches to gather information about the world (Creswell, 2007; Edwards & Skinners, 2009; Punch, 1998). This is essential for effectively addressing the research questions and objectives of the current study. Research methodology facilitates data collection from various sources, such as surveys, in-person interviews, and focus groups. It is emphasised that methodology is crucial for fulfilling research aims. This exploratory study will use the qualitative research method as it provides a means to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The qualitative research approach assists the researcher in capturing the nuances and complexity of human behaviour and organisational dynamics. The iterative nature of qualitative research facilitates the exploration of evolving themes, enabling researchers to adjust their focus as new insights emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, allow researchers to adapt their questions and approach

based on participants' emerging themes and responses. This flexibility can lead to richer data collection. The richness of qualitative data allows for comprehensive thematic analysis, enabling researchers to identify critical patterns and insights that inform practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative research generates rich, descriptive data that can identify themes, patterns, and narratives relevant to the change management process. This richness enhances the understanding of what strategies may be effective during the change at an organisational level.

Qualitative research methods, particularly data collection through interviews, offer a range of benefits that make them especially valuable in social sciences and applied research. There are various benefits to using interviews as a qualitative data collection method. Interviews are beneficial for obtaining a participant's perspective, allowing researchers to explore topics in depth and adapt their questions according to the interviewee's responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Qualitative interviews are flexible and allow the researcher to ask why or how; they enable researchers to follow up on interesting points and explore new themes that arise spontaneously (Creswell, 2013). Conducting interviews facilitates a personal connection between the interviewer and the participant. This rapport can lead to more open and honest responses, as participants may feel more comfortable sharing their authentic views and experiences regarding the phenomenon under study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Researchers can explore complex issues through interviews, which quantitative measures may not easily capture. This exploration can reveal underlying motivations, beliefs, and behaviours related to the phenomenon under study (Seidman, 2013). Non-verbal cues during interviews enhance the richness of the data collected, revealing emotions and sentiments that words alone may not convey (Mason, 2002).

The use of interviews as a qualitative data collection method brings forth numerous advantages, including the depth and richness of information, flexibility in questioning, the ability to build rapport, exploration of complex issues, contextual insights, observation of non-verbal cues, and the potential for iterative refinement (Mason, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2017). These benefits make the in-depth interview research method a powerful tool for a researcher conducting qualitative studies to examine change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

3.6 Research Strategies

According to Sanders et al. (2016:177), a research strategy encompasses a collection of methods researchers utilise to address their research questions. Consequently, a research strategy supports the researcher in achieving the objectives of the study. The various research strategies include surveys, action research, grounded theory, case studies, and narrative inquiries. The most commonly used qualitative data collection methods are focus groups, observations, document analyses, interviews, and open-ended survey questionnaires (Tümen-Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). The present study is a phenomenological investigation that utilises an exploratory approach to examine the methods of change

management, communication, and employee resistance during the transformation of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

3.7 Observation

Observation is a passive qualitative data collection method that involves systematically watching and recording the behaviours, interactions, and events in a natural setting without interacting with the subjects being observed. It is particularly effective in qualitative research because it allows researchers to gather rich, contextual information and insights into human behaviour in real-time. Observation often occurs in the participants' environment, which helps capture behaviours as they occur naturally without influencing the situation or the subjects involved. This context adds depth to the data collected, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Spradley, 1980).

Qualitative observations can capture subtleties that surveys or interviews might miss, including non-verbal communication, emotional cues, and spontaneous reactions (Patton, 2002). Such details might provide significant insights into the subjects' perspectives and social dynamics. Observers typically take detailed field notes to document their observations, reflections, and analytical thoughts during or after the observation period. This data helps to contextualise findings and can later contribute to the analysis phase (Yin, 2014). Through repeated observations, researchers can identify patterns and themes that emerge from the data. This inductive approach allows theory building based on real-world behaviours rather than preconceived hypotheses.

While observation as a passive data collection method has many strengths, it also presents challenges. One concern is the potential for observer bias, where the researcher's preconceptions may influence what they notice and document (Smith, 2008). Moreover, since observation is inherently subjective, two observers may note different details or interpret behaviours differently, raising questions about reliability and validity (Brenner, 2006).

3.8 Document analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative data collection method, also known as secondary data, that involves systematically evaluating and interpreting various forms of printed and electronic documents to extract meaningful information relevant to a research problem. This method is particularly effective because it allows researchers to delve into existing materials, offering insights that might not be accessible through interviews (Bowen, 2009). Researchers can use this approach to scrutinize and interpret data, thereby deriving meaning, enhancing understanding, and constructing empirical knowledge about the studied phenomena (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). By leveraging available documents, researchers can efficiently process large volumes of information, avoiding the time and resource demands associated with primary data collection methods such as interviews or surveys. The abundance of publicly accessible primary documents, including government reports and

academic articles, allows researchers to access a wealth of information, facilitating a more thorough understanding of the subject matter (Bowen, 2009; Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The document analysis research method is used as a complementary research method. Documentary analysis can also reduce costs typically associated with primary data collection, such as transportation expenses, making it particularly advantageous in financially constrained settings. These documents, created independently of the research process, are less susceptible to the researcher's biases, potentially yielding more authentic insights for exploratory studies (Bowen, 2009; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). However, while documents can offer valuable insights, they may only encompass some essential aspects of a research question. Qualitative nuances or specific contexts that deepen understanding may not be included. Even though many documents are publicly available, locating relevant materials can be challenging, as some may need help finding or classifying. Additionally, the availability of documents may reflect historical or institutional biases, prompting researchers to critically evaluate sources for potential biases that could skew results (Bowen, 2009).

Lou (2020) noted that secondary analysis helps synthesise existing knowledge, analyse historical trends, or identify large-scale patterns. This cost-effective method allows researchers to concentrate more on data analysis than on fieldwork, enhancing research outcomes. Nonetheless, secondary data may need to sufficiently address specific enquiries or provide the level of detail desired (Creswell, 2009), and it may be less representative of the desired geographic area, timeframe, or target population (Creswell, 2009). While document analysis enhances data collection efficiency and objectivity, researchers must be mindful of its limitations, such as that documents may need more detail, be difficult to retrieve, and exhibit biased selectivity. The researcher complements this method with another research method, such as interviews, or triangulates findings with qualitative data to address potential biases and fill in gaps left by documents. Thus, this balanced strategy bolsters the validity of research conclusions and yields a more comprehensive understanding of the research question (Bowen, 2009).

3.9 Interviews

Interviews serve as a robust qualitative research method, collecting data through direct dialogue between an interviewer and a participant. This method allows in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences on specific topics. The primary aim of qualitative research is to delve into the intricate and multifaceted factors that contribute to a specific phenomenon. Unlike quantitative surveys that often seek to quantify data and identify patterns, qualitative research interviews prioritise rich, narrative responses. This allows researchers to grasp the nuances of participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences, leading to a more holistic understanding of the subject (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Open-ended questions are the hallmark of qualitative interviews. Researchers can elicit detailed, descriptive responses by avoiding closed questions that yield yes/no answers or limited options. The focus on exploratory verbs allows respondents to reflect and articulate their experiences

or feelings in their own words, often leading to unexpected insights that could inform future research or practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The informal nature of interviews can create a conversational atmosphere, which may help interviewees feel more comfortable and open, often leading to richer data collection (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). Interviews can be structured with a predefined set of questions or semi-structured, which is a blend of structured and open formats; these interviews use a guide with open-ended questions, allowing for a degree of flexibility. Interviewers can probe deeper based on responses, encouraging a more conversational flow and the potential for rich insights. Unstructured interviews allow interviewees to steer the conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews provide rich, detailed data because they allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words. Thus, this leads to insights that quantitative methods may miss (Patton, 2015). The format allows the interviewer to explore intriguing themes or responses in real time, enabling the collection of unanticipated data. Interviews facilitate a personal connection between the interviewer and the participant, potentially leading to more openness and honesty in responses. During an interview, the researcher may ask follow-up questions to clarify responses, which helps understand the context and nuances behind participant answers (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). One of the defining characteristics of qualitative research and questions in the interviews is their inherent flexibility. As the research advances, it might become evident that we need to refine or adjust specific questions to explore new avenues of inquiry that emerge during the study. This iterative process aligns with the principles of emergent design, where the research framework adapts based on what is learnt throughout the study. Such adaptability enables researchers to uncover deeper insights and respond to the fluid dynamics of human experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In qualitative research, the specificity of participants and research sites is crucial. It is essential to clearly define who will be involved in the study and where it will take place. This specificity ensures that the questions are relevant and resonate with the participants' experiences. By understanding the context in which participants operate, researchers can craft meaningful and relevant questions, leading to more authentic and insightful responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The open-ended questions in qualitative research can be delivered to a participant physically through traditional mail, sent via email, conducted over the phone, or in a face-to-face conversation between the researcher and the participant (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

While qualitative research has its strengths, it also presents several drawbacks. For example, complex qualitative data analysis can be labour-intensive and requires robust analytical skills. Researchers may need to employ coding techniques to categorise responses and identify themes or patterns. This process often requires multiple readings of the data and can introduce the potential for bias in interpretation. Collecting, transcribing, coding, and analysing responses can be significantly more time-consuming than quantitative data collection, which often relies on statistical analysis. Participants' diverse interpretations and expressions can lead to variability in data quality. Ensuring respondents understand

the questions in the way intended by the researcher is essential to obtaining valuable responses. Ensuring adequate engagement and motivation from participants can be challenging. The open-ended format of the questions allows respondents to interpret them in various ways, which can pose a significant challenge in using this data collection method (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

A qualitative interview guide, complete with interview questions, serves as a powerful tool for exploring complex phenomena. Rather than being considered an instrument themselves, interviews are structured using the guide. The open-ended structure of questions in the interview, flexibility to evolve during the study, and focus on specific participants and contexts facilitate a rich understanding of human behaviour and experiences. These features enable researchers to uncover deeper insights that quantitative methods might overlook, making qualitative research invaluable in many fields, including social sciences, healthcare, education, and market research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

Conducting interviews and analysing the resulting data can be labour-intensive, often demanding significant time for tasks such as transcription and coding (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). The interviewer's influence, including their demeanour and presence, can affect how participants respond, potentially resulting in biased data (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). Additionally, the quality of the information gathered can fluctuate greatly depending on the participant's capability and willingness to express their thoughts, which may only sometimes be dependable (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). The commonly used qualitative data collection methods include document analysis, focused groups, interviews, and observations (Busetto & Gumbinger 2020).

Structured Interviews

A fixed set of predetermined questions characterises Busetto & Gumbinger's (2020) structured interviews. These questions typically come in a closed format, meaning respondents must choose from specific options rather than providing open-ended answers. While structured interviews have distinct advantages, they also come with limitations that researchers must consider. The core feature of structured interviews is their reliance on a specific set of questions that remain consistent across all participants. This uniformity ensures that each interviewee receives the same enquiries, promoting the comparability of data. Because structured interviews do not allow for follow-up questions or elaboration, they are focused narrowly on specific topics. This lack of adaptability can be beneficial when the research objective is clear-cut and requires precise data collection.

The uniform nature of structured interviews facilitates direct comparison between responses from different participants. This comparability is particularly useful in quantitative research or when synthesising data across a larger sample size. Structured interviews can be conducted relatively quickly, as the set format minimises the time spent on each interview. This efficiency is especially advantageous

in situations where time or resources are scarce. The closed-ended responses collected from structured interviews lend themselves well to statistical analysis, making quantifying data, identifying trends, and drawing generalisable conclusions easier (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

The rigid structure of these interviews can restrict the richness of data collected. Without the opportunity for elaboration, nuanced responses or unexpected insights that might arise in a more flexible format are lost. The inability to ask follow-up questions can lead to misunderstandings or insufficient exploration of participant perspectives. If a respondent provides an unclear answer, the interviewer cannot probe deeper for clarification. Participants may provide brief or superficial answers to closed questions, missing out on the opportunity to express their thoughts in detail. Therefore, this limitation could impede a thorough comprehension of the research issues (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews are a qualitative data collection method characterised by open-ended questions and a flexible, conversational format (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Unstructured interviews are likened to guided conversations, whose primary goal is to foster an open dialogue rather than follow a strict question-and-answer format (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews allow for a free-flowing dialogue between the researcher and the participant. This approach enables participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words, leading to a deeper understanding of the studied subject. Data is typically gathered through participant observation and field notes in unstructured interviews, supplementing the interview process.

The interviewer does not have a fixed set of questions and can adapt the conversation based on the participant's responses and insights. Thus, this allows for the exploration of topics that may arise unexpectedly. Unstructured interviews predominantly use open-ended questions, encouraging participants to elaborate on their responses and providing opportunities for rich, detailed answers. The approach prioritises the participant's perspective, allowing them to direct the flow of conversation and discuss issues that are important to them. The conversational nature of unstructured interviews often creates a more relaxed atmosphere, which can help participants feel more comfortable sharing personal or sensitive information. Participants may respond in narrative form, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences and emotions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Unstructured interviews yield rich, complex data, providing insights that may not surface in structured interviews. They allow for exploring context and nuance in participants' responses. One of the standout characteristics of unstructured interviews is their inherent flexibility. Unlike structured interviews, which can confine participants to predefined responses, unstructured interviews evolve in response to the interviewee's input and the context of the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The flexibility of the format enables researchers to uncover themes or issues that were not initially considered, leading to new avenues for inquiry. The informal nature promotes a rapport between the interviewer and

participant, which enhances the willingness to disclose personal experiences and views. Since the dialogue flows in various directions, it captures the broader context of participants' thoughts and experiences. Interviewers can ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses, allowing for deeper exploration of interesting or relevant topics (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Unstructured interviews often take more time to conduct and analyse than structured interviews. Sessions can be longer, and qualitative data analysis can be labour-intensive. The resulting data can be complex and challenging to analyse systematically. The variability in responses makes it harder to identify patterns or themes and may require nuanced qualitative analysis methods. The informal nature can lead to inadvertent influences by the interviewer on the participant, potentially introducing bias into the data collection process. Given the diverse responses, comparing findings across different interviews can be difficult, limiting the ability to generalise conclusions to a broader population. Conducting unstructured interviews effectively requires skill and experience. Interviewers must be adept at facilitating conversation, listening actively, and asking follow-up questions that guide the discussion meaningfully (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are described as an exchange with an informal character, essentially a conversation with a goal. Researchers use semi-structured interviews to delve into an individual's subjective experiences, opinions, and motivations, not just facts or behaviours (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are characterised by open-ended questions and an interview guide or topic list, which outlines broad areas of interest and sometimes sub-questions. The focus on different questions may vary across interviews, and some questions may be skipped based on the interviewee's responses or the interview's length. Semi-structured interviews are interactive, allowing unexpected topics to emerge and be explored. Interviews can be audio or videotaped; sometimes, only written notes are feasible or acceptable. The interview schedule guide is usually adapted and improved at the start of the data collection process as the interviewer learns more about the field (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

The disadvantages of semi-structured interviews include their reliance on the interviewer's ability to guide the conversation and probe for deeper insights. The interviewer must be sensitive to the context and the interviewee's comfort level, especially when discussing sensitive topics (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

Focused group interviews

Focus group interviews are a qualitative research method that involves guided discussions among a selected group of participants. This approach delves into the participants' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, providing richer insights into their behaviours and interactions. Focus groups are structured group interviews aimed at exploring participants' expertise and experiences in a manner that helps

researchers understand the reasons behind certain behaviours and opinions. Through facilitated discussion, focus groups can reveal complex dynamics and collective insights that may not emerge in individual interviews (Busetto & Gumbinger 2020).

Typically, a focus group comprises six to eight participants who are selected based on relevant criteria related to the research topic. An experienced moderator leads the discussion, using a topic guide or script to steer the conversation while allowing for open dialogue among group members. This moderated format encourages participants to build on each other's ideas, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

Focus group interviews are relatively straightforward to organise and conduct. The group setting fosters natural conversation, making it easier for participants to express their thoughts and share experiences. Conducting focus groups can be quicker and more cost-effective than individual interviews. Multiple perspectives can be gathered in a single session, allowing researchers to collect diverse insights quickly. The group interaction can lead to richer data, as participants may remember details or experiences while discussing with each other. This dynamic can show how social influences shape individual responses and behaviours. Focus groups facilitate the sharing and comparison of experiences among participants, providing a collective viewpoint that can enhance understanding of common themes and variations (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

Limitations of focus group interviews: the group format can lead to less control over the discussion flow, sometimes resulting in a divergent focus or dominant voices over shining, quieter participants. A skilled facilitator guides discussions while ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. Participants may feel pressured to conform to the dominant opinions within the group, leading to a phenomenon known as groupthink. This can suppress individuality and creativity, resulting in a consensus that may only partially reflect all participants' views. Differences in authority, experience, and social standing among participants can create power dynamics that influence the discussion. This may lead some participants to hold back their opinions or dominate the conversation, skewing the results. Focus groups may be less effective for discussing sensitive or deeply personal topics. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing in a group setting, which could hinder the depth of responses and the authenticity of the insights gathered (Busetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

Individual in-depth Interviews

Individual in-depth interviews are a qualitative research method designed to explore the intricacies of individual experiences and perceptions. It is a powerful qualitative research data collection method that provides a window into the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals. Their primary purpose is to co-create meaning with interviewees, delving into the subjective interpretations and emotions surrounding phenomena under study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006).

The interviews facilitate a deep exploration of the individual's viewpoint, which can reveal insights into their feelings, beliefs, and motivations surrounding a particular event or experience. By focusing on individuals' narratives and lived experiences, the interviews produce rich, nuanced data that quantitative methods may overlook. This richness is particularly valuable in understanding complex human behaviours and social phenomena. Individual interviews allow researchers to gain context about the interviewee's life, culture, and environment, which can significantly influence their attitudes and behaviours. Understanding this contextual backdrop is crucial for a comprehensive analysis (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The open-ended nature of these interviews encourages a flexible approach, allowing the interviewer to adapt questions in real-time based on responses. This adaptability can lead to unexpected insights and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Rather than simply extracting information, these interviews involve a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. This co-creation of meaning means that both parties engage in a conversation where interpretation and understanding evolve throughout the process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The interview commences with a broad, open-ended question to encourage the interviewee to express their thoughts freely. This initial question sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the topic. As the interview unfolds and the interviewer gains insights from the initial responses, they can gradually introduce more specific questions. These can focus on particular aspects of the phenomenon or delve deeper into specific experiences or emotions the interviewee expresses. Digressions are encouraged to foster a natural and engaging conversation. This approach allows interviewees to explore tangents that may seem unrelated but can enrich the discussion and lead to further insights. The interviewer should be attentive to these digressions and consider them opportunities for deeper understanding (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In-depth interviews present several ethical challenges; as noted in the study by Showkat & Parveen (2017), probing into personal topics may inadvertently lead interviewers to disclose sensitive information. Maintaining confidentiality is critical. Delving into deeply personal experiences may trigger emotional distress in participants.

During the interview, the interviewer employs active listening techniques—reflecting, summarising, and asking probing questions. This engagement demonstrates empathy, affirms the interviewee's experiences, and encourages elaboration. The interview should conclude thoughtfully, often with a closing question that allows the interviewee to share any final thoughts or reflections that may not have been addressed. A graceful closure helps ensure that the interviewee feels heard and valued (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006).

3.10 Study Area

Established in 1974, uMngeni-uThukela Water is a state-owned entity (SOE) with its headquarters in Pietermaritzburg. As of July 1, 2023, it began operating under its current name following the integration of uMhlathuze Water into Umgeni Water. The Minister's rationale for consolidating the water boards

was to enhance water and sanitation services to underprivileged areas, aiming to increase coverage and ensure that more communities have access to clean and safe water, thus promoting better public health and well-being. By collaborating with municipalities as Water Service Authorities, uMngeni-uThukela Water aims to address the infrastructure and skill shortages that often hinder sustainable bulk water provision in KwaZulu-Natal (uMngeni-uThukela Water, 2024).

The regional water utility delivers water and related services to other water service institutions and customers within its designated service area in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Among other regulations, it adheres to the Water Services Act (Act 108 of 1997) and the Public Finance Management Act (Act 1 of 1999), earning it the classification of a National Government Business Enterprise. UMngeni-uThukela Water reports directly to the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) through its Board (Accounting Authority), including its Chairperson and Chief Executive. The Minister of Water and Sanitation Acts as the Executive Authority for Water Boards. According to Section 29 of the Water Services Act, the primary responsibility of uMngeni-uThukela Water is to provide water and sanitation services to other institutions within its service area. Furthermore, Section 30 of the Water Services Act permits the entity to engage in additional activities, as long as these do not adversely affect its primary functions. To help fulfill its water service delivery goals, uMngeni-uThukela Water has set up two subsidiary companies: Msinsi Holdings and Umgeni Water Services (uMngeni-uThukela Water, 2024). The reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu Natal commenced on the 1st of July 2023, with a name change from Umgeni Water and to uMngeni-uThukela Water, and the process of managing change is still in progress.

3.11 Target Population

Martínez-Mesa et al. (2016) highlight that population is fundamental in research studies as it refers to a group of individuals who share common characteristics within a specific geographic or institutional context. This notion serves as the foundation for research initiatives, helping to shape research questions and hypotheses. Understanding the population allows researchers to delve into various phenomena effectively (Martinez-Mesa et al., 2016). Conversely, the target population refers to the entire group of individuals from which one might draw a sample (Asiamah et al., 2017; Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Willie, 2022; Alvi, 2016). In the current study, the target population is 1 343 made up of all employees at different levels in these two organisations who experienced the reconfiguration of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water Boards in KwaZulu-Natal into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The group is identified based on parameters that align with the research study's objectives and scope, enabling the researcher to concentrate efforts on the most pertinent segments of the population from the sample that might be drawn.

3.12 Sampling

In the context of the qualitative research approach outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the sampling method plays a crucial role in ensuring the richness and relevance of the collected data. Sampling is the process of selecting a representative group from the population under study (Alvi, 2016). Sampling is a method that assists the researcher in inferring information about a population based on the results from the sample. A sample is a small group of members selected from the target population to represent the population. The target population is a group from which a sample is drawn; the exact population will depend upon the scope of the study. The sample size was drawn from the target population, which comprised 20 participants employed by uMngeni-uThukela Water, specifically including members of the executive committee, middle managers, employees, and representatives of organised labour. Data collection ceased when saturation was achieved, as no further ideas emerged, and the sample size adequately addressed the research questions. Consequently, this fulfilled the objectives of the study. A research strategy refers to the overall plan or approach that guides a researcher in conducting a study and answering research questions of the target population. Broadly, sampling is divided into two categories: probability and non-probability sampling.

Non-probability sampling is widely used in qualitative, exploratory studies as a sampling technique used in selecting the participants for the research study. Saunders et al. (2016) define a non-probability sample as a selection of individuals based on non-random criteria, implying that not every individual has an equal chance of inclusion in the study. Thus, this qualitative sampling technique allows the researcher to intentionally select participants based on their specific characteristics, experiences, or knowledge aligned with the study's aims. According to Saunders et al. (2016), there are four common types of sampling techniques used in qualitative research: convenience, purpose, and snowballing. The participants in this study were selected based on the purposive sampling. This approach is particularly beneficial when the goal is to gain deep insights into a focused area of interest—in this case, the management of the change process from a water board into a Regional Water Utility.

Purposive sampling is a technique in which the researcher chooses a sample based on their understanding or expertise regarding the specific group being studied, also referred to as "judgement" sampling. The rationale for using a purposive sampling strategy is grounded in the belief that, depending on the study's aims and objectives, certain individuals possess distinct and significant perspectives on the phenomenon being examined. As a result, it is essential to include these individuals in the sample (Mason, 2002; Robinson, 2014; Trost, 1986). The researcher deliberately selects participants who can provide valuable perspectives on the change initiative by employing purposive sampling.

This method is advantageous as it enables the researcher to gather data that closely aligns with the research questions and objectives, thereby enhancing the overall quality and applicability of the findings. The emphasis on recruiting individuals who were already part of uMngeni-uThukela Water

during the initial announcement of the organisational change, effective July 2023, adds a critical dimension to the study. These participants possess first hand experience and insights about the change process, making their contributions particularly pertinent. Participants were chosen based on their ability and willingness to provide rich, relevant information on the change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

A total of twenty participants were purposively selected to participate in this study, which encompasses the uMngeni-uThukela Water executive team, middle management, employees, and organised labour who have already assumed their positions in the organisation by July 2023. Below is table 3.1: depicting the profile of research participants in a manner that retained anonymity based on their age, years of experience, division and gender.

Table 3.1: Profile of research participants based on age, experience, division and gender

Research Participant	Position	Age	Years of experience	Gender	Division
Participant 1	Executive manager	55 years and above	20 + years	Male	Operations
Participant 2	Middle manager	25-34 years	6-10 years	Female	Operations
Participant 3	Employee	25-34 years	2-5 years	Male	Shared Services
Participant 4	Senior manager	45-54 years	11-20 years	Female	Operations
Participant 5	Organised labour representative	35-44 years	11-20 years	Male	Operations
Participant 6	Senior manager	35-44 years	11-20 years	Male	Operations
Participant 7	Employee	35-44 years	2-5 years	Female	Shared Services
Participant 8	Middle manager	45-54 years	2-5 years	Female	Finance
Participant 9	Employee	45-54 years	20 + years	Female	Scientific Services
Participant 10	Senior manager	55 years and above	11-20 years	Male	Operations
Participant 11	Employee	45-54 years	20 + years	Female	Infrastructure Development
Participant 12	Employee	35-44 years	2-5 years	Male	Operations
Participant 13	Middle manager	55 years and above	11-20 years	Female	Operations

Participant 14	Middle manager	35-44 years	11-20 years	Female	Operations
Participant 15	Employee	45-54 years	20 + years	Female	Operations
Participant 16	Executive manager	45-54 years	11-20 years	Female	Chief Executive Office
Participant 17	Employee	45-54 years	6-10 years	Female	Operations
Participant 18	Senior manager	45-54 years	11-20 years	Male	Finance
Participant 19	Senior manager	55 years and above	20 + years	Male	Operations
Participant 20	Middle manager	45-54 years	20 + years	Male	Scientific Services

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

3.13 Data Collection and Instrument

Data collection is a crucial aspect of the research process, allowing researchers to gather information relevant to their enquiries systematically. According to Datta (2018), this process is essential for measuring variables of interest, answering specific research questions, testing hypotheses, and assessing outcomes. Effectively collecting data requires a structured approach that ensures the reliability and validity of the findings. Various tools and methods can be used in qualitative research for data collection. Among the most common techniques are interviews, questionnaires, documentary analysis, and observations. Each of these methods has its strengths and can be chosen based on the specific objectives and context of the study.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the executive team, middle management, employees, and representatives from organised labour at uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility. An interview schedule was used, containing questions about change management methods, communication channels that ensure clear messaging to all employees, and reasons for employee resistance during the transformation of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix 1: Research Interview Guide). The content and structure of the interview guide were aligned with the content of the research questions. Below is a table that links the research questions to the specific focus of the questions in the interview guide.

Table 3.2: A link between the research question and interview guide structure and content

Research question	Core content focused in interview guide to answer the question	Number of standing interview questions on the research question
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What <i>change management methods were used to ensure the successful reconfiguration</i> of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?	Change management method	4
What <i>communication channels, for clarity of messaging</i> that were used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?	Communication channels used for clarity of messaging	3
What were the <i>root causes of employees' resistance to the change</i> process, and how could these have been avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility?	Root causes of employee resistance to change	4

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

3.14 Data Collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the executive team, middle management, employees, and representatives of organised labour at uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility. An interview guide was utilised, featuring questions about perceptions regarding change management methods, communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees, and causes of employee resistance during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal (refer to Appendix 1: Research Interview guide). The research questions and objectives shaped the interview schedule guide content and format.

Interview preparation is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research that significantly contributes to the quality and effectiveness of data collection. McNamara (2009) outlines essential principles that researchers should follow during the preparation stage to ensure that interviews yield rich and relevant information and create a comfortable environment for participants. A well-planned interview process not only facilitates a smoother interaction with participants but also reduces the likelihood of biases that could undermine the validity of the collected data.

Opt for an environment free from distractions - The physical environment in which an interview takes place can significantly influence the quality of the conversation. A quiet, neutral setting minimises distractions and interruptions, allowing participants to focus fully on the questions being asked. This environment promotes deeper engagement and more thoughtful responses. Research has shown that distractions can lead to incomplete or superficial answers, as participants may struggle to concentrate or feel disoriented (Hennink et al., 2011). By selecting an appropriate location, researchers can enhance the validity of the data collected. Research interviews of the executive team, middle management, employees, and organised labour were scheduled during working hours, held virtual on Teams meetings, and recorded face-to-face in the participant's office or in a boardroom where interruptions were reduced.

Clarifying the goals of the interview: Establishing clear communication about the interview's objectives is essential for fostering trust and openness. When researchers articulate the aims of the interview, participants are more likely to understand the importance of their contributions and how they relate to the broader research goals (Wengraf, 2001). This understanding can empower participants, making them feel valued and more inclined to share personal and meaningful insights. Providing context helps demystify the process and encourages participant engagement, leading to richer qualitative data. The interviewee was welcomed and explained in detail the issues of confidentiality, ethics, and anonymity via the informed consent form completed by each participant before the interview process.

Addressing confidentiality - Confidentiality is a cornerstone of ethical research practices. When researchers explain how participants' data will be treated and ensure their privacy will be respected, it creates a sense of security paramount for open dialogue (Bourke, 2014). Participants in the research sign informed consent forms that clearly state that they can withdraw from the research at any time without facing any negative or undesirable consequences, and that the researchers will treat their responses confidentially without mentioning names.

Explain the structure of the interview - Providing participants with an outline of how the interview will unfold is crucial for setting their expectations (Kvale, 1996). The interview commenced with the interviewer presenting the phenomenon under study, the three key interview questions, and the objectives the study seeks to answer. The interviewee is expected to respond to semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions honestly and to the best of his ability to enhance data richness. When participants understand the structure—for example, knowing whether the interview will consist of open-ended questions—they are better prepared to navigate the conversation. This understanding can reduce anxiety and help participants feel more at ease, as they know what is

expected of them. This preparedness can lead to a more fluid dialogue, fostering a collaborative atmosphere that enhances data richness.

Indicate the duration of an interview - Transparency regarding the duration of the interview is essential for managing participants' time and expectations (McNamara, 2009). When researchers indicate how long an interview will take, participants can better prepare and allocate their time accordingly. This consideration also reflects respect for the participants' schedules, which can enhance their willingness to engage in the process. If participants feel their time is being honoured, they are more likely to contribute fully to the interview. The research participants were informed of the time allocated for the interview during the interview invitation stage. The allocated time for the interviews was sixty minutes, but the actual duration of the interviews ranged from forty to forty-five minutes on average.

3.15 Pre-testing of the interview guide

A critical aspect of developing data collection instruments is pre-testing or piloting the interview schedule guide. Commonly utilised techniques for the interview schedule guide pilot testing include internal testing, expert assessment, and field testing. Conducting a pilot test of a semi-structured interview guide is essential in qualitative research, as it helps to ensure the interview guide's effectiveness, relevance, and coherence in gathering the intended information. This phase is crucial for refining interview questions, improving data collection quality, and adhering to ethical research standards. Pilot testing validates that the interview guide adequately addresses key areas of inquiry that align with the research objectives (Kallio et al., 2016).

Initially, the researcher shared the interview guide with four employees within uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility to confirm that it covered all significant themes and aligned with the research questions. Through this pilot testing, the researcher identified ambiguous or potentially misleading questions. By incorporating feedback from this initial round of testing, the researcher was able to enhance the richness and validity of the collected data, resulting in findings that are more credible and reliable (Kallio, Pietilä & Kangasniemi, 2016).

Subsequently, the interview guide underwent expert assessment. A consultant who spearheaded change management initiatives within uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility reviewed the guide and pinpointed areas needing further clarity or depth, thereby improving the overall design of the interview guide. The final interview guide integrates feedback from various testing methods to effectively gather meaningful data and address validity and ethical issues in the research process (Kallio et al., 2016). 2009.) Pre-testing techniques also enabled the interviewer to decide on an hour-long interview, and the actual interview session conducted averaged between 40 and 50 minutes for each session.

3.16 Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to process data and get themes regarding the management of change during the transformation of a water board into a Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The emphasis was on the adopted change management strategies, the communication channels to ensure clear messaging, and the employee resistance experienced throughout the reconfiguration process. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that focuses on identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning or themes within qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). To effectively organise and categorise the data into relevant themes, the study utilised Braun & Clarke's (2006) latent thematic analysis framework, which adheres to a 15-point checklist for an effective thematic analysis process that outlines how qualitative data can be appropriately processed for effective analysis. Table 3.3 below presents a comprehensive overview of the said checklist.

Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework provides a structured approach that enhances the rigour and transparency of qualitative research. Each step plays a crucial role in ensuring that the analysis captures the depth and richness of the data while providing meaningful insights. By adhering to these criteria, the researcher produced high-quality thematic analyses that contributed valuable insights into the phenomenon under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 3.3: Fifteen-point checklist for effective thematic analysis process

Process	Step No.	Criteria
Transcription of verbal data	1.	"The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy.'"
Generating initial codes	2.	"Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process."
	3.	"Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach) but, instead, the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive."
	4.	"All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated."
	5.	"Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set."
	6.	"Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive."
Analysis	7.	"Data have been analyzed rather than just paraphrased or described."

	8.	“Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.”
	9.	“Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.”
	10.	“A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.”
Overall	11.	“Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.”
Written report	12.	“The assumptions about and specific approach to thematic analysis are clearly explicated.”
	13.	“There is a good fit between what you claim you do and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.”
	14.	“The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.”
	15.	“The researcher is positioned as <i>active</i> in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge.'”

Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 96)

Using the above-identified steps, the raw data was meticulously transcribed. The researcher listened to the audio recordings multiple times and re-examined the interview transcripts to verify data accuracy. Through this process of re-reading, the researcher identified recurring words and phrases from the participants' responses, which helped build familiarity with the data and facilitated theme identification and generation. NVivo 20 software was used for qualitative data analysis. The data was organised and coded into main themes and sub-themes focusing on the change management methods employed, the communication channels utilised for clear messaging, and employee resistance encountered during the reconfiguration of the water board into a Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher used these developed themes as headings to present the findings.

3.17 Research Quality

High-quality research processes enhance the validity and reliability of findings. When researchers adhere to systematic methods and rigorous standards, they increase the likelihood that their results accurately represent the phenomena they study. This is crucial for establishing a strong foundation for knowledge claims (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A quality research process fosters trust among various stakeholders, including participants, colleagues, and the broader academic community. Conducting research ethically and transparently not only increases participant engagement but also enhances the

overall credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research following a quality process is more likely to contribute to theory, practice, and policy significantly. It provides well-supported insights from data and can influence future research directions and practical applications (Maxwell, 2013). To ensure such a process, the study was guided by the eight criteria by Tracy (2010), as articulated in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4: Eight "Big Tent" Criteria for Qualitative Research

Criteria for quality (end goal)	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy topic	<p>“The topic of the research is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting”
Rich rigor	<p>“The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes”
Sincerity	<p>“The study is characterized by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges”
Credibility	<p>“The research is marked by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (non-textual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections”
Resonance	<p>“The research influences affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings”

Significant contribution	<p>“The research provides a significant contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically”
Ethical	<p>“The research considers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)”
Meaningful coherence	<p>“The study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other.”

Source: Adapted from Tracy (2010: 840)

The present study was steered by the work of Tracy (2010), who applied the criteria for excellent qualitative research.

Worthy topic – The topic of the research study was significant as it emphasises the importance of effective management of change within organisations, both in the private and public sectors. It highlights the importance of effective communication strategies and resistance mitigation measures as critical success factors for successful change management.

Rich Rigor - The researcher exhibited thoroughness in establishing the contextual framework, dedicating ample time to fieldwork, choosing the appropriate sample size, and conducting effective data collection and analysis.

Sincerity - The researcher approached the research process honestly and openly, clearly defining the study's goals and any potential biases that may have impacted the chosen methods.

Credibility - To strengthen the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings, the researcher employed member-checking, allowing participants to review and provide feedback on the transcribed data. An audit trail is also provided through detailed descriptions of the research processes and decisions but also direct quotes of what the participants said to accurately represent what they said during interviews.

Resonance - The research report conveys the potential influence of the study in assisting leaders who seek to reconfigure their organisations and implement change management. A thick description of the

research context, description of participants, research process and results provides a rich enough portrayal of circumstance for application to others' situations, and usually at the behest of the reader or other researchers. The thick description is key for the transferability of the results of this study to similar contexts.

Significant Contribution - The study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the change management techniques employed, the communication strategies used for effective messaging, and the employee resistance encountered during the transition of the water board into a Regional Water Utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The insights gained are valuable as they address essential strategies for effective communication and resistance management within organisations, facilitating smoother transitions at the organisational level.

Ethical Considerations - These will be discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

Meaningful Coherence - The research design effectively connected the overall framework to data collection and analysis, ensuring consistency with the conceptual framework.

3.18 Ethical considerations

The research study adheres to the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethical procedure. Bryman and Bell (2007) state that research participants must not be exposed to any form of harm. Thus, the research needs to protect and prioritise the dignity of its participants. The critical principles regarding ethical considerations in this dissertation that were observed include the following:

Gate keeper's letter

A gatekeeper's letter is a crucial document in research protocols that provides a protective measure, particularly when engaging with participants and operating within an organisation's jurisdiction. Gatekeepers are individuals who regulate access to the organisation where the research study takes place. The researcher has received authorisation to conduct the study within the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility (see Gatekeepers letter in Appendix 2).

Voluntary participation

In every research process, individuals involved maintain their right to voluntary participation. The participants were thoroughly informed about the study's details. In this research, the executive team, the middle managers, employees, and organised labour at the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility were made aware that their involvement was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study without facing any repercussions. A participant information sheet was provided before the interview (refer to Appendix one for the participant information sheet).

Informed Consent

In this study, the executive team, senior managers, middle managers, employees, and organized labor at the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility were guaranteed the right to consent to or withdraw from the study at any time without facing any repercussions. Consequently, participants were given an information letter and a consent form before the interview. The researcher ensured that participants signed the informed consent forms before the interviews began so they would have a complete understanding of the study's purpose (refer to Appendix Two: the informed consent form).

Confidentiality and anonymity

In this study, confidentiality and anonymity were top priorities. Participants from the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility were informed that only the researcher and the research supervisor would have access to the recorded data and transcripts. Anonymity was maintained by not including any identifying information with the responses. The researcher used code names instead of actual names when reporting the study's findings. The researcher informed the participants that the research report would not mention their names or departments.

Ethical Clearance

Before starting the study, the researcher received ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a result, the researcher adhered to all required ethical guidelines by following the University of KwaZulu-Natal's ethical standards and securing an ethical clearance letter (refer to Appendix Three).

3.19 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the research adopted for this exploratory study. The study took a qualitative approach and implemented an exploratory research design to gain participants' insights into the change management methods applied during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility. It also focused on the communication channels used to clarify messages and identified the root causes of employee resistance during the organisational change process. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with participants who were purposively selected for their relevant knowledge and experience of the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility, which was officially announced on 1 July 2023. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and the research adhered to ethical procedures set by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The following chapter presents the findings from the interviews carried out to gain an in-depth participant's insight on the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the exploratory study on examining change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The presentation of findings from this study is structured according to the three research objectives. As such, the chapter first presents the key themes on change management methods used during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Secondly, the chapter focuses on themes about communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of water board into a regional water utility to facilitate change process and key challenges on the communication channels used that hinder effective communication during the change process. Lastly, the chapter focuses on the themes about evaluating the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal before the chapter summary.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

It is worthnoting that whilst the success rate of the interview responses cannot be directly quantified, the fact that twenty participants provided comprehensive profiles suggests a high degree of cooperation and engagement, thereby contributing to the overall success of the data collection process. The findings of this exploratory study reveal various themes and sub-themes that reveal the change management method used during the reconfiguration of the water board into the regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal and the communication channels that were used for clear messaging during the organisational change process and evaluate the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided.

4.3 Themes on change management method used to successfully manage change of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal

The study presents a variety of six themes related to change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, which include (1) a top-down approach for speedy change (2) visible leadership to drive change agenda; (3)

less structured change pathway; (4) communicating the change process; (5) consultant-driven change and (6) change agent-driven approach as shown in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Themes on the changes management methods

Change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal	Frequency
1.Top-down approach for speedy change	8
2. Visible leadership to drive change agenda	5
3. Less structured change pathway	3
4.Communicating the change process	2
5.Consultant driven change	1
6. Change agents driven approach	1

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

4.3.1 Top-down approach for speedy change

The findings of the study on the interviews conducted from the UUW executive managers, senior managers, middle managers, representatives of the organised labour, and employees revealed that reconfiguration was achieved through a top-down approach that pronounced speed of change, consequently experiencing significant challenges at uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW). In the interest of speed and complying with ministerial directives, decisions regarding the organisational change process of the regional water utility were made by senior leadership without adequately including lower-level employees in the process. This top-down change approach placed the responsibility for change management firmly with the executive team, with middle management and employees at all levels receiving directives only at a later stage, limiting early collaboration towards a smooth change. A strong leadership, combined with effective change agents, is vital for successful organisational change of both structure and people. Leadership must provide clear direction, maintain visibility, and engage all levels of employees in the process. This collaboration will foster a shared sense of purpose and facilitate smoother transitions, ultimately leading to the desired outcomes of the reconfiguration efforts at UUW.

The way change was managed at uMngeni-uThukela Water did not only reflect a top-down style of change management but also the failure to be inclusive to get wide consensus and commitment as part of changing together with people first. The participants from the senior management team interviewed within UUW revealed that the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility and the strategic change management vision adopted by the UUW executive team, with minimal involvement, were not shared with the middle manager team. Participant UUW executive member 1 elaborated the

exclusionary approach to change, which focused much on structure and less on the human side, as follows:

“As we play a pivotal role in water provision, it is essential that we are consulted on matters such as support mechanisms, quality management systems, and other operational aspects, all of which we lead. We should have been given the opportunity to review this proposed change, particularly in relation to our current practices and how these may shift due to our entry into new areas. It is crucial for us to identify the necessary initiatives and projects, as well as to determine which strategies would be most effective moving forward. Relying solely on a top-down approach may not adequately address all relevant considerations”. (Participant 1)

In addition to the evidence of middle managers being excluded in a planned strategic change of this complexity and magnitude, the results also reveal that lower-level employees were made aware of the change late in the process. Participant 3 UuW employee further provided detailed information on the top-down nature of change approaches adopted by UuW, whereby strategic change decisions were made by UuW leadership without thorough inclusion of lower-level employees, especially when the decisions are first locked in at the top before involving a broader team. The participant shared the following insights:

“I think like at this stage because they're just looking at the high-level strategy and setting things that are very high level where you would expect more involvement from. The executives, and like regional management and to our extent the senior management would input then their ideas also into that I would say. At the next, the next stage is now to well. Once that strategy and initiatives are locked in then then the support from the middle management to drive the strategy that the top level have”.

One of the participants revealed how employees of the former uMhlathuze Water were told that the reconfiguration process had been concluded and what they needed to do was just sign the transfer letter as soon as possible. Participant 8, a middle manager at UuW, provided the following information:

Change was announced, directive change something that you could not question. "I had to grasp that along the way, when the change was announced". Change was introduced by the minister and was handed over to the UuW board, take the baton - we were told that change has to happened... all employees are expected to sign the transfer letter as a matter of urgency with no proper consultation done...this was very so sad. (Participant 8)

Employees at all levels within the new utility perceive the reconfiguration of the water sector in KwaZulu-Natal, specifically the merger of Umgeni Water and uMhlathuze Water into a single entity known as uMgeni-uThukela Water, as a top-down organisational change. Announced by Mr Senzo Mchunu, this restructuring took effect on 1st July 2023, following stringent mandates under the Water

Services Act of 1997. As part of the transition, uMhlathuze Water was disestablished, and an interim board for uMngeni-uThukela Water was appointed by the Minister, while key executive positions were filled by acting incumbents. Employees expressed concerns that these strategic changes happened without their input or adequate communication, highlighting the pursuit of speed and compliance to request change at the expense of transparency and active stakeholder engagement and involvement in the change decision-making process during the restructuring. Participant 2 UUW middle manager had the following to say regarding how the focus was on speed rather than an effective and consultative change process:

“It's still the way we used to look at things, where things are coming more on the top down. But I think the idea the intention is to involve people, but I think probably the way. Normally we are faced with trying to do things fast and when you try to do things fast you then omit the critical steps such as involving employees at all level....The important levels, which are the all the employees”. (Participant 2)

Consequently, the common and dominant feeling of being excluded in the change process and its implementation was attributed to the top-down approach of change management, as illustrated by participant 6 UUW senior manager below:

“As senior manager of uMngeni-uThukela Utility, I do not know about the change process only the top tier of the organisation which is the Executive level team that is aware of the change process. If the Executive leadership want us to be part of this change process, they much ensure that they hold each and every one by hand and they must go together with them from start to finish...” (Participant 6)

Participant 1, who was a senior member of the uMngeni-uThukela Water, was explicit of how extensive involvement of all employees at all levels was necessary and would potentially require time and delay the change process, particularly given the urgency of certain change milestones that require immediate attention.

“So I would say the ideal situation is to involve everyone during the organisational change process and that would mean that taking a bit more time to plan and to go through these discussions and share a lot of the information” (Participant 1)

Participant 3 UUW employee further provided information not only on the top-down approach adopted during the implementation of change within UUW but also how leaders failed to act as a trusted and reliable bridge between the change management team and employees, especially since the management team relies on leadership communication as well at all levels.

As an employee within the organisation that has recently joined the organisation, I noticed that the reconfiguration process was introduced by the Minister of Water and Sanitation as one of the initiatives of the SA government reforms. I noticed that a top down approach was used by the regulator ...however, within the organisation... no visibility of the leadership within the organisation. External consultant appointed to drive the process of change and was not formally introduced by leadership to all employees....things are forced into our throat not even explained. (Participant 3)

4.3.2 Visible leadership to drive the change agenda

This study reveals that effective change management necessitates unwavering commitment, transparency, and persistent engagement with visible leadership felt at all levels of the organisation. In terms of the actual reconfiguration, many participants consistently articulated that lack of visible support and ongoing involvement from senior management created significant challenges in fostering employee buy-in and securing a smooth transition.

While the presence of interim leadership structures was key to avoiding a leadership vacuum, it added a disconnection between UUW executives and employees, consequently undermining the establishment of a clear roadmap to drive the organisational and collective change process. The sense of disconnection and lack of togetherness was further exacerbated by the reliance on external consultants, which, while potentially beneficial, should not have replaced the accountability, sense of ownership, and togetherness that should rest firmly with internal leadership and their followers. The findings of the study reveal that while all UUW employees were eager to have direction and clarity, they felt let down by a consistent absence of leadership engagement but also visibility to show everyone the pathway.

Results illuminate that change cannot be effective in the absence of genuine commitment from UUW leadership. As illustrated by the numerous participant insights, establishing a culture of open communication, coupled with visible and accountable leadership, fosters a collaborative environment conducive to a successful change agenda. In essence, the study reveals that without prominent leadership visibility, direction, alignment, and commitment of followers to the process and outcomes of the planned change, success is very limited, particularly during times of significant organisational change.

Participant 9, who was UUW Senior manager emphasised the importance of clear leadership engagement and support as a crucial role in defining operational strategies and outlining the demarcations of the regional water utility to align with the new mandate in the post-reconfiguration period.

–There is a need for clear leadership engagement and institutional support post-reconfiguration. U UW leadership played a critical role in defining operational strategies that align with the new mandate. Hence, U UW leadership involvement speaks to the foundational need for U UW visible leadership support during the organisational change process. (Participant 9).

Participant 2, who was U UW middle manager, exemplified the critical role that visible leadership plays in steering the organisation towards achieving its desired goal but also ensuring leadership presence is felt by employees throughout the organisation.

"Central to impactful change is a leadership team - lack of visibility of leadership... no effort and input visible from Executive."(Participant 2)

Commitment and clear direction from U UW leadership are vital to ensuring employee buy-in in the reconfiguration process. Participant 3 U UW employee echoed how employees were finding it difficult to accept and adapt to the ongoing changes without strong support from upper management.

U UW employee - commented that "effective change management requires commitment and clear direction from the top to ensure buy-in from employees." This statement captures the essence of leadership visibility, suggesting that without an unwavering commitment from the U UW leadership from various levels of the organisation employees may struggle to embrace and adapt to the reconfiguration processes underway. (Participant 3)

Participant 16 U UW executive manager surmised the importance of U UW leaders owning the change process, promoting transparency, and creating and sustaining trust, which were much needed to assist in alleviating fears and encourage a spirit of collaboration among U UW employees at all levels.

U UW executive member - provided an insight on the "importance of visible commitment from executives and senior management to foster trust and encourage employee participation" which underscore the necessity of leaders taking ownership of the change process, establishing transparency that can mitigate fears and foster a collaborative spirit among staff.(Participant 16)

The insufficiency or inadequacy for leaders to simply establish a framework without maintaining continuous involvement, leading change by example, and inspiring commitment not only through their actions but also by adopting an approachable demeanour. As illustrated by participant 7 U UW employee below: The insufficiency or inadequacy for leaders to simply establish a framework without maintaining continuous involvement, leading change by example, and inspiring commitment not only through their

actions but also by adopting an approachable demeanour. As illustrated by participant 7 UUW employee below:

UUW employee - He reiterated the necessity for “leadership to be present and actively engaged” throughout the change process, indicating that merely setting the framework is insufficient without ongoing involvement. His perspective illustrates the need for leaders to embody the change, demonstrating commitment through their actions and approachable demeanor. (Participant 7)

Participant 4, a senior at UUW, emphasised the vital importance of consistent and transparent leadership in reassuring employees and cultivating a feeling of stability and direction within the organisation.

UUW senior manager - provided an insight on the absence of visible leadership and support from the UUW board and executives during the change reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, as has a potential hindrance to effective change management. This observation highlights the pivotal role that consistent and transparent UUW leadership plays in reassuring employees and facilitating a sense of security and direction in times of uncertainty. (Participant 4)

Participant 16, an executive member within UUW, is provided details and insights on the commitment to the change process that is displayed by the leadership team during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility. The participant had the following to say:

“Leadership vacuum is visible as UUW have a lot of personnel acting on key positions which impact negatively on the implementation of the reconfiguration process. During the era of the interim board of UUW the vision for change and the road map was clear with the newly appointed permanent board – I’m not too sure. Key milestones for the reconfiguration process are not well understood, articulated and communicated by UUW leadership. The direction that is taking by the UUW is not clear to me. I’ve been through various organisational changes with the organisation previously as from 2002. The challenge with the reconfiguration process is that - everybody is talking, driving change at all levels ...change is not guided, directed from the top”

The difficulty of top-down change to meaningfully engage and involve employees energised and excited by change is not a good reflection on how effective change management should unfold. Participant 14 UUW middle manager elaborated on how passive, disengaged, and invisible leadership fails to utilise human resources to excel in planned change management:

“ The intention of the Minister of Water and Sanitation is great on paper as it aimed to serve the communities with the Province of KwaZulu-Natal that have no access to portable water and decent sanitation services...organisational change can be good or bad as it is determined by who and how it is being driven and managed. People are ready, excited about the change as it will bring about the social change...what is lacking is a person / team that is driving the organisational change process internal, which is the UUW leadership”.

Participant 1, who is a member of the organised labour representative within UUW, concurred with the lack of visibility and commitment of the UUW leadership team at all levels of the organisation in driving the reconfiguration process.

“...How can you drive a change process that you are also equally affected by that change – the implementation of the UUW placement policy, the implementation of the new organisational structure is directly affecting the UUW leadership team starting from the Executive team, senior management and middle management team. The UUW leadership are uncertain about their future positions within the organisation... there is no clear direction, commitment and road map in driving the reconfiguration process... ”(Participant 5)

Strong strategic leadership and accountability in times of change are very key to driving planned change in an organisation. Participant 11 UUW employee below:

“The proper planning from UUW leadership was, in my opinion, not carried out. Having observed everything that unfolded, I believe there is a lack of strategic leadership. At that time, we didn't have a CEO, and there was no accountability. I've noticed that often it is just managers at a Grade 6 level who engage with the staff. This situation highlighted the need for strong leadership and accountability during times of change.”

While the involvement of consultants in the change management process is valuable, it becomes less effective if employees feel that they have been completely abandoned by their top leaders and left in the hands of consultants. Participant 2, UUW middle manager, had the following to say about the sense of abandonment at the time they needed their leaders most:

“Immediately it was, it means then we would see the organisation is now run by consultant, you know. You know, at least the consultant should assist my manager. You know, to understand the issue of change and to understand how to communicate and all of that, but not to be on the

forefront, you know in the forefront you need your own people, not your own people abandoning you”.

Participant 16, who was a U UW executive member, shared the same sentiment on the lack of leadership accountability and commitment to drive the process of change with U UW as depicted in the quote below.

“Advisory forum it doesn't matter who they appoint, even if it's a consultant. We have no issues with that, but obviously that person should be accountable to make sure that all the deliverables are met”. (Participant 16)

4.3.3. Less structured change pathways

The reconfiguration process in this study was realised via less structured pathways but triggered a significant concern regarding the lack of a clearly defined roadmap for the ongoing changes within the organisation. A sense of uncertainty and confusion that was prevalent among the U UW staff at all levels, from the executive to the shop floor levels, during this reconfiguration process would have been avoided if there was a clear road map regarding what we U UW was changing during the organisational process. Participant 4, a senior manager at U UW, shared his thoughts on the less structured approach used during the transition: *“There is no roadmap regarding what we are changing. Is it a gradual process, or are we to expect abrupt changes?”* A well-defined roadmap is essential in guiding an organisation through change, providing clarity on the specific objectives, timelines, and methodologies to be employed. The absence of a framework suggests a failure to communicate the rationale behind the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in the KwaZulu-Natal organisational change process effectively, leading to ambiguity regarding its nature—whether it will unfold gradually or manifest suddenly. A well-defined roadmap is essential in guiding an organisation through change, providing clarity on the specific objectives, timelines, and methodologies to be employed. The absence of a framework suggests a failure to communicate the rationale behind the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in the KwaZulu-Natal organisational change process effectively, leading to ambiguity regarding its nature—whether it will unfold gradually or manifest suddenly.

As the reconfiguration unfolded, many participants expressed unhappiness captured by the phrase *“left in the dark”* (Participant 4), indicating a disconnect between the U UW leadership's intentions and the U UW employees' understanding of the overall change process. When U UW employees at all levels of the organisation felt uninformed or misinformed about imminent changes, it fostered a culture of speculation and mistrust. Hence, U UW employees resorted to informal communication channels such as corridor conversations and informal discussions to fill the information void about the overall organisational change process, which exacerbated misunderstandings and spread anxiety throughout the U UW. Additionally, the ambiguity surrounding the organisational change process hindered effective planning and resource allocation. When employees are uncertain about their roles in the

evolving structure, it becomes challenging for them to make proactive contributions or adjustments to their work. Participant 4, who was UUW Senior manager, had the following to say:

“There is no road map regarding what we are changing. Is it a gradual process, or are we to expect abrupt changes? It seems we are left in the dark.”(Participant 4)

While the reconfiguration of the water boards was possible with a less structured pathway for changes, many employees indicated that they would have preferred clarity of a structured approach to organisational change process as this would have helped with effective communication and fostering a sense of collective purpose. Participants in this study perceived that there was no structured change plan to guide UUW employees’ efforts and that they experienced a sense of confusion and helplessness, making it difficult for them to navigate their own positions within the larger organisational framework. As quoted by Participant 3, who was a UUW employee:

“We need a solid framework that outlines each phase of implementation, so everyone understands where we are heading. At present, it feels as though we are embarking on a journey without a map; we cannot even see the destination.”(Participant 3)

There was a lack of a clear change framework, which caused confusion among UUW employees regarding the overarching objectives and desired outcomes of the configuration efforts. Participant 5, who was a UUW organised labour representative, noted that when employees were not informed of the goals guiding the transformation, they struggled to understand their roles within the new structure, became disengaged, and resisted the reconfiguration process.

“A guiding framework is essential if we expect individuals at all levels to engage with and contribute positively to the change. If we do not know what the goals are, we cannot align our efforts accordingly.” (Participant 5)

Participant 11, who was a UUW employee, shared that a well-defined and structured change approach is essential for effective change management within UUW. However, a less structured change approach has, consequently, led to a disconnect between UUW leadership and employees, eroding interpersonal trust and creating anxiety among UUW employees.

“Leadership has not been stable, and it feels as if the change management department is not fully equipped to handle the complexities. The interim leadership did not effectively communicate the framework, which has left many of us confused” (Participant 11).

Participants' sentiments suggested that the approach to organisational change adopted during the reconfiguration process has been somewhat fragmented, inconsistent, and lacking in attention to detail. Participant 6, who was UUW Senior manager, illustrated this as follows:

“Without consistency from the leadership, the framework lacks impact. It is as though everyone is awaiting someone to step up and clarify their role within this new structure.” (Participant 6)

The participants underscored the necessity for a participatory approach to change management, asserting that the effectiveness of any change initiative hinges on the involvement of those at all hierarchical levels within the UUW organisation. Participant 7, who was a UUW employee, had the following to say on the significance of participatory change management.

“It is vital to involve individuals from all tiers within the organisation, so that the framework reflects the real-world challenges we face. Change should not be dictated solely from above; it requires input from those who operate on the ground.” (Participant 7)

When UUW employees are not sufficiently integrated into the change narrative, they perceive the transformations as top-down impositions in pursuit of rapid structural change rather than as collective endeavours with great concern on the human side of change with mutual benefit. Participant 9, who was a UUW middle manager, emphasised the need for engaging employees in the change process in a manner that values employee expertise and enhanced empowerment to play a pivotal role in designing transitional strategies that resonate with the collective and ultimately enforce employee buy-in to a change process, as quoted by Participant 9 below:

“A collaborative approach to developing the change framework could pave the way for better understanding and acceptance among employees. When individuals feel included in the process, they are more likely to engage positively” (Participant 9)

4.3.4 Communicating the change process

The results of the study revealed that effective communication about the change process through various means is critical to avoiding employee frustration. However, in the current study, reconfiguration of the water boards was possible through a process that made many employees feel uninformed or ill-informed about the reasons behind the organisational level and strategic changes within UUW and their implications. Transparency was notably lacking as UUW employees at all levels expressed frustrations about receiving information primarily through indirect channels, such as organised labour representatives, and the prevalence of informal information communication channels, such as Grapevine, rather than clear information and updates directly from the UUW leadership team.

Notably, the communication process was predominately one-way communication, as many UUW employees missed opportunities for open discussions where their input could have been solicited.

Despite some attempts to use various communication channels, including emails and intranet postings, there was a notable reliance on electronic means, which failed to reach a significant portion of the workforce, particularly blue-collar employees without access to these platforms. Recommendations for alternative communication channels, such as face-to-face interactions with UUW leadership, were prevalent in responses. A collaborative approach would not only enhance the quality of communication but also empower managers to take ownership of the change, enabling a smoother transition and fostering a more engaged workforce, as articulated by Participant 1, who was UUW's executive manager below:

The Executives need us middle and senior managers in terms of supporting their vision....how can we input if we are not involved in the initial stage of planning ,... including aspects like sharing and engaging with various groups within UUW, the responsibility for quality management systems rests with us. We need to reflect on our current practices and consider how they will evolve as we venture into these new operational areas. What initiatives should we implement, what projects need to be undertaken, and how can we develop suitable strategies for this transition process?"(Participant 1)

Only after final decisions were made did information cascade down the hierarchy, leading to a lack of context and rationale for the changes. This resulted in increased frustration due to the absence of employee participation in the strategic change decision-making process, despite their expected role as key actors in decision execution. Employees were scrambling for answers and clarity, leading to confusion, anxiety, and the undermining of trust in leadership, but also promoting the spread of misinformation as employees turned to unofficial channels for updates, further complicating the communication landscape. Participant 6, who was a UUW senior manager, had the following to say on how change communication could be effective with much involvement across vertical levels but also reliance on middle managers as connectors of the bottom with top leadership.

At this stage, it seems that the focus is primarily on high-level strategy and overarching goals, which perhaps doesn't allow for as much involvement from those at different levels within the organisation. I would expect more engagement from executives, regional management, and, to some extent, senior management, who should be contributing their insights at this stage. Once the strategy and initiatives are established, the next step will be to rely on middle management to support and drive the implementation of the strategy that has been set by the upper levels."
(Participant 6)

Effective communication is frequently cited as a critical component lacking in the current change process. The interviewees revealed that there is often a lack of clear or adequate communication about organisational change processes, updates, and policies. The change process within UUW does not have a clear framework that guides the process of change to ensure the impactful, effective transition from a

water board into a regional water utility. Without such a framework, initiatives may become disjointed, leading to inefficiencies and frustration among staff, as portrayed by Participant 8, who was UUW middle manager.

“Useful information that could have been utilised. To formalise the way forward in terms of the guidelines, framework and the methodology that drive the reconfiguration process, I think we need to revisit those two bulletins business processes and re-engineering and sure that organisational change framework with clear milestone are established and robust communication with staff from all levels ... So that kind of communication needs to be brought in until the organisation stabilises...”(Participant 8)

Participant 12, who was UUW middle manager, lamented that the lack of a roadmap with clearly communicated milestones made many employees feel lost and unmotivated with not only the trajectory of change but also the change process and communication of change progress towards the anticipated re-configuration.

“Something like a road map. To say this is where we are, this is where we going. This is how far this is what we've achieved and this is we still have maybe 10 deliverables that we need to achieve until we can say we've arrived, you know”. (Participant 12)

Participant 20, a senior member of UUW, highlighted the bias in communication during the reconfiguration process due to the dominance of mass emails and insufficient consultation.

Currently, however, it seems that the communication channels in place are lacking "The emails we receive are not relevant and don't address the changes the organisation is going through." The only existing platform for communication appears to be through the UUW organised labour, and there has been no briefing from management, particularly from the CEO. Overall, the communication feels inadequate and insignificant in this time of change.

Consequently, the predominate use of non-face-to-face ways of communication, such as emails and the UUW intranet, was not appropriate and accessible for blue-collar workers who could not read and faced language barriers, as reported by Participant UUW 3:

"Communication is inadequate, and there's a lack of information shared with all levels." The existing channels for communication include emails, the intranet, and social media, which aim to reach a broader audience. However, it appears that not all employees are being reached, particularly those in Richards Bay who are still using their emails, and employees in uMhlathuze who are unable to access intranet information. As of July 2024, this situation has not improved. Furthermore, the language used in communications should be inclusive and

considerate, ensuring that all staff members (blue collar) can understand the messages being conveyed.

Blue-collar workers that are working on the plant could not be reached. Organised labour communication efforts seemed to be used. Participant 8 UUW middle manager illustrated below:

There is a significant communication challenge within the organisation. One participant said, "If you communicate the issues affecting my bread and butter, I expect UUW to address my concerns to the union. I don't have a choice but to attend the union meeting." This highlights the urgency for effective communication regarding matters that directly impact employees' livelihoods. Moreover, access to email is a problem, as many people working at the plant level are not office-based and are therefore missing out on important communications.

The communication of change was seen as one-sided and lacked soliciting feedback from all stakeholders impacted by UUW organisation change efforts for continuous improvement:

There is an issue of one-sided information, with many feeling that they are not involved in communication. "Employees are coming up with good ideas, but there is no platform to collect these and incorporate them into the overall change process." (Participant 9)

Interviews revealed that the communication channel used to disseminate information on the change effort within UUW was predominantly email, which was problematic especially because of language barriers. The difficulty of reaching a greater audience through emails was reiterated as follows:

The current communication platform relies heavily on email, which is not effectively reaching people in the various sites, particularly blue-collar workers. "Reaching people at the sites is lacking; workshops at Mhlanga cannot work because the language is not appropriate." This indicates that the content being communicated is not effectively tailored to the audience. There is a need for communication that resonates with all employees, "What are your milestones?" This suggests that clear goals should be established to ensure everyone is informed and engaged... Communication should be transparency, trust, be honest Participant 16)

Results also revealed that the communication channels used by the UUW were intranet, change agents, organised labour mass meetings, and meet and greets done by the UUW Chief Executive Officer. During the meet and greet meeting with the UUW CEO, communication was inconsistent and spread the false news, which was revealed by participant 18 UUW senior manager in this way:

Channels - intranet, CANs, Organised labour, New CEO, greeting and meeting, with a promise, Initially, the channels of communication were inconsistent, often spreading false information. People were pressured to sign the transfer agreement under the impression that without their signatures, the merger could not proceed. This was a reactive strategy employed

by the executives at the time. "The communication was misleading and caused a lot of confusion." Additionally, the former communication regarding the disestablishment of uMhlathuze indicated that both Water Boards would work together. However, this message differed from what was previously communicated about the former uMhlathuze Water, leading to further confusion and tension among staff. (Participant 18)

Participant 10, who was Uuw senior manager, was in favour of a responsive approach to communication within the organisation. This approach would involve providing clear and relatable messages that resonate with employees' experiences and concerns during the change process. Participant 10 said the following:

"Communication should be more meaningful and personalised. Leadership needs to pause their focus on technical issues and actively engage with employees at all levels throughout the change process. It is essential for the organisation to take the time to 'check the pulse' of its employees. More engagement is required."

Another Participant 18, who was Uuw employee, indicated the active communication platforms used by Uuw to disseminate information about the reconfiguration project; organised labour played a very important role in keeping all employees informed. However, the Uuw intranet lacked meaningful content, as illustrated below:

"The active communication channels, such as the intranet and internet, exclude many people on the ground. The organised labour played a critical role in keeping employees informed. Overall, 'information is not flowing,' and it lacks meaningful content. In fact, 'communication is being impeded big time.'"

Participant 1, a senior manager of Uuw, reflected on the staff complements that 80% of Uuw staff are working out on the field with little or no access to emails, of which they get excluded from the communication regarding the reconfiguration efforts.

"There is a significant gap in communication, as blue-collar workers are often excluded, with the main focus being on office workers.... '80/10'. Discussions taking place informally in corridors lead to confusion and spread rumours, which distorts the information being shared."

Effective change communication that drives the organisation's change should give hope, motive, and reassurance for an organisation to achieve a smooth transition. Participant 11, a senior manager within Uuw, provided an insight as illustrated in the quote below:

" ... indicates a need for clear communication to provide direction, especially in uncertain times. Communication is framed as a means to clarify the path ahead and instil hope, helping individuals understand where they are in the change journey and where they are

headed...description of communication as something that “gives hope” underscores the need for messaging that is motivating and reassuring, essential for building buy-in at all levels.

Participant 18, who was a senior manager from U UW during the interview process, indicated that the current board and the executive team driving the change process with U UW seem to have no clear direction on the key milestones to be achieved during the reconfiguration process.

The outgoing board of U UW was activity involved in the reconfiguration process whereby the consultant was appointed to conduct a due diligent assessment of the two former water boards and come out with a report with clear recommendation on the strategies to be implemented in driving the smooth change, the risks that came with the merging of two entities were also outlined in the reports. All the recommendations on the report should give a clear direction on the key change management milestones to be adopted. I strongly believe that those recommendations, with clear budget allocation would assists in driving the reconfiguration process. The new Board did not give them the real understanding of the both former organisations. Revisit the Due Diligent report and re-engineer the business processes and how we better managed the new entity. New U UW Board came with change management strategy to drive the change process after the interim board left but there seems to be a disjuncture (Participant 18).

Information about change processes, updates, and policies was not always communicated clearly or adequately. The study revealed that U UW leadership communication and messaging to employees created confusion due to a lack of a platform where questions could be asked to gain clarity. U UW communicated on the U UW intranet, which is not interactive and also only relied much on communication through labour as the main interactive communication to get to people, as depicted by Participant 11, who was U UW middle manager:

The culture of poor communication is prevalent, and it is significantly impacting our core business. Without a clear roadmap, we are left in a state of confusion. Communication is only being shared through organised labour, which has become our sole source of information. Recently, a circular was issued regarding the macro structure, but it was sent out without any accompanying attachments. This has led to widespread confusion among staff. As one participant put it, “The circular left us wondering what the changes actually meant.” It is clear that a better approach is needed; any important communiqué should have been attached to the circular. Additionally, we could use the intranet and communication posters placed in strategic locations to ensure everyone is informed. Moreover, during a recent organised labour workshop on the macro structure, it was made clear that “it is not the union’s responsibility to communicate these changes.” This highlights the urgent need for a structured communication

strategy that involves everyone in our organisation, so we can work together effectively and understand what is happening.

Without clear communication, staff can feel lost and uncertain about their roles and what is expected of them. The macrostructure published on the intranet was unclear, due to instability within the organisation due to a lot of acting positions at the executive level downwards, employees did not know whom to approach for information or support. Participant 15, who was an employee at U UW, elucidated that a clear organisational structure and open lines of communication are vital for enabling employees to adapt and move forward with confidence.

“Yeah, there was no stability and there was no guideline, don’t know where to turn to for clarity on the macro structure published on the intranet, you know” (Participant 15).

Participant 13, who was U UW middle manager, also concurred with clear communication and a well-defined organisational structure as essential for helping employees understand their roles and how they contribute to the organisation’s goals. Without these, confusion and uncertainty can hinder progress.

“Something like a road map. To say this is where we are, this is where we going. This is how far this is what we’ve achieved and this is we still have maybe 10 deliverables that we need to achieve until we can say we’ve arrived, you know”. (Participant 13)

Participants attributed the challenge of lacking communication and unclear structure, which led to confusion, as they were expected to draft individual performance contractors and key performance indicators that are aligned to the key deliverables of the organisation regarding the reconfiguration process. Participant 20, a middle manager at U UW, shared the following observations:

“Do we now need to think in terms of a five-year plan to move forward? There has been no guidance from management about change. Once we achieved some stability within the organisation in the last month or so, we were told to start considering departments direction. It has felt a bit rushed, as this aligns with the new Key Performance Indicators and personal contracts, leading to a push for quick approvals”

4.3 5 Consultant driven change

Results reveal that the external consultant, Aziye, operated in isolation from the U UW internal leadership, raising the danger that their recommended improvement strategies from the cultural survey assessment done may become disjointed from the core organisational culture and operational realities. Effective change management not only requires access to specialised knowledge and expertise but also requires full integration of these insights into the organisation's existing frameworks and processes. The

effectiveness of the reconfiguration process hinges upon a well-defined partnership between external consultants and Uuw internal leadership. This integrated approach is key to facilitating a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the organisation, ensuring that the implementation of change initiatives is both coherent and aligned with the organisation's goals and values. Participant 9, a Uuw employee, reflected on how creating a synergy between external expertise and internal leadership is paramount to achieving enduring and impactful organisational transformation, but was not the case in the reconfiguration process as indicated in the quote below:

Uuw employee - "While I recognise the value of having external expertise – Aziye consultant, it is crucial that they work alongside our existing leadership. If they are not fully integrated into our processes, their impact will be minimal. They are external to help, not to run with the change to completion as fast as they can and leave all of us behind, confused, and more disengaged" (Participant 9)

Lack of visible effort and input from the executive team regarding the newly adopted corporate strategic goals, known as "CARE goals," raised concerns among Uuw employees. This absence underscored the leadership's apparent disengagement from the change process. The reliance on external consultants further underscores a significant shift towards consultant-driven change within the organisation, specifically within Uuw. The signal of potential abdication of Uuw leadership responsibility, wherein the executive leaned heavily on external expertise to navigate organisational change instead of actively participating in the process themselves, was articulated by participant 2 Uuw middle manager as follows:

Uuw middle manager - No effort and input visible from Executive. In communicating the Uuw newly adopted "CARE goals". Consultant contracted by Uuw communicated - Road map communicated at Durban Heights (Participant 2)

Another participant added on how the engagement of a consultant—Aziye—to drive change initiatives became a point of contention among employees as there was a lack of a formal introduction by Uuw management of the consultants and scope of the change. Consequently, employees were left unsure of not only the consultant's role and authority within the organisation but also the change objectives and change desired outcomes.

Furthermore, the absence of a "face" (Participant 3) in the change process compelled employees to perceive the consultant's efforts as disconnected from their day-to-day reality and felt disengaged and disoriented by the change process. For positive change to take root, it is imperative that the consultant is visibly supported and endorsed by leadership, fostering a coherent narrative that articulates the vision for change and engages employees in a meaningful way. Participant 3, an employee of Uuw, emphasised proper introduction and role clarity of consultants and strong leadership support of

consultants to create a collective, clear, and united “face of the change rather than a distant and impersonal change.

Uuw employee - Aziye consultant driving change initiatives (Not being formally introduced by Management). No clear vision of change, no visibility in driving the change (no face).(Participant 3)

The consultant-driven change in a context of disengaged leadership and lack of engagement made employees to highlight not only the need for vertical coherence across all levels but also a clearly defined roadmap that defines Uuw strategic change objectives and explains what the Uuw aims to achieve through this change process and the external involvement of consultants. The reliance on a consultant-driven change strategy hampered the necessary alignment and communication between various levels of Uuw leadership and the employees at large during the re-configuration process, as illustrated by Participant 5 organised labour representative at Uuw.

Uuw organised labour representative - Consultant - Aziye actively playing in the middle of the tier and no movement on the top and lower level tier. No visibility of leadership, road map - this is what we want to achieve. (Participant 5)

Another participant underscored how successful change initiatives require a delicate balance where consultants collaborate with organisational leaders rather than overshadowing them. An approach that would internally-led, conscious to cultivate employee trust, promote ownership of the change among employees, and ensure a more cohesive transition for the organisation overall is what Participant 7, an employee at Uuw, stated:

Uuw employee - Visibility of leadership is absent. Consultant - Aziye - appointed to drive the change , loose focus of your own people, but there should be a guiding factor- leaders of org should take lead. No communication from the CEO and cannot accept the voice of the consultant. Aziye should assists my leadership not be in the forefront. (Participant 7)

Without the active involvement and backing of Uuw leadership, the effectiveness of the external consultant is questionable. Participant 15 Uuw employee summarised the feeling of employees regarding the change vision as “seating in the dark,” without clarity of direction, and disoriented to participate meaningfully as key and convinced actors in the change process as illustrated below:

Uuw employee - Currently we are lacking capacity and seating in the dark in terms of change management. The use of consultants and not supported by senior management.(Participant 15)

Participant 5 UUW organised labour representative reinforced the idea that the change process is not solely the domain of external experts but a shared journey with the workforce, ultimately leading to greater engagement and acceptance of the changes within the organisation.

Visibility of leadership can be improved by resuscitating the UUW staff information session, workshops, communication bulletin with both language, even though the consultant is driving the process (Participant 5)

Participant 1, the UUW executive manager, emphasised the essential requirement for formal feedback systems and a more inclusive approach to change that might have empowered all UUW employees and cultivated trust in leadership.

Due to employees concern raised during site visit by UUW acting Chief Executive Officer - gave birth to appointment of Consultant - Aziye - to drive change process. However, there is no formal platform to take complaints, input, feedback from employees (Participant 1)

4.3.6 Change agents driven approach

The role of change agents in driving change within the uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility (UUW) was multifaceted and pivotal during the ongoing organisational change process.

Participants' response in terms of clarification of roles and responsibilities of UUW change agents provided insights on a recurring concern among participants: the ambiguity surrounding the roles of change agents. As one participant noted, *"Before the workshop took place, a change agent was meant to be nominated, and the Terms of References were to be defined and articulated."* (Participant 7 UUW employee) This lack of clarity has undoubtedly contributed to misunderstandings about the scope of change agents' responsibilities, with some employees mistakenly referring to them for human resources issues. Another middle manager articulated the need for well-defined roles: *"It's important to work with everyone and introduce change agents to everyone."* (Participant 5 UUW organised labour representative) The significance of distinct roles cannot be overstated; it will enable change agents to focus on their primary objective of facilitating effective change.

The necessity for an articulated strategic direction was a prevalent theme in participant feedback. As one middle manager observed, *"having a proper document is crucial; it acts like a GPS, guiding everyone including the change agents in the right direction towards a final destination."* (Participant 16, a UUW executive manager). This absence of guiding documents during the current reconfiguration led to confusion and uncertainty. The participants underscored the significant role of effective change agents in collaborating with leadership to develop a comprehensive roadmap: *"There needs to be a clear direction, a roadmap, and visibility from leadership to effectively guide everyone through the*

change. This is key if change is to be effective." (Participant 4, a UUW senior manager) This structured approach would have helped delineate goals and timelines, ensuring clarity in execution.

The findings of this study revealed that the theme of capacity building for UUW change agents emerged significantly from the participants' responses. One participant noted, *"having the board conduct a workshop for the Executive on the change process... will help everyone to 'embrace change'.* (Participant 15 UUW employee" This emphasis on training and development will enhance the ability of change agents to manage employee concerns and facilitate smooth transitions. Furthermore, another participant articulated that the newly established Change Department should assist the executive and senior management: *"I think it is our duty to assist the executive, the middles and the senior management to participate in driving the change process."* (Participant 10, a UUW senior manager) Empowering change agents through education would have bolstered change efficacy and employee confidence, ultimately benefiting the organisation as a whole.

Effective change management is seen as dependent on visible and active leadership, suggesting that employees look to leaders for guidance and reassurance during transitions. Participant 16, a UUW executive member interviewed, provided an insight on the role of leadership and change agents in driving the reconfiguration efforts. In the previous organisational change within UUW, there were guiding documents; in the current change, which is the reconfiguration of water boards into a regional water utility, there is no guiding document. Change efforts should focus on all employees within the organisation; input and buy-in will assist in achieving a smooth change. Participant 8 UUW middle manager also shared a lack of understanding of the role played by UUW change agents:

Historical changes require a "change management process" and a "living plan." However, it's not always clear what exactly we are changing. If we are uncertain about what we are changing, we will never achieve meaningful change. Having a proper document is crucial; it acts like a GPS, guiding everyone in the right direction towards a final destination. The focus on change should not rest solely with top management; it's essential to engage all levels of the organisation. By giving people clear milestones, we can encourage their involvement in the process and make them feel excited about the next phase of change.

Poster on notice board ... Change Agent - lot of people appointed as Change agents, what are they doing, how are they doing to assists the organisation in terms of managing smooth and impactful change?

While Participant 8, who was a middle manager, lauded the efforts to clarify the terms and conditions of change agents and the face-to-face initial introduction of the various change agents, it was clear that this strategy was not properly briefed to staff as depicted in the quote below.

:

“Before the workshop took place, a change agent was meant to be nominated, and the Terms of References were to be defined and articulated. A poster was shared, but no one had been properly briefed on the new strategy that was being introduced. It’s important to “work with everyone and introduce Change agents to everyone.” There was a poster featuring the faces of the change agents team for the first meeting. Participants expressed their “expectations” for the change agents in finance and shared services. Employees concerns regarding performance were raised, and it was suggested that those issues should be referred to HR through suggestion boxes. (Participant 8)

Participant 10 UUW senior manager chose how lack of clearly articulated direction from supportive leadership did not help in clarifying the role and scope of responsibility for change agents to be effective ears and eyes on the ground for effective change management.

“The organisation has appointed change agents to be the ears and eyes on the ground during the change process ...I’m not too sure then if as an organisation we have really touched into how the reconfiguration process is to be manage, because even with the change management agents, I’m not too sure if they have been appointed to deal specifically with this or they’re just brought upon so that they deal with any change that is happening within the organisation. In all of this process there is a lack of strategic leader that will provide clear guidance. In my view, strong leadership combined with effective change agents is vital for driving successful organisational change. Together, they cultivate a shared sense of purpose, encourage active participation from employees at all levels, and maintain momentum throughout the change process to ultimately achieve desired outcomes. I don’t think this goals will be realised as we lack strategic leadership that will provide clear direction” (Participant 10)

The coordinating and connecting role of change agents during the reconfiguration of uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility was surmised by participant 5 UUW organised labour representative.

“As a member of the organised labour within uMngeni –uThukela Water Utility, the organisation have elected change agents to drive the process of change. Looking at the organisation different tiers, change agents are seating in the middle tier of the organisation and working with the appointed consultant that is currently driving change ...leadership is not visible, I have never head of them talking about change... change agents cannot be able to replace the role played by organisation leadership. What is interesting is that the middle tier is busy and the top tier is not visible at all. But who drive this change?”

Participant 17, who was a U UW employee, highlighted the importance of U UW working in collaboration with the change agents in driving the organisation's change processes, especially in continuous engagement with all relevant stakeholders, as illustrated below:

Continuous engagement - Leadership should be part of the engagement process, work together with Change agents.

While the U UW conducted a workshop for the U UW change agents to build capacity, it was clear that the change initiative should begin at the highest level of the organisation (the Board and Executive) rather than start with lower levels or specific teams like change agents. This demonstrates commitment from the top and sets a standard for the rest of the organisation. Participant 4, who was a senior manager at U UW, as illustrated below:

The board should conduct a workshop for the Executive on the change process, ensuring that information cascades down to all levels of leadership within the organisation. This will help everyone to "embrace change" and "walk the talk," as they clearly understand what is required of them. A roadmap should be made available to guide the process. It is essential that this begins at the Board level and involves the Executive, rather than starting with the change agents team. There needs to be a clear direction, a roadmap, and visibility from leadership to effectively guide everyone through the change.

Participant 3 U UW employee illustrated how the newly established Change Department could have been used more effectively to intervene and assist the executive, senior, and middle managers in driving the change efforts.

"And if they use that, that individual or those or that group in the new department focusing on change, things would be better. They are being left out then, as a change management. Department, I think that it is, it is our duty to assist the executive, the middles and the senior management to participate in driving the change process." (Participant 3)

In this study, Participant 2, who was U UW middle manager, explained that it was not appropriate that the change management specialist rather than the executive leadership were the face of the reconfiguration of the water boards.

Who is the face of the change? – appointment of change management specialist, assist ushering us with the change, what steps are required, ushering us in the process. "leadership asked what is happening with regards to reconfiguration - if the head is not stable the body cannot function"- Exec- shift accountability and responsibility.... Change is not positioned well where it belong - leadership accountability is lacking"(Participant 2)

Participant 10, who was a senior management within Uuw, indicated that the rare instances of direct involvement of leadership in driving and supporting change were exemplified by the recently appointed CEO and the project sponsor, who attended one of the capacity-building initiatives for the change agents.

“Even though there is lack of active participation of leadership in driving the change process within Uuw .it is noteworthy to note that the newly appointed Chief Executive and the project sponsor graced the change agents capacity building session with their presence ,participation and commitment’ ...this brought a glimpse of hope (Participant 10)

4.4 Themes on the communication channels used for the messaging to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal

The study revealed a variety of eight different themes relating to formal and informal communication channels used for clarity of messaging to reach Uuw employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, which include (1) face-to-face executive announcements, (2) executive-led internal workshops, (3) executive and board meetings, (4) excessive dependence on mass emails, (5) reliance on grapevine, (6) circulars, (7) brown bag sessions, and (8) executive-led staff information sessions, as shown in Table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2 : Themes on the communication used for clarity of messaging to reach all employees

Communication channels used for clarity of messaging to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.	Frequency
Formal communication channels	
1.Face to Face Executive announcements	3
2.Executive led internal workshops	2
3. Executive led staff information session	1
4.Executive and Board meetings	3
5.Excessive dependence on mass Emails	4
Informal communication channels	
6.Reliance on grapevine when there is scarcity of information	4
7.Circulars to the masses for quick message delivery	2
8. Brown Bag Sessions	1

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

4.4.1. Face to face executive announcements

The findings of this study revealed that the communication involved in the change process was predominantly one-way, with sporadic attempts at two-way face-to-face interactions. The imposition of decisions without comprehensive consultation contributed to employee resistance and disconnection.

There was an instance when face-to-face executive site visits were used to communicate to all employees about the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility. Informing all employees about the disestablishment of uMhlathuze Water and the extension of Umgeni Water operational boundaries to include uMhlathuze Water. Participant 20, who was a UuW middle manager, indicated the unique use and role of face-to-face communication in the early stages of the change announcement:

In the initial meeting with the UuW Board, participants reported a sense of abruptness regarding the changes being implemented. As one participant recounted, "Change was announced, directive change something that you could not question." This directive nature of the announcement left many feeling that they were expected to accept the new framework without understanding its implications. The process had been initiated by the Minister, who passed responsibility to the Board, instructing them to implement the changes: "we were told that change has to happen; UuW had to extend its borders."(Participant 20)

Participant 8, a UuW middle manager, exemplified the nature, magnitude, and source of initial frustration over the lack of clarity surrounding the intentions of the changes.

"The primary goal of reconfiguration was not clearly explained by the Board," leading to confusion among employees regarding the merger process. Initially perceived as a merger of two organisations, it soon evolved into the disestablishment of one entity, leaving many uncertain about which organisation would ultimately prevail. One organisation was disestablished and one organisation should extend its boundaries... they did not understand. What raised eyebrows was the first meeting called at Premier Hotel as the Richards Bay team for change management without former Umgeni Water" causing participants to question, "If the organisation was merging, why were only former Richards Bay employees called for a change management meeting?" This perceived exclusion fuelled further doubt and dissatisfaction regarding the change process. (Participant 8)

Participant UuW middle manager who was UuW senior manager revealed that the initial communication that was made by UuW executives during a face-to-face site meeting in different regions within UuW was distorted and created confusion among all employees at all levels within the organisation regarding the reconfiguration of the water boards, as illustrated in the quote below:

The situation surrounding the disestablishment of Richards Bay and the extension of Umgeni Water's operating boundaries has caused considerable confusion, particularly with the recent discussions about a merger. As one senior management participant noted, "Disestablishment of RB and extension of UW operating boundaries, but now the board is talking about a merger? Very confusing." There is a growing sense of disconnect between what has been communicated and what is actually happening in daily operations. This participant expressed frustration, stating, "What was communicated is not transpiring in daily activities." The inconsistency between the board's statements and the reality on the ground has left many staff members uncertain and bewildered, disconcerted, about the future of the organisation (Participant 8).

4.4.2 Executive led internal workshop

The results of the study revealed that executive-led internal workshops were a vital tool for effective change management; however, the feedback indicates that the execution of these workshops was inconsistent, marred by communication gaps and delays. The insights gathered from participants highlighted a pressing need for Uuw leadership to adopt a more proactive communication strategy, ensuring timely and clear guidance. Structured workshops, enriched by meaningful Uuw employee participation and attentiveness to emotional considerations, were highlighted as key to laying the necessary foundation for a more cohesive, informed, and engaged workforce as the organisation continues its transition into a regional water utility. Participant 17 Uuw employee stressed that despite these intentions and initiative in the executive-led workshop on change announcement, the Uuw executive internal workshop at Richards Bay significantly fell short in areas of transparency, generating employee awareness and excitement around the change in the early stage as revealed below:

There is a significant lack of transparency surrounding the recent reconfiguration processes. One participant voiced their concerns, stating, "A workshop was done at Richards Bay, and then one person will be nominated. There was no awareness of what is going to happen, and now we have to nominate people." This led to confusion, as they added, "People nominated someone for something that they did not know." Furthermore, the participant highlighted a critical issue, saying, "Terms of reference were not introduced." This absence of clear guidelines has only added to the uncertainty staff members are feeling about the future direction of the organisation.

It is also notable that in addition to the executive-led workshop, the Uuw organised labour representatives took the initiative to conduct workshops aimed at clarifying the Uuw organisation macrostructure. Participant 8, a Uuw middle manager, emphasised that although labour was involved

in change communication, management was primarily responsible for this task, and the union should not shoulder this burden alone, as another UUW middle manager articulated below:

“It’s not the union’s job to communicate these changes. They did their best with the workshops, but there should have been a clearer directive from management.” (Participant 8)

As the executive-led workshops on change were not common, labour felt that they were always waiting for change communication from UUW leadership before relaying any information back to the employees. Participant 11, a UUW employee, had the following to say:

“It often feels like we are left waiting for management to provide answers,” one participant remarked. “This back-and-forth leads to uncertainty and frustration among the staff.” (Participant 11).

The results of this study revealed that while the organised labour representatives ‘efforts to engage UUW employees through workshops are commendable, the overarching issue remains a lack of effective communication from UUW leadership and delays in responding to UUW employees questions raised via the UUW organised labour representatives. Participants conveyed that an effective workshop on change initiation, chain progress, implementation, or change evaluation serves as a vital platform for engagement, collaboration, and knowledge transfer, particularly during a period marked by significant organisational upheaval. Participant 12, a UUW employee, provided the following detailed explanation:

“Workshops are crucial for creating a shared understanding of what changes are occurring and why they are necessary. But they are not common here as we seem to have absent leadership” (Participant 12).

Participant 20, who was UUW middle manager, pointed out how structured and interactive workshops are key and serve to ensure high change awareness, interaction, and shared change vision.

“Only through structured workshops can we ensure that everyone at all levels feels included and informed of change vision. To be informed arises from interaction with others on issues that matter” (Participant 20)

Several participants pointed out the opportunity for open dialogue they provide. Participant 4, a UUW senior manager, stated the following:

UUW senior manager- “These workshop sessions allow employees to voice their concerns and gain clarity on the change process. It is essential that leadership engages with staff through these mediums to foster trust.” Such sentiments reflect a broader recognition that effective change management

requires not only disseminating information but also actively listening to and addressing the concerns of employees. (Participant 4).

Many participants shared the view that workshops are effective to foster a more supportive organisational culture, particularly amid feelings of anxiety and uncertainty triggered by planned strategic change. Participant 6, a UUW senior manager, illustrated this view as follows:

“Workshops should not just focus on the technical aspects of change but also on the human element,” one individual noted. “Training on emotional intelligence and support mechanisms during workshops could greatly assist employees in managing their feelings during this tumultuous period.” (Participant 6)

4.4.3 Executive and Board meetings

The participants shared the view that reconfiguration of uMngeni uThukela Water (UUW) from a traditional water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal required executive and board meetings, which played a pivotal role in navigating this reconfiguration process; however, their effectiveness has been marred by issues of inconsistent and unclear communication and a lack of trust in the leadership and change process, which was not inclusive enough.

. Participants expressed the expectation that these gatherings would provide clarity regarding the organisation's future direction. However, feedback indicates a reactive rather than proactive approach to leadership, with meetings often convened to address crises or urgent matters rather than to facilitate ongoing dialogue and planning of effective execution of strategic change. For instance, participant 7 UUW employee was explicit that “leadership seems to operate on a need-to-know basis,” highlighting a culture of silence that exacerbated uncertainty among staff, as illustrated in the quote below.

UUW Board and executive and board meetings are often convened in reaction to pressing issues rather than as part of a consistent schedule. A participant articulated this perspective, stating, “The executive seems to operate on a need-to-know basis; meetings are called only when there is a crisis or urgent matter to address.” This suggests a reactive approach to leadership, where proactive engagement and planning are noticeably absent. (Participant 7)

Many employees felt that the change-related outcomes of UUW board and executive meetings were inadequately communicated down the hierarchy, resulting in a disconnect that fuelled employee anxiety and speculation about their job security and roles within the reconfigured organisation. Participant 12, a UUW employee, highlighted the frequent informal dissemination of information, which led to a reliance on "corridor conversations" instead of formal channels of communication, as illustrated in the quote below.

“We often hear about decisions made in executive meetings second-hand, through corridor conversations,” which underscores a pressing need for a more structured approach to information sharing Executives meet, but we hear nothing, getting surprised or trying to fill the gaps through corridor updates of information. (Participant 12)

The irregular and inadequate nature, but also the failure of communication to address pressing issues by the board and the executive meetings, was captured by Participant 19, a UUW senior manager, as follows:

“The organisational change information emanating from the UUW board and executive meetings is irregular and most of the times does not address the core of our concerns as employees. I am not convinced we are all on the same page... there is hindrance of trust-building, a crucial element in navigating through the resistance to change.

Executives need to engage more face-to-face with employees so that what is discussed in their meeting is about reality on the ground and people`s challenges with the reconfiguration process. Regular visits to operational sites and open forums for dialogue would have been beneficial to understand the emotional and psychological aspects of employees if they are to change along with the structural reconfiguration. As Participant 13, who was a UUW middle manager posited what would be ideal for most effective reconfiguration of the water boards:

“We need our leaders to be present on the ground to understand the emotional and psychological toll this change is taking on us.

In managing planned strategic change is to be effective and engaging, it is very crucial that board and executive meetings and actions reflect not only transparency but embrace a variety of concerns to gain wide appeal, as reported by Participant 2, a UUW middle manager.

“If the leadership truly wished to foster a culture of trust, they would involve us in these discussions instead of dictating solutions.”(Participant 2)

Participant 7, a UUW employee, echoed this sentiment, emphasising that:

“Without proper feedback loops in place, it feels like management is making unilateral decisions without considering our perspectives or fears.” This lack of transparency fosters a sense of mistrust between leadership and staff, where employees feel detached from the organisational direction. (Participant 7).

Conversely, Participant 8, a middle manager at Uuw, articulated the fear and uncertainty that emerge during the transitional phase when executives convene.

“Every time we hear about an executive meetings, it raises questions: What will happen now? Am I safe in my role?” This reflects the pervasive uncertainty within the organisation, where decision-making processes are viewed as opaque and disconnected from the realities faced by employees. (Participant 8)

Ensuring regular communication of executive and board feedback meeting outcomes and fostering direct engagement between leadership and staff are vital steps in bridging the alarming gap on the effectiveness of the communication channel being used. Participant 4, a Uuw senior manager aptly summarised,

“We need to move past the 'us and them' mentality; it's time we all work together towards a common goal.” This call for unity and collaboration reflects a crucial opportunity for Uuw to redefine its organisational culture in the context of ongoing changes. (Participant 4)

4.4.4 Excessive dependence on mass email

The findings of the study revealed that the effectiveness of email as a communication channel in facilitating effective communication during the configuration of a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal was critical but undermined in several ways to ensure clarity of message and smooth change process within Uuw by certain segments of the employee population.

Participant 7, a Uuw employee, was clear that emails, which form a predominantly common mode used in the reconfiguration, were perceived as a one-way communication tool that denied employees an opportunity for meaningful and engaging dialogue or interaction in pursuit of planned strategic change, as illustrated in the quote below:

“Emails are by nature one-way communication. There is no facility for feedback or conversation. It makes us feel that our voices are not being heard. We need a more interactive approach where employees can ask questions and engage in discussions regarding changes that directly affect them. (Participant 7)

Participant 2, who was Uuw middle manager, was explicit that emails were excluded for some employees who do not have access to emails or have low literacy levels to get the emailed message.

Many blue-collar workers do not have consistent access to emails, leaving them feeling excluded from vital information regarding the transition. This divide significantly hampers the

ability to have robust engagement with all stakeholders in the organisational change process effectively.

Participant 8 UUW middle manager also shared the views that emails often served as an imposing form of communication rather than fostering a consultative atmosphere during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in Kwazulu-Natal.

“It feels as if we are being told what to think rather than being consulted.” This top-down approach can create feelings of alienation and resistance, as employees may perceive the management’s communications as directives rather than collaborative efforts. (Participant 8)

It was difficult to express or demonstrate empathy to workers when the primary mode of communication was emails.

Emails were the predominant communication channel used by UUW executives to drive the process of reconfiguration process is often lack the warmth of personal interaction, creating an emotional disconnect during a critical phase of organisational change. This detachment negatively impacts employee morale and their ability to embrace the transition positively. (Participant 10)

The use of emails to communicate change messages suffered from confusion, which at times triggered anxiety and fuelled a lack of trust in those expected to lead change. For example, there was an email communication that was shared by UUW executives on the approved version of the UUW organisational structure, and there were more than one version of the same document that was written “approved UUW organisational structure” among UUW employees, which created confusion, anxiety, and a loss of trust from UUW leadership. Participant 11, a UUW employee, shared the following observations:

Conflicting narratives that sometimes circulate through emails, which leads to confusion among staff. This lack of uniformity in messaging can further undermine trust in leadership and the change process. (Participant 11)

The need by employees to ask questions and solicit feedback on the change design choices, change styles, change roles, and change communication channels. Participant 12 UUW employee focused on the need for alternative or complementary channels of change communication as some of the dominant channels were inadvertently excluding others and less effective, as reported below:

UUW employee provide an insight on the need for different communication channels, stating, “Emails should complement more direct forms of communication, such as meetings or workshops. We need opportunities to ask questions and receive immediate feedback.”

The employee sentiments on email as a change communication channel used in the reconfiguration process were also captured in the following way by Participant 13, who was a middle manager.

“Emails often feel like a tick-box exercise, lacking the warmth of personal interaction. It is difficult to feel a sense of community when everything we receive is so formal and detached. Mass emails convey information, but they do not acknowledge our emotions” (Participant 13)

Participants expressed that the use of mass emails during the reconfiguration of the water boards in this study had a negative impact on teamwork and cohesive change efforts. Participant 14 UUW middle illustrated the use of mass emails as follows:

“...the essence of teamwork is lost when emails are the only means of communication. We need to rebuild our connection as a team, which emails do not facilitate. We crave more interaction and collaboration so that we would be clear on the change vision, share our worries, discuss what we want together.” (Participant 14)

Another participant provided an insight on the UUW leadership's careful choice of the appropriate communication channel, which should take into consideration the nature of the message to be conveyed and the target audience. An emphasis on your generation that is more technology savvy and the old generation that would prefer face-to-face or direct conversation for clarity of messaging, as elaborated by Participant 16 below:

“There is a generational divide which is key in communication and choice of channel preferences. Younger staff might feel more comfortable with digital communication, but many of us value direct conversation for clarity and rapport. Use of various targeted channels makes sense when there are key distinctions in the audience and types of messages” (Participant 16)

Participant 20, who was a senior manager, advised the need to use not just emails but also communication channels that foster a culture of openness as summarised.

“Emails alone will not foster a culture of openness or trust. We need to create spaces where dialogue can flourish, not just rely on one-way communications. We need to probe issues and be satisfied that we have got to the bottom of an issues as much as we could” (Participant 20)

Participant 17, a UUW employee, echoed the need for a variety of change communication channels as follows:

“If management could view mass emails as one component of a broader communication strategy, and not the sole communication channel method, that would be more effective, cover

every employee. We are eager to engage, but this is hampered when we are not on the same page with shared understanding.” (Participant 17)

4.4.5 Reliance on the grapevine when there is scarcity of information

The findings of the study revealed that Uuw employees, especially at middle and lower levels in the organisation, relied on informal communication channels such as Grapevine due to the ineffectiveness of formal communication channels that were used to communicate the organisational change process.

The study revealed that due to a lack of transparency and clarity in formal communication channels used, all employees in different levels within the organisation were getting information and communication through channels such as Grapevine to fill gaps, especially when there was a pervasive sense of uncertainty and anxiety regarding the organisational change from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The study revealed that participants described the challenges caused by a lack of transparent communication. Participant 4, a senior manager at Uuw, provided the following information:

“The fear of job loss and the unknown is palpable; we need to know what the future holds.” This deficiency in clear information is further compounded by the disparity in how communication is circulated throughout the organisation. (Participant 4)

Participants expressed a concern that most discussions about the organisational change process appeared to be taking place within the Uuw board and the executive team management circles, leaving employees in the dark and resulting in corridor conversations that often lead to misunderstandings. Participant 3, a Uuw employee, elaborated how change agents were feeling unuseful as employees were getting information through Grapevine.

“Most people are pulling out of Change Agent Networks (CANs) because they see no commitment from management at all levels. There is no information to be with employees about change. People get information fast from grapevine” (Participant 3)

Participant 16, a Uuw executive manager, elaborated how Grapevine communication was a source of inconsistency and breeding of mistrust among employees.

“People are fed up with hearing different versions of what’s happening; we need one clear message. Gossip has been common to inform us on some aspects of change When communication fails, we become reliant on corridor talks, which often lead to

misunderstandings. People share whispers rather than facts, and this only breeds confusion and mistrust.”(Participant 16)

Lack of communication from leadership leads to staff relying on rumours and unofficial channels for information, which in turn creates an environment filled with uncertainty and worry, as illustrated below by Participant 12, a U UW employee:

A further participant remarked, “Leadership’s silence contributes significantly to the grapevine. Instead of receiving timely updates from management, we are left to depend on hearsay. This breakdown in communication has resulted in a culture of speculation and anxiety among the staff.”(Participant 12)

The effects of grapevine communication caused anxiety for many employees at U UW during the organisational change process. Participant 12, who was a U UW employee, was quoted as below:

“The grapevine has become a source of anxiety for many employees. We are left to wonder about our job security and the future of our roles within the organisation. Corridor talks lead people to believe the worst, and the absence of clarity only exacerbates the situation.”(Participant 12)

Participant 11, an U UW employee, provided insight into the type of communication required to avoid Grapevines.

“We must prioritise structured communication to mitigate the influence of the grapevine. When employees lack access to clear information, they will inevitably turn to each other for answers. If we can provide upfront and transparent updates, we would alleviate much of the anxiety currently circulating.”(Participant 11)

4.4.5 Circulars to the masses for quick message delivery

The results of the study revealed that while uMngeni-uThukela Water (U UW) employs circulars as a formal, inexpensive, and time-saving communication channel to disseminate critical information to a large group of employees during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The effectiveness of U UW circulars was compromised by several factors, such as (1) lack of accessibility by the blue-collar workers who are working at the operational plants within U UW, (2) lack of clarity in the information provided, (3) circulars were insufficiently integrated into the broader U UW communication framework, and (4) limited engagement opportunities with the diversity of the workforce within U UW. In this context, the circulars struggled to adequately communicate some key information, as demonstrated below by Participant 11, an employee of U UW. The results of the study revealed that while uMngeni-uThukela Water (U UW) employs circulars as a formal, inexpensive, and time-saving communication channel to disseminate critical information to a large group of employees during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The effectiveness of UUW circulars was compromised by several factors, such as (1) lack of accessibility by the blue-collar workers who are working at the operational plants within UUW, (2) lack of clarity in the information provided, (3) circulars were insufficiently integrated into the broader UUW communication framework, and (4) limited engagement opportunities with the diversity of the workforce within UUW. In this context, the circulars struggled to adequately communicate some key information, as demonstrated below by Participant 11, an employee of UUW.

"Communication through circulars was noted; however, critical information (such as the microstructure) was not adequately disseminated." This highlights the necessity for circulars to ensure effective communication at all levels. (Participant 11)

In using circulars as a change communication channel, it is noteworthy that there was no clear and consistent communication plan and clarity of the role of circulars as part of the communication mix tools. This lack of a cohesive communication strategy and clarity of the role of each communication tool was explained by Participant 2, a UUW middle manager, as follows:

"There was a noted absence of a clear and consistent communication plan, which contributed to confusion and misunderstanding among employees about the change process." She asserted that circulars must be integrated into a broader communication strategy to ensure clarity. (Participant 2)

Participant 5, who was a UUW labour representative, reflected on the use and reliance of circulars without complementary engagement strategies, which failed to foster true understanding among employees regarding the changes taking place within the organisation.

"Some main formal channels for disseminating information quickly such as circulars, lack of effectiveness in reaching and engaging all employees." (Participant 5)

Participants elaborated that there was the "use of digital platforms (intranet, emails) as primary means of communication, but with insufficient engagement at ground levels." (Participant 18) The UUW senior manager reiterated that while circulars were inexpensive and less time-consuming, they also had weaknesses in terms of lacking engagement opportunities and feedback.

"Use of digital platforms (intranet, emails) as primary means of communication, but with insufficient engagement at ground levels." (Participant 18)

Circulars were useful as formal and structured ways of communicating important messages on reconfiguration, but they failed to promote open dialogue, a crucial component of change management. Participant 10, a UUW senior manager, stated the following:

"Utilisation of emails, newsletters, and official memos to disseminate structured information regarding the reconfiguration process was common. Circulars are good to reach many people

in a simple and less expensive way. However, it is not interactive communications that allow for dialogue concerning changes.”(Participant 10)

4.4.6 Brown Bag Sessions

Participants in this study have underscored the significance of the UUW brown bag sessions in promoting communication and addressing existing gaps within the organisation during times of change.

The findings from the study reflect a consensus among participants regarding the instrumental role of brown bag sessions in facilitating dialogue surrounding organisational change. These gatherings encouraged employees to voice their concerns and contribute to discussions on critical issues. For instance, one participant highlighted the relaxed atmosphere fostered during these sessions, where employees felt encouraged to express their worries without fear of judgement. The benefits of the Brown Bag session that was chaired by the acting executive officer yielded fruits, as employee concerns that were raised during the first session of the UUW Brown Bag session prompted UUW leadership to take a unanimous decision to formally appoint a UUW change management consultant that is currently driving the change management processes, as illustrated by Participant 1, who was a UUW executive member.

“Brown bag sessions provided a more relaxed environment where employees felt comfortable asking questions and expressing concerns regarding the organisational change process.” This sentiment underscores the efficacy of informal settings for enhancing open communication among team members. Concerns raised by employees during a site visit by the acting CEO prompted the appointment of a consultant, Aziye, to facilitate the change process. Currently, there is no formal platform available for lodging complaints, nor has a cultural survey been conducted. (Participant 1)

Participants perceived the UUW Brown Bags session as an informal communication channel that encouraged UUW employees at all levels to freely engage in discussions about the UUW organisational change process, raising pertinent issues about the impact of organisational change in their current jobs. Participant 3, who was a UUW employee, expressed the following regarding the positive aspects of brown bags:

“These sessions foster interaction, allowing us to address issues directly and ensuring that voices are heard.” (Participant 3)

Only in the limited brown bag sessions did U UW employees have the opportunity to voice their anxieties without fear of judgment. These sessions felt more personal than other formal communication channels used by the U UW. Participant 17, a U UW employee, underscored the importance of establishing safe spaces for employees to articulate their feelings, ultimately helping to alleviate their fears and uncertainties.

“During these sessions, we can voice our anxieties without fear of judgement. (Participant 17)

The power of the Brown Bag meeting in facilitating direct and interactive communication between U UW leadership and employees was captured by Participant 14, a U UW middle manager:

“It’s crucial for leaders to attend these sessions. When executives are present, it shows they care about our concerns.” Leadership visibility fosters a sense of transparency and trust, reinforcing their commitment to the workforce. (Participant 14)

4.4.7 Executive led staff information session

The study revealed that there has been a longstanding tradition of information sessions organised by the executive team. They expressed concern that these sessions have not taken place recently, resulting in employees feeling disconnected from significant updates and changes within the organisation. Participant 6, who was senior manager at U UW, had the following to say:

The historical practice of information sessions conducted by the executive team is there. The concern is that such sessions have not been recently implemented, which has left employees feeling disconnected from critical changes.(Participant 6)

Participant provided an insight that for U UW to improve communication effectiveness during the organisational change process, there was a need for consistent and regular executive-led staff information sessions. This approach would have promoted direct, robust engagements with employees regarding the ongoing changes within the U UW, as suggested by Participant 3, who was a U UW employee.

The organisation should enhance its communication strategies by incorporating regular staff information sessions led by the executive team to ensure direct engagement with employees about ongoing changes. Without these, trust will not be there, direction will also not be there for employees. (Participant 3)

Participant 6, who was U UW senior manager, echoed similar sentiments on the importance of U UW executive-led staff information sessions with a necessity to be incorporated into the change management

communication strategy to significantly diminish uncertainty and improve understanding among employees.

-It is important that the sessions by executives is not just about any other information minus the reconfiguration, NOO. The importance is on integrating staff information sessions into the change management process, advocating that these sessions, led by the executive team, could effectively reduce confusion and enhance clarity among employees.

4.4.8 The root causes of employees’ resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The results reveal four themes depicting the root cause of employees’ resistance during the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, namely the top-down change process, concerns on job loss, lack of psychological safety, and board instability as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Themes on the root causes of employees resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided

Root causes of employees’ resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.	Frequency
1.Top down change process	8
2.Concerns on job loss	5
3. Lack of psychological safety	5
4. Board instability	2

Source: Author Own Compilation (2024)

4.4.9 Top-down change process

The study found that the top-down change approach often excluded the involvement of employees in driving the change process at Uuw, although it may be quicker to implement. The risks of a top-down approach to change to avoid delays created by consultation were the alienation of employees as key stakeholders of change. A more inclusive and participatory method was considered and proposed as being more advantageous to avoid employee resistance, as elaborated by participant 19, who was Uuw senior manager:

There are some challenges and shortcomings associated with a top-down approach to change management within this context. They observe that the current methodology still embodies a

top-down mindset, wherein decisions are predominantly made by senior management without adequately involving employees at all levels. This lack of engagement can foster feelings of alienation among staff. The pressure to act swiftly often results in the overlooking of important contributions and insights from employees. Consequently, this may lead to resistance to change, as employees may not feel invested in the decisions that impact their roles. Furthermore, the participant suggests that, ideally, all employees should be engaged in the change process. This would necessitate additional time and effort to facilitate discussions and share information, ultimately resulting in greater buy-in and reduced resistance.(Participant 19)

UUW employees had little room to question or provide input to the organisational change process, which led to employee disengagement and a lack of ownership in the change process. This top-down directive contributed significantly to UUW employees' resistance to the organisational change efforts. This sentiment was expressed by participant 9, a UUW employee, as follows:

“And it was a directive other than a negotiation or a matter of trying to understand that there's a need for a change. Yeah, it was a directive. That it was something that you could not question. Yeah, it is. Yeah. It's something that is coming from the top-down triple down to lower levels”.
(Participant 9)

This type of approach led to further resistance, as employees believed their perspectives and concerns were being disregarded, as illustrated by Participant 14 below, the UUW middle manager:

At the outset of the due diligence process, it seemed clear that the organisation was financially stable and sustainable. Consequently, one could question the need for change. The board engaged in considerable discussions, with recurring questions arising regarding the rationale for the change. Ultimately, the decision appeared to rest with the Minister. (Participant 14)

A reflection by Participant 12 revealed how the top-down approach was a significant source of resistance during the entire process of reconfiguration.

"The major issue is that this approach does not adequately address the many questions that arise from individuals. Even now, it is evident that critical issues remain unaddressed, and there continues to be a lack of local integration.... Employees may be concerned about how the changes will impact their day-to-day responsibilities, job security, and career progression. I firmly believe that genuine integration is still absent."

Participant 4, who was U UW senior manager, illuminated the decision-making process. The struggle to understand the nature of change but also the lack of engagement were the sources of resistance around the reconfiguration of the water boards.

"I believe I fell short in yesterday's meeting when it came to understanding how we arrived at the decision to appoint change agents. In terms of the change itself, I think it holds promise, but I am unsure about how to unpack it further. At present, I sense a degree of resistance and a lack of engagement surrounding this change."

Participants expressed that they felt exclusion during the change process and lack of information from the leadership about the organisation change within U UW, which created confusion and potential resistance to other employees with U UW, as shown in the quote below:

"Many of us are left in the dark about what this change actually entails. We keep hearing about a new organogram and the introduction of new regions within the organisation, but we haven't received any clear information on this. How are we supposed to know how to adjust our behaviour or respond to these changes when we don't even have the full picture? It's frustrating, because we cannot resist or support something we don't understand. The lack of clear communication and transparency from leadership has only led to confusion and misinformation amongst us."(Participant 12)

Lack of adequate communication of change had caused a lack of collaboration with relevant stakeholders, as illustrated below by Participant 20, who was U UW middle manager:

The lack of collaboration in the recent changes has significantly increased the scope of work, particularly with the integration of two laboratories in different regions. There is a notable absence of clarity regarding operational aspects, which has led to confusion and frustration among staff. The change in structure has not been accompanied by adequate communication or collaboration, ultimately fostering resistance to these changes.(Participant 20)

4.4.10 Concerns on job loss

This study revealed the significant human concerns related to the impact of U UW organisational change on individuals, particularly regarding job security. It reflects anxiety about how such changes disrupted employees' lives, indicating that the speaker believes these transitions are not merely operational or structural but deeply personal and emotional. Reflections from Participant 19, who was U UW senior manager, explained the humane fear of employees, which was different from structural aspects of change.

“These are my fears. How are my fears are going to be addressed cause we cannot take away to do overtake during a change process. These human element which needs to be addressed is not about infrastructure, it's not about extending our boundaries only, but if they are human lives that are going to be disrupted, you know”.

Participant 11, who was a UUW employee, stressed the importance of addressing employees’ concerns about job security and the need for clear, open communication to help them feel stable and confident amid uncertainty, as reported in the quote below:

, "Am I going to lose my job?" shows the speaker's anxiety and uncertainty about their future. It reflects a genuine fear that their livelihood might be at risk. The participant also points out how management communicates these changes. The speaker believes that reassurances about job security should come first in conversations about change, rather than being an afterthought. This need for clear communication shows a desire for honesty and trust, emphasising how important job security is during uncertain times. Furthermore, the mention of "the skills that we're going to need" suggests that instead of fearing job loss, employees should be informed about how they can adapt and contribute to the changing workplace. This highlights the need for training and support during the change process to help individuals feel more secure and valued in their roles.(Participant 11)

4.4.11 Lack of psychological safety

Lack of psychological safety arising from anxiety triggered by change is a notable issue, with employees reporting significant levels of stress, frustration, and, in some cases, actively seeking psychological support. This psychological strain may stem from various factors, including uncertainty about job security, difficulties in adapting to UUW organisation change efforts, a lack of leadership support, and feelings of being overwhelmed by the magnitude of change. Acknowledging and addressing these emotional responses is crucial for UUW leadership. However, there was an absence of representatives from UUW leadership within the psychological support groups, which contributed to an existing sentiment of resistance among certain groups of employees, as reported by Participant 13, who was UUW middle manager:

“The working group was formulated so that employees could find a platform to discuss with UUW leadership how the reconfiguration process is impacting them. The aim was to ensure that the senior management understood the implications of this situation on us. However, during my involvement in the working group, it became evident that there was some resistance; concerns arose about whether this might simply be a tick-box exercise. Notably, the working group lacked the presence of a senior employee from uMngeni, which may have contributed to this perception”.

A concern was raised by most participants regarding the initial message shared by the leadership during the announcement of the uMhlathuze Water and the reconfiguration of UUW. The leaders had communicated that both entities would be disestablished and a new organisation, the Regional Water Utility, would be formed, including employees from both the former uMngeni Water and uMhlathuze Water. However, after the employees of the former uMhlathuze Water signed their transfer letters, the initial message was changed, which contributed to employee resistance and frustration about the change process.

Employees noted that there are now “in one basket” and purportedly working towards the same goals. They highlighted that this view contradicts what they were initially told, which led to significant employees resistance. Dissemination of inaccurate information about the change process has resulted in considerable psychological stress among employees, as people feel misled and uncertain. One participant shared their experience, saying, “If you’re just going to focus on the numbers... I don’t want to help anyone, just give me the attendance figures.” This shows a growing feeling of cynicism and a reluctance to engage with a process they believe has not been communicated clearly or honestly. (Participant 16.)

Participant 16, who was a UUW executive, revealed that lack of clear communication and lack of psychological safety led to misunderstandings and reluctance by employees to embrace new processes as follows:

“The psychological impact was quite alarming. People felt frustrated, and some were resistant to the change. They found it difficult to cooperate because they were used to doing things a certain way. Now, they are being asked to change their methods, which has caused a lot of discomfort. As a result, many individuals are currently seeking psychological support due to feelings of frustration and depression brought on by these changes. This has led to a significant resistance to change.”

Participant 4 illustrated the importance of leadership to acknowledge emotional and social resistance within the organisation emanating from poor change communication, process, and unsupportive leadership.

“These are my fears, and I wonder how they will be addressed during the change process. We cannot overlook the human element involved; it is not just about infrastructure or expanding our limits. If people’s lives are going to be disrupted, we must take that seriously. The resistance to change often stems from psychological strain, and it is crucial that we acknowledge and address these emotional concerns as we move forward.

4.4.12 Board instability

The findings of the study revealed that unstable leadership and political interference hindered U UW's ability to maintain a cohesive strategy, thus complicating the organisational change efforts and potentially reducing efficiency and trust among employees. Frequent changes in board members and perceived political interference hindered consistent and effective governance. Unstable leadership and such interference disrupted the organisation's ability to maintain a cohesive strategy, making the transformation process more difficult among employees, as highlighted by one of the participants as follows:

The U UW had an interim board acting for the period of two year, new board was appointed and there were organisation strategies that were introduced by the outgoing board " fit –for-purpose project while the organisation was busy with the implementing of the fit-for-purpose strategic project. The Minister introduced the water reform project which the reconfiguration of water board into regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The interim board that was driving the process of the organisation name change i.e. uMngeni-uThukela Water (U UW) was replaced with immediate effect by the currently newly appointed U UW Board. The outgoing interim board has done a lot of work regarding the reconfiguration project with reports left by transitional advisor at that which was aborted, this attributed to a lack of continuity. "Obviously, in terms of political interference, there is an element there as well. It's not easy; when you start moving, you have an acting board or a temporary board for two years, and then you renew it again to establish a permanent board. The old board clearly needs to hand over to the new board. However, if you look at how the old board exited, those are challenges as well. There should be a formalised handover." (Participant 6)

Another participant emphasised unstable leadership and how it hindered the U UW's success in the U UW transformation process, especially due to employees resistance to the transformation project.

Firstly, the new board's lack of a clear strategy makes it hard for staff to understand the direction of the organisation, leading to confusion and disengagement. Without a plan to build on the previous work, employees may feel disconnected from the goals, making them less willing to embrace new initiatives. The suggestion to review opinions and processes indicates a need for careful evaluation, which can disrupt normal operations. Employees may see this as a sign of instability, increasing their reluctance to accept changes.

Additionally, mentioning the hiring of consultants shows that resources were set aside to help with improvements, but these efforts were overlooked after the interim board left. This can frustrate staff who expect responsible use of resources. When past investments and plans are

ignored, it breeds scepticism and further resistance to change. Overall, unclear direction, poor communication, and ineffective resource use can hinder the organisation's ability to adapt and grow.

Another participant, a middle manager within UUW, interviewed and provided insights on the leadership instability within UUW that may contribute to employees' resistance to the reconfiguration of the water board into the regional water utility. The participant had the following to say:

The Permanent Board's assumption that they can "simply step in and lead" without sufficient engagement with employees can be seen as a lack of sensitivity to "the complexities involved in change." This approach can worsen feelings of "instability and neglect," causing employees to become resistant to new initiatives, as they may feel their "needs and concerns are not being adequately considered."(Participant 14)

"The New Board started because they didn't come with them. I'm sorry to say, they didn't come with a strategy of how they want to carry on from the work that was started by the other. So we need to revisit our opinions, processes and really visit our due diligence reports and see what's there because there's a lot of evolution that is there and a lot of money was spent. But to get the consultant to assist with those things but sort of they were after the interim board left, those were shifted aside and it was a very". (Participant 14)

4.5 Chapter summary

The study presented in this chapter revealed a variety of six themes related to change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, which include a top-down approach, visible leadership to drive change agendas, a less structured change pathway, communicating the change process, consultant-driven change, and a change agent-driven approach.

The analysis of the communication channels employed during the reconfiguration of uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal revealed the utilisation of both formal and informal communication channels. These communication channels were implemented by UUW leadership to facilitate the organisational change process during different phases of the organisational change process, with the aim of effectively communicating the purpose, benefits, and implications of the organisational change to employees at all levels. The communication channels

sought to disseminate information about the organisational change, ensure clarity of messaging, secure employee buy-in, and ensure a smooth transition for all staff members within UUW. The study revealed a variety of eight themes relating to communication channels used for clarity of messaging to reach UUW employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, which include face-to-face executive announcements, executive-led internal workshops, executive and board meetings, excessive dependence on mass emails, informal communication channel reliance on grapevine, formal communication (circulars), informal communication (brown bag sessions), and executive-led staff information sessions.

The results revealed four themes depicting the root cause of employees' resistance during the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, namely the top-down change process, concerns on job loss, resistance to change, and board instability. Lastly, in this way, this exploratory study has provided the results that identify the change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, identify the communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, and evaluate the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The next chapter discusses the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the key findings in relation to the existing literature and relevant previous studies. It is noteworthy that the results in this study provide insights on the change management methods used to ensure the success reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, the communication channels for clarity of messaging that were used to reach all employees during the change process, and the evaluated root causes of employees resistance to change and how these have been avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The results also highlight gaps that were identified in relation to change management method approaches used to drive the organisational change process, gaps on the communication channels used for clarity of messaging, and possible mitigation measures to minimise root causes of the employees resistance, with the aim of ensuring smooth and impactful change during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2 Findings

The study will provide insights on the change management methods used to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. It is noteworthy that the results in this study provide insights on the change management methods used to ensure the success reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, the communication channels for clarity of messaging that were used to reach all UuW employees during the change process, and the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these have been avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The findings reveal that uMngeni-uThukela Water (UuW) predominantly employed a top-down approach during its transition from a water board to a regional utility, characterised by centralised decision-making concentrated within the senior leadership. This method not only limited the involvement of lower-level employees but also created a hierarchical communication structure. As evidenced by the literature, such a top-down approach, while possibly expedient for swift implementation, can lead to feelings of exclusion among staff members and generate significant resistance to change (Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1951). The predominance of one-way communication, where directives were issued with little engagement or consultation, further exacerbated discontent among employees. Research indicates that limited dialogue and a lack of open communication can impede the

acceptance of change, as employees often feel alienated from the process (Hameed et al., 2016; Sithole, 2023).

These findings correlate well with Lewin's Force Field Analysis, which posits that successful change requires overcoming forces resisting it. A top-down approach, as experienced at UUW, is akin to placing considerable resistance forces against transformational initiatives. This exclusionary model stifles the “driving forces” needed to foster a collaborative change environment, ultimately hindering organisational evolution.

Similarly, the Change Kaleidoscope framework elucidates that context and the nature of the change play pivotal roles in the effectiveness of the transformation process. The findings suggest that UUW's top-down approach neglected the multifaceted nature of change and did not adequately consider the context of employee engagement and involvement, thus detracting from the potential success of the transition.

The UUW, from the C-Suite Executive to shop floor levels, highlighted the necessity for visible leadership to effectively guide the change agenda at UUW. The literature consistently emphasises that leadership involvement is crucial in fostering an environment conducive to change (Kanter, 2020; Siddiqui, 2017). However, the absence of continuous support and engagement from UUW's senior management emerged as a significant barrier to securing employee buy-in and facilitating a seamless transition. Research from various public institutions confirms that visible leadership and ongoing engagement with employees are crucial for effective change management (Fusch et al., 2020; Ntau, 2013).

Additionally, employees identified the inadequacy of a structured change pathway as a critical concern. Many staff members expressed confusion regarding the objectives of the organisational change and the overall direction of the reconfiguration process. This lack of clarity has been well-documented in the literature, indicating that a muddled change narrative can heighten employee anxiety and undermine confidence in leadership (Dini et al., 2024; Mensah et al., 2024). The absence of a rigorous change strategy not only diminished trust in leadership but also negatively impacted employee morale. As highlighted by Hameed et al. (2016) and Sithole (2023), a clear and comprehensive roadmap outlining specific goals, timelines, and methodologies is essential to providing clarity during periods of transition, nurturing a sense of security among employees.

Juxtaposing the findings with the institutional theory, a clearer roadmap for change holds significant importance in addressing the institutional pressures that influence employee behaviour and attitudes towards change initiatives. By outlining the rationale behind changes, leadership could mitigate resistance, provide clarity, and allow employees to align their efforts with organisational goals.

To move forward, Uuw must enhance its change management efforts by embracing collaborative practices that promote open dialogue and transparency. Research indicates that involving employees in the change process fosters greater commitment and reduces resistance (Kotter, 1996; Kempling & Cunningham, 2019). Therefore, a commitment to ongoing visibility and engagement from leadership will be instrumental in fostering an environment that supports effective change management.

Moreover, by adopting a more participatory approach to change, Uuw can counteract the feelings of exclusion currently present among staff. Encouraging two-way communication and active involvement at all levels will empower employees and instil trust in leadership. Literature suggests that organisations that successfully engage their employees in the change process are better positioned to navigate the complexities of transformation and achieve desired outcomes (Harrison et al., 2021; Voronina et al., 2023). The findings from the study on Uuw underscore the necessity for a comprehensive and well-structured approach to change management in public institutions. This approach should focus on clear communication, visible leadership, and employee engagement, echoing the recommendations of numerous studies in the field. By implementing these strategies, Uuw not only stands to facilitate a more effective change process but also enhance employee morale and commitment, ultimately fostering a more resilient and adaptable organisation during this significant transformation.

The study revealed that Uuw leadership implemented various formal and informal communication channels used to convey clear messaging to all Uuw employees during the reconfiguration process. The finding revealed the strengths and limitations of the various communication methods throughout the change process, underscoring the significant impact the communication channels have had on employee understanding, engagement, and overall morale and how they ensure effective communication during the organisational change process within Uuw.

The findings illustrate that face-to-face executive announcements served as a significant communication channel during the reconfiguration phase. However, the nature of these communications was predominantly one-way, resulting in sporadic attempts to encourage two-way dialogue. This notion aligns with the findings of Kotter (1996), who emphasised the importance of generating engagement and dialogue among stakeholders during change initiatives. In instances where top-down communication is practiced, employees often experience abruptness and confusion regarding major shifts—such as the disestablishment of uMhlathuze Water and the expansion of Umgeni Water's operational boundaries—creating a sense of frustration and resistance towards the changes imposed. This underscores the importance of fostering participatory communication to minimise resistance, as highlighted by Lewis (1947) in his change management model, which articulates the necessity of effectively communicating the rationale behind changes to reduce misunderstanding.

The role of executive-led internal workshops emerged as pivotal in facilitating effective change management. Yet, these workshops' execution revealed inconsistencies, marred by delays in communication and a lack of participatory engagement. Schein (1985) noted that effective communication and a shared understanding of the change process are crucial to defeating resistance, yet participants reported that these workshops frequently failed to provide the transparency and clarity needed, particularly concerning the objectives of the reconfiguration efforts. While some workshops were undertaken by labour representatives, it remained a persistent sentiment among employees that management bore the ultimate responsibility for clearly conveying information regarding the changes, reflecting the importance of trust in communications as outlined by Albrecht et al. (2022).

Moreover, the study underscored that executive and board meetings played a crucial role in the reconfiguration process. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of such meetings was undermined by inconsistent communication and a perceived lack of trust in leadership—a factor previously discussed by Kouzes and Posner (2007), who assert that trust is fundamental for creating a conducive environment for change. Employees expressed concerns that outcomes from these meetings were inadequately communicated throughout the organisation, resulting in a culture of silence and reliance on informal channels, such as "corridor conversations." This reliance on informal communication intensified anxiety and speculation regarding job security and individual roles within the new structure (Lewin, 1947).

While excessive dependence on mass emails constituted a predominant communication channel used by U UW's leadership, their effectiveness was compromised due to their one-way nature. U UW employees from the executive C-suite to a shop floor level reported feeling disengaged and unheard when change information was communicated solely through mass emails. The literature supports this finding; Hiatt (2021) indicates that impersonal change communication channels can diminish employee involvement and create barriers to effective engagement. Furthermore, relying on mass emails excluded certain demographics, such as blue-collar workers with limited access to electronic communications, thereby generating barriers to participation. The emotional detachment and lack of engagement typically associated with overreliance on mass email communications detracted from fostering a trustworthy and empowering communication environment, as advocated by online sources like Goleman et al. (2013), who emphasise the importance of empathy in communication.

The breakdown of formal communication channels within U UW compelled U UW employees—at all levels of the organisation, especially those in middle and lower-level positions—to resort to informal grapevine communications for organisational change information, updates, and overall roles and responsibilities. U UW employees' reliance on unofficial communication channels such as Grapevine and corridor talks propagated a culture of speculation and anxiety, wherein employees often received

conflicting narratives about the organisational change efforts, reflecting what Kanter (2020) identified as a frequent pitfall of inadequate information flow during organisational transitional periods. The absence of clear and timely communication from U UW leadership significantly contributed to the uncertainty experienced by U UW employees during this turbulent period. Such a scenario aligns with the observations of Kotter (1996), who noted that a lack of effective communication during organisational change often leads to confusion and distrust among employees.

U UW leadership used circulars to swiftly disseminate critical organisational change information across U UW organisation. However, their effectiveness was hampered by limited accessibility for blue-collar workers, a lack of clarity in the information provided, and insufficient integration into a cohesive communication strategy. Drawing on insights from Cameron and Green (2020), participants noted that while U UW circulars could effectively convey messages, they did not facilitate engagement nor allow for meaningful dialogue about the reconfiguration change efforts, indicating a need for a comprehensive communication approach that combines both formal and informal methods.

Conversely, brown bag sessions emerged as an effective informal communication channel, fostering open dialogue about the organisational change. These gatherings encouraged employees to express their concerns and queries in a relaxed setting, leading to meaningful interactions, echoing the findings of Klein and Knight (2005) that informal conversations can enhance interpersonal trust and relationship-building within an organisation. U UW employees at all levels appreciated the informal nature of U UW Brown Bag sessions, which allowed for personal connections and transparency often lacking in more formal communication channels.

However, the tradition of regular executive-led staff information sessions has notably waned, resulting in employee disconnection from vital updates regarding ongoing changes. Previous studies suggest that regular interactions with leadership are crucial in maintaining rapport and managing resistance (Musaigwa, 2023). Study participants highlighted the necessity for these sessions to be revitalised and integrated into the change management strategy, as such gatherings facilitate strong engagements with leadership and employees, enhancing trust and clarity during significant organisational transformation.

The findings underscore the need for a diversified and inclusive approach to communication during the reconfiguration process at U UW. While certain channels, such as face-to-face meetings and brown bag sessions, proved beneficial in promoting dialogue, the widespread reliance on one-way communication methods—particularly emails and the grapevine—resulted in substantial gaps in understanding and engagement among employees. This aligns with the findings of Hameed et al. (2016), who emphasised the necessity of cultivating an environment that encourages interaction and feedback during change processes to ensure employees feel valued and engaged. Effective change management hinges on the

establishment of robust communication frameworks that facilitate dialogue, build trust, and encourage employee participation. By acknowledging the diverse needs and preferences of all employees—including those with limited access to traditional communication channels—it becomes essential to create an inclusive environment that fosters acceptance of change. The findings of this study advocate for UuW leadership to embrace a more interactive and transparent communication strategy that prioritises all UuW employee involvement, addresses emotional concerns, and cultivates a culture of trust and collaboration, thereby reinforcing the critical role of communication in steering successful reconfiguration efforts within UuW (Dini et al., 2024; Voronina et al., 2023).

The findings of this study reveal the intricate dynamics of employee resistance to change within the context of uMngeni-uThukela Water Utility's (UuW) reconfiguration into a regional water utility. UuW employees exhibit resistance due to a predominantly top-down approach to change, job security concerns, and a lack of psychological safety, which together create a challenging environment that hinders effective organisational transformation. This aligns with the perspectives articulated by Ford et al. (2008), who assert that resistance often arises from a discomfort with altering established routines in the wake of change; similarly, Kanter (2020) emphasises that clear communication and the involvement of employees are paramount in mitigating resistance and fostering a smoother transition.

Central to these findings is the predominance of a top-down change process instigated by UuW leadership during the reconfiguration phase, frequently cited by employees as a principal contributor to their resistance. Employees across various levels articulated their feelings of exclusion from the decision-making processes, resulting in a sense of alienation and disengagement. While some change management literature, such as that by Kotter (1996), suggests that an authoritative approach can be expedient in initiating change, this study indicates significant drawbacks inherent in such an approach. UuW staff expressed frustration over decisions made solely by the executive team and the board without adequate consultation at operational levels. As noted by a senior manager, this style fosters feelings of marginalisation and undermines employee trust—an important aspect of successful change management, as highlighted by Elving (2015).

Moreover, resistance arises from the perception that employees' insights are disregarded. Several UuW employees lamented that the changes being implemented were framed more as directives than as collaborative negotiations, further diminishing their sense of ownership regarding the organisational change. This resonates with the findings of Hiatt (2006), who argues for the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders feel included in the change process. Consequently, this pervasive feeling of exclusion has contributed to a general lack of transparency, with many employees feeling uninformed about ongoing changes, thus exacerbating their resistance. This aligns with the observations made by Malek

and Yazdanifard (2012), who state that insufficient communication generates confusion and uncertainty, leading to resistance.

The results of the findings also highlight significant anxieties among employees concerning job security. Concerns expressed by UUW personnel, ranging from C-suite executives to lower management, indicate that the reconfiguration poses a direct threat to their livelihoods. This worry reflects broader themes identified by Hameed et al. (2016), who note that fear regarding job retention can act as a substantial barrier to change. Moreover, these concerns are found to be deeply personal rather than merely operational, highlighting a critical need for leadership to address these human fears alongside structural transformations. Senior managers within UUW emphasised that discussions about the reconfiguration should prioritise reassurance regarding job security rather than treating it as a secondary concern. This echoes the arguments of Kotter (1996) and Cummings & Worley (2009), who stress the importance of clear communication about changing job roles and expectations to mitigate anxiety.

Another significant factor contributing to resistance identified by many UUW employees was the lack of psychological safety. The upheaval inherent in the change process triggered emotional turmoil, leading to heightened stress and anxiety among staff. The failure of leadership to cultivate a psychologically supportive environment compounded feelings of isolation and discontent. This observation is consistent with the findings of Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), who argue that overcoming resistance to change requires addressing the emotional and psychological needs of employees. Employees voiced concerns that initiatives intended to create communication forums often appeared merely ceremonial, leading to perceptions of insincerity and a lack of genuine engagement. This sentiment reflects the insights of Lewis (1947), who posits that an effective change process must consider the human aspects of change comprehensively. The resulting psychological strain significantly hindered employees' adaptability to change, with some even seeking psychological assistance to cope with the emotional toll of the transition.

Addressing these root causes of resistance necessitates a committed effort from UUW leadership to foster engagement, promote open communication, and provide emotional support for employees. By recognising and valuing input from all levels of the organisation, UUW is more likely to navigate the complexities of organisational change effectively, ultimately facilitating a smoother transition. Research from Kanter (1983) supports this, asserting that inclusive practices lead to greater acceptance of change initiatives. In conclusion, the collective insights drawn from the literature underscore the importance of leadership in acknowledging both the structural and emotional layers of employee experience in change processes; this holistic approach is essential for success in organisational transformation efforts. These results are discussed in detail below:

5.2.1 Top-down approach for speedy change

The reconfiguration of uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal signifies a notable shift in water management and service delivery within the region. This transition has evolved under the influence of salient factors, such as a top-down approach to change management, an unclear change pathway, and the visibility of leadership throughout the organisational change process. These elements not only shape the management of change but also significantly affect employee experiences and attitudes toward the transition, directly impacting the overall success of UUW's evolution into a regional water utility.

The adoption of a top-down change management strategy at UUW, while capable of enabling swift decision-making and implementation, often breeds resistance among employees if not accompanied by appropriate engagement strategies. Kotter (1996) underscores the importance of generating a sense of urgency and building a guiding coalition when instigating change. Correspondingly, Lewin (1951) accentuates the necessity of "unfreezing" the current state prior to implementing change, reinforcing the need to address employee concerns. However, the decision-making processes at UUW primarily reside with senior management, potentially stifling contributions and feedback from employees directly impacted by these changes. This unilateral approach risks fostering a culture of disengagement, where employees may feel that their insights and apprehensions are disregarded, ultimately culminating in resistance to the new organisational direction. In alignment with the observations of McKinsey & Company (2014) and more contemporary research by Tan et al. (2022), successful transformations evidently require participation and buy-in across all organisational levels, suggesting that a more inclusive approach could yield superior outcomes.

Moreover, the absence of a clearly defined change pathway further intensifies uncertainty among employees. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) advocate for the necessity of a systematic process outlining the rationale, strategies, and anticipated outcomes for effective organisational change. Additionally, Hiatt (2006) promotes the ADKAR model, highlighting the critical roles of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement in facilitating meaningful change. By failing to offer such a framework, UUW arguably leaves its employees ill-equipped to navigate the transition confidently, resulting in elevated anxiety levels and diminished morale. A lack of clear communication regarding roles and expectations throughout the change process exacerbates this confusion, leading employees to grapple with uncertainty regarding their positions within the new organisational structure. This phenomenon is echoed in the findings of Weick and Quinn (1999), indicating that ambiguity can adversely affect organisational effectiveness and increase the likelihood of failure during transformation

efforts. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Oreg et al. (2020), further emphasise the detrimental impact of ambiguity on employee adaptation during times of change.

The visibility of leadership emerges as a pivotal factor in facilitating successful change initiatives. Hayes (2018) emphasises that effective leaders must engage actively with their teams, offering support and guidance throughout the change process. Avolio and Gardner (2005) assert that authentic leadership is vital for gaining followers' trust and respect, elements that can mitigate resistance to change. In UUW's context, consistent and visible leadership is crucial to reassure employees about the transition. Leaders who actively demonstrate their commitment to change foster an environment characterised by trust and collaboration. This dynamic can positively influence employee attitudes toward the transformation, promoting a collective sense of purpose and commitment to the new organisational goals. Moreover, Bass and Riggio (2006) indicate that transformational leadership—defined by the ability to inspire and motivate—can significantly enhance the effectiveness of change management efforts, with recent research by Chen et al. (2021) reinforcing the importance of transformational leadership in fostering employee engagement during change processes.

Furthermore, the implications of organisational culture in change initiatives cannot be overstated. Schein (2010) posits that an organisation's culture can serve as either a barrier or a facilitator of change, while Cameron and Quinn (2006) contend that a thorough understanding of this culture is integral to successfully implementing changes. If UUW's existing culture exhibits resistance to change, the application of a top-down approach may further entrench such negativity. Engaging employees through inclusive practices and fostering opportunities for dialogue regarding the transition can facilitate a cultural shift, engendering a more adaptable and positive environment. Consequently, Kotter (1996) posits that a culture open to change and innovation significantly enhances an organisation's ability to adapt and thrive over time. Recent studies, such as those by Alvesson et al. (2020), also highlight the crucial role of an adaptive culture in ensuring successful organisational transformations, emphasising the necessity for UUW to cultivate such a culture.

Crucially, a prominent criticism of the top-down approach to organisational change is its inherent exclusion of employees from decision-making processes that directly affect their work and responsibilities. Within UUW, this approach revealed a conspicuous lack of consultation with both middle management and frontline employees, as strategic decisions were predominantly made at senior leadership levels. This exclusion fostered a sense of disengagement and alienation among staff, who felt their opinions and expertise were undervalued. Kira et al. (2011) and Jha (2018) echo similar sentiments, highlighting that top-down strategies frequently neglect the invaluable insights that employees can contribute. Recent research by Holten and Brenner (2022) further corroborates this,

indicating that employee involvement in change initiatives is positively correlated with their commitment to the change process.

The repercussions of this disconnect extend beyond mere dissatisfaction; they thwart the overall efficacy of the organisational changes being implemented. Middle managers, who play an essential role in bridging the divide between executives and frontline personnel, frequently found themselves tasked with enforcing decisions they had no hand in crafting. Such a situation not only engenders frustration among middle managers but also among their teams. Burke (2017) contends that the success of change initiatives hinges on managers' ability to elucidate the reasons behind changes clearly. In the absence of such inclusive processes, middle managers struggle to communicate these changes effectively to their subordinates, leading to confusion and resistance.

An environment where employees feel disempowered can significantly compromise morale and commitment. Research by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) and Kotter (1996) suggests that involving employees in decision-making is essential for effective change implementation. At UUW, the discernible lack of involvement in the decision-making process led to diminished morale and a pervasive sense of disconnection among staff. This underscores the critical need for leadership to embrace more inclusive strategies that foster participation and collective ownership within the change process—a sentiment echoed by Bresser et al. (2021) in their advocacy for participatory change management approaches.

To alleviate these challenges, it is imperative for leadership at UUW to adopt a change management approach that prioritises inclusivity. Actively seeking input from middle management and engaging employees at all levels can bridge the gap between leadership and operational staff. Promoting collaboration can yield significant improvements in the effectiveness of change initiatives while simultaneously fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among employees. Mento et al. (2002) and Lichtenstein et al. (2006) support this assertion, positing that an inclusive culture enhances the likelihood of achieving sustainable outcomes for the organisation.

Effective communication stands as a cornerstone for the successful execution of any organisational change. The top-down approach typically fosters one-way communication flows, which can diminish employee engagement and organisational cohesion. The reconfiguration process left many employees at UUW feeling "left in the dark," causing confusion and anxiety about the organisation's future and their roles within it. Lewis (2011) articulates that effective communication must be reciprocal to cultivate trust and collaboration, a notion further supported by Men (2014), who asserts that efficient communication has a significant impact on employee attitudes and behaviours. Contemporary findings by Varga et al. (2023) further reinforce the importance of effective communication during

organisational changes, showing strong links between communication quality and employee satisfaction.

The detrimental effects of unclear communication manifest through the ambiguity they create, fostering speculation and distrust among staff. Employees who are not adequately informed about significant developments in the organisational change process may resort to unofficial channels for information. This reliance on informal communication channels such as Grapevine propagated the spread of inaccurate information, further amplifying anxiety and dissatisfaction. Studies by Cornelissen (2008) and Jansen et al. (2009) demonstrate that a lack of formal communication can ultimately undermine trust. At Uuw, employees expressed concerns that decisions made at the senior level were insufficiently communicated across the organisation, leaving them feeling disconnected from its strategic direction.

Ineffective communication further serves to erode trust between employees and leadership. When staff members feel uninformed about significant decisions, it breeds resentment and disengagement. Research conducted by Ford et al. (2008) and Dowling et al. (2015) suggests that such disconnect can heighten anxiety levels among employees, who, in turn, become increasingly concerned about job security and the long-term viability of the organisation. Leadership within Uuw must therefore acknowledge the pressing need to establish robust, transparent, and reciprocal communication channels to foster trust with employees.

To this end, leadership at Uuw should implement communication strategies that promote both information dissemination and feedback collection from employees at every level. Regular updates regarding the progress of the reconfiguration process, complemented by open discussion forums, could significantly reduce feelings of insecurity and thereby enhance employee engagement. The findings of Clampitt and Downs (1993) and Hargie et al. (2017) emphasise that prioritising effective communication as a fundamental aspect of change management can not only strengthen employee relationships but also cultivate a more cohesive workplace environment.

In conclusion, the deficiencies in communication and transparency observed at uMngeni-uThukela Water have borne pronounced consequences for employee morale and trust in leadership. To navigate organisational change successfully, leadership must prioritise effective communication strategies that clarify uncertainties while fostering an inclusive culture. By doing so, the organisation can facilitate a smoother transition and enhance collaboration, ultimately leading to improved organisational success. The issues surrounding diminished employee morale and engagement observed at Uuw illuminate the adverse effects of a top-down approach to organisational change. The strategy employed during its transformation into a regional water utility has revealed challenges, including a lack of employee

involvement, limited communication, and decreased morale. By adopting a more inclusive and participatory approach to change management, UUW can cultivate an environment conducive to a successful transition. Engaging employees in decision-making processes, enhancing open communication, and providing avenues for feedback will undoubtedly contribute to creating a more positive atmosphere and an effective regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.2 Less structured change pathway

The absence of a clearly defined and structured change pathway significantly impeded the reconfiguration process at uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW). This deficiency led to a myriad of challenges, including increased uncertainty and anxiety, ineffective communication, decreased employee engagement and morale, as well as difficulties in planning and resource allocation. Each of these issues adversely impacted both UUW employees and the organisation as a whole. Foundational research by Kotter (1996) and Hiatt (2006) underscores the critical importance of a well-defined change pathway as a prerequisite for successful organisational transformations. More recent works by Waddell and Brown (2020) and van de Ven and Poole (2021) further emphasise that structured change frameworks not only enhance clarity but also support organisations in navigating complex dynamics during transformation processes.

Employees grappled with uncertainty due to the lack of a clear roadmap outlining the steps of the reconfiguration. This ambiguity regarding roles, responsibilities, and the future direction of the organisation exacerbated feelings of anxiety and stress. Lewis (2011) notes that uncertainty can severely diminish employee confidence and engender a climate filled with apprehension regarding imminent changes—a sentiment that was palpably evident within UUW. This aligns with findings by Kira et al. (2011) and Oreg (2006), who argue that organisational change can elevate stress levels and contribute to a toxic workplace atmosphere when employees feel insecure about their futures. More recent studies, including those by Stein et al. (2022) and Gunter et al. (2023), have also highlighted the detrimental effects of uncertainty on employee well-being and organisational performance during change initiatives.

A structured change pathway would have facilitated better communication and information sharing across the organisation. Effective change communication strategies, as proposed by leaders such as Clampitt (2003) and Men (2014), should have been established to ensure clarity in messaging throughout the transition. However, the absence of a formal framework resulted in a reliance on informal communication channels, including hallway conversations and hearsay. This reliance on unofficial sources of information, as noted by Jansen et al. (2009), often breeds misinformation and misunderstandings, further exacerbating anxiety and confusion among employees at all levels. Recent findings by Varga et al. (2023) reinforce the notion that clear communication is paramount; many UUW

employees consequently found themselves grappling with incomplete or inaccurate information regarding the reconfiguration process.

When employees are left uninformed about their future roles, their engagement and morale invariably suffer. A lack of a definitive change pathway can give rise to feelings of disengagement and demotivation, making it increasingly difficult for employees to see how their individual contributions align with the organisation's strategic objectives. This was particularly true for personnel at uMngeni-uThukela Water, as the inability to discern how their roles fit within the broader framework fostered a sense of disenchantment. Research by Saks (2006) and Cummings & Worley (2014) emphasises that when employees cannot connect their work to organisational goals, it can lead to decreased motivation and productivity—a phenomenon evidently present within Uuw. Further investigations by Zhang et al. (2021) have substantiated these claims, indicating a direct correlation between engagement levels and employees' understanding of their roles during organisational change.

Moreover, the absence of a clear understanding of the change process complicates effective planning and resource allocation. Without a structured change pathway, inefficiencies can arise, leading to delays and increased costs. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) highlight that a lack of direction can undermine an organisation's capacity to utilise its resources effectively, jeopardising the overall success of the reconfiguration effort. Recent studies by Kreitner and Kinicki (2021) illustrate that effective change management requires a detailed understanding of both internal and external factors that could influence the transformation. Effective change management not only depends on the expertise of external consultants like Azile, who conducted cultural surveys, but also fosters a partnership between the consultant and Uuw's internal leadership. This collaborative synergy ensures a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the organisation, aligning change initiatives with its overarching goals, as supported by Burke (2017) and Porras and Wilson (2022).

To adequately address these persistent challenges, uMngeni-uThukela Water should have embraced a more structured change approach to the reconfiguration process. This could have involved the development of a comprehensive change management plan, which would have served as a guiding document throughout the organisational transformation. Establishing effective communication channels, providing sufficient training and support, as well as monitoring and evaluating progress, would have enabled Uuw to mitigate employees' resistance to the reconfiguration efforts. As Cummings and Worley (2014) assert, and this is corroborated by findings from Meyer et al. (2016), a well-thought-out plan enhances employee engagement and morale, ultimately positioning the organisation for long-term success.

Furthermore, integrating models such as Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change or Lewin's Change Management Model could have provided UuW with practical frameworks for navigating the complexities of organisational change. Kotter's framework emphasises the importance of establishing a sense of urgency and building a guiding coalition, both of which are crucial in engaging employees and fostering organisational buy-in. Additionally, recent publications by Asif and Murtaza (2019) and Kiessling et al. (2022) underscore Lewin's model in promoting a structured approach to change, advocating for "unfreezing," "changing," and subsequently "refreezing" behaviours, which could have helped UuW employees to understand their evolving roles and responsibilities during the reconfiguration process.

By adopting a more structured approach, uMngeni-uThukela Water would not only have facilitated a smoother transition to a regional water utility but also fostered greater employee morale and engagement. This, in turn, would have fortified their foundation for potential long-term success—an assertion supported by Meyer et al. (2016), who stress the significance of clear processes and open communication in effectively managing organisational change. Overall, the insights provided herein elucidate the pressing need for a structured change framework in organisational transformations, reinforcing the critical connection between clarity, communication, and employee engagement in achieving successful outcomes. By taking these considerations into account, UuW has the opportunity to enhance its change management strategies, positioning itself for greater effectiveness and sustainability in future endeavours.

5.2.3 Leadership visibility to drive the change agenda

The reconfiguration of uMngeni-uThukela Water (UuW) from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal has raised significant concerns among employees regarding the lack of leadership visibility and engagement throughout the transformational process. This absence of visible leadership can severely undermine organisational change initiatives, manifested as employee uncertainty about the organisation's direction and future. Research highlights that when leaders are not actively involved in the change, employees often resort to speculation about the unfolding events, leading to confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities (Kotter, 1996; Kuipers et al., 2014; Ahn et al., 2021). The psychological contract between employees and employers stipulates that clarity in communication is essential, especially during transitions. When management fails to communicate effectively, it breeds mistrust and apprehension (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Nguyen et al., 2020), suggesting that leadership's commitment to transformation should be unequivocally demonstrated.

Moreover, the perception of leadership visibility at UuW transcends mere physical presence; employees desire assurance that leaders are engaged in navigating the change process. This notion

aligns with institutional theory, which posits that effective leadership is crucial in embodying organisational norms and practices (Van Wijk et al., 2019; Patnaik, 2020). Engaged leaders can provide a stabilising influence that fosters trust and confidence among staff during significant organisational transitions (Melnikov et al., 2022). As noted by Kark and Shamir (2002), the presence of transformational leadership encourages commitment among followers, suggesting that the visible engagement of leaders can help mitigate resistance to change and enhance collaborative efforts.

The literature consistently contends that employees look to their leaders for direction in times of upheaval. Kuipers et al. (2014) emphasise the pivotal role of effective leadership in aiding employees to comprehend the changes occurring within the organisation and aligning their efforts with strategic goals. Additionally, Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) assert that robust communication from leaders decreases uncertainty, thereby enhancing employee commitment to organisational objectives. When leaders elucidate the rationale behind changes, outline expected outcomes, and involve staff in the process, it considerably boosts morale and fosters cooperation (Bryman et al., 2020; Oreg & Vakola, 2020). These findings underscore the necessity for U UW leadership to maintain open lines of communication to articulate the vision for change clearly.

Furthermore, U UW employees from different levels of the organisation expressed feelings of disconnection arising from the lack of clear leadership guidance regarding the reconfiguration vision. This disconnect contributes to diminished productivity and creates a negative workplace atmosphere. Research suggests that when leadership is actively involved in defining success and establishing performance indicators that reflect organisational objectives, it lays the groundwork for effective change (Herold, 2018; Kramer et al., 2021). Without such involvement, performance indicators may fail to encapsulate the organisation's broader vision, leading to flawed strategies that neglect critical issues. This perspective resonates with the findings of Wang and Huang (2023), who highlight the role of performance-orientated leadership in directing effective change initiatives.

Feedback from U UW employees demonstrates that visible leadership significantly influences employee morale during organisational change. As one employee stated, "When our manager is around and involved, I feel more motivated to put in my best effort." This sentiment affirms the vital importance of leadership presence in fostering a supportive environment during challenging transitions. Studies show that employees who feel recognised and supported by their leaders exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement (Carmeli et al., 2023; Fiss & Zajac, 2020). Institutional theory further posits that when leaders exemplify the organisation's values, they enhance the culture of engagement and strengthen employee commitment.

Trust in leadership emerges as a crucial factor in facilitating a successful transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Employees emphasise that a lack of visible leadership can erode their faith in the organisation's strategic vision. Research suggests that, by actively engaging with employees, leaders cultivate an atmosphere of trust and stability, thereby reassuring employees of their commitment to the organisational mission (Zhou et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2023). Effective communication throughout this change process is paramount, as a lack of clarity regarding the roadmap for reconfiguration not only generates uncertainty but also diminishes employee confidence in the organisation's future direction (Meyers et al., 2021).

Engaged leaders cultivate a culture that genuinely values feedback, especially during organisational changes. UuW employees have indicated the importance of leadership visibility and engagement, which facilitates the expression of concerns regarding the transition and ensures that feedback flows both ways. Institutional theory suggests that when leaders incentivise feedback, they highlight the significance of employee contributions, thereby enhancing overall organisational culture and adaptability (Gernigon & Chlid, 2020; Ruck & Welch, 2021). Furthermore, establishing effective communication channels within the organisation is vital; when leaders remain distant, employees may hesitate to share insights, reducing the effectiveness of performance assessments and stalling progress toward objectives.

The integration of regular assessments is essential for successful change management. Research demonstrates that organisations can benefit from incorporating evaluations and reviews to monitor progress, identify areas for improvement, and adapt strategies as necessitated by evolving circumstances (Peters, 2022; Fernandez et al., 2023). Such continuous evaluation guarantees accountability to stakeholders while reflecting adherence to best practices. Additionally, frequent assessments allow for timely adjustments, ensuring ongoing alignment with organisational goals, which is particularly crucial for public sectors like UuW.

A lack of visible leadership can contribute to fragmentation within teams, as employees often experience feelings of isolation from their colleagues and the overarching mission of the reconfiguration. While many individuals express enthusiasm for the Water and Sanitation Minister's vision—aimed at expanding UuW and improving access to clean water and sanitation for disadvantaged communities—this strategic goal risks being undermined by insufficient leadership presence and cohesive support for the change process. Feelings of isolation hamper collaboration across divisions, thereby obstructing a successful transition (Davis et al., 2022; Lee & Bartunek, 2023). Therefore, we cannot overlook the importance of team cooperation in achieving long-term organisational objectives.

To this end, the interplay between leadership visibility, employee engagement, and institutional theory is crucial during organisational change. Insights gathered from UuW employees underscore the significance of proactive and communicative leadership throughout the transformation process. These critical elements are integral for cultivating trust and morale and for ensuring that employees feel valued and informed throughout the reconfiguration journey. When UuW's leadership prioritises visibility and engagement, the organisation is better positioned to enhance its culture and navigate change effectively. Ultimately, strong leadership is indispensable not only for addressing strategic objectives but also for fostering emotional connections with employees, thereby significantly contributing to the successful reconfiguration from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal (Battilana & Casciaro, 2023; Wong & Cummings, 2023).

5.2.4. Communication channels for clarity of messaging – Formal and informal

The findings of this study reveal significant shortcomings in the communication channels used by uMngeni-uThukela Water (UuW) during its transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Primarily using a top-down approach, the communication strategy has centered on infrequent announcements from UuW executives and mass emails. Such methods have failed to promote meaningful dialogue between management and staff. Many employees feel alienated as a result, believing that decision-making processes neither seek nor value their views. Research by Sulaiman, Abdullah, and Man (2023) indicates that top-down communication often leads to disengagement and diminishes employees' sense of ownership, an idea echoed by Matzler et al. (2023), who argue that inclusive communication strategies are vital for fostering employee commitment. There is a clear demand for a more consultative approach, allowing UuW leadership to engage with employees at all levels instead of simply imposing directives.

One notable consequence of this top-down communication style is a decline in employee engagement throughout the organisational change process. When decisions are made solely at the executive level without soliciting input or feedback, employees often feel excluded from the change. Such exclusion fosters a sense of alienation, as staff perceive themselves as mere recipients of management directives rather than valued contributors to the organisation's future. Consequently, their investment and commitment to change diminish, potentially leading to resistance against new initiatives. Research by Deepalakshmi et al. (2024) supports this idea, stating that employee engagement is closely linked to the perception of being involved in decision-making processes, a view reinforced by Armenakis and Harris (2023), who highlight the connection between perceived inclusion and overall job satisfaction.

Resistance to change is a common challenge for organisations undergoing transformation, and a top-down approach tends to exacerbate this resistance. When employees perceive changes as imposed upon

them rather than collaboratively developed, it fosters a culture of scepticism (Kebede, Kebede, & Wang, 2022). Employees may question the motivations behind such changes, resulting in reluctance to adhere to new policies or practices, as noted by Kotter (1996). McKinsey & Company (2021) further supports this viewpoint by emphasising the importance of fostering a sense of partnership and shared purpose during organisational transformation efforts, particularly when goals are unclear.

Moreover, the heavy reliance on mass emails to convey important updates has emerged as a significant barrier to effective communication within U UW. Many employees have voiced frustration over the impersonal nature of such communications, which are often filled with jargon and complex language. This approach obscures intended meanings, leaving staff confused and disengaged from the change process. Sulaiman, Zulhamri, and Man (2023) assert that effective communication should engage employees personally to foster emotional connections, while Kossoudji and Stankov (2022) stress the importance of sincerity and clarity in corporate communications to build trust.

Another significant flaw in U UW's communication approach is the limited opportunities for feedback from employees at all levels. When information travels unidirectionally from the U UW board and executives to staff, there are minimal chances for employees to express concerns or contribute suggestions. This lack of feedback can lead to misunderstandings and further frustration among staff. Rogito and Makabe (2023) concur that insufficient feedback mechanisms create a breeding ground for misunderstandings regarding ongoing changes, a notion supported by McKinsey & Company (2021), which advocates for inclusive dialogue as a means of enhancing understanding. Effective communication requires two-way dialogue, as demonstrated by U UW's brown bag sessions and executive-led information gatherings.

Additionally, the study emphasised the inaccessibility of crucial information to certain segments of the workforce, particularly blue-collar employees. Many staff members lack consistent access to email and digital platforms, hindering their ability to receive timely updates on key organisational changes. This digital divide highlights a significant gap in communication strategies that must be addressed to ensure that all employees, regardless of their roles, remain informed. As Eloff and Wessels (2022) point out, bridging this gap is essential for fostering inclusivity and equality in the workplace.

In the absence of effective formal communication channels, many employees have turned to informal avenues, such as the grapevine, for information about organisational changes. For instance, when U UW issued a circular announcing the new organisational structure, it referenced an attachment that was left out. This omission confused employees, leading them to rely on informal communication methods like corridor conversations. Such reliance can result in the spread of inaccurate information, further increasing anxiety among staff. Research by Ashforth and Mael (2024) highlights that informal

communication often leads to speculation and rumour-mongering, complicating employees' understanding of job security and the implications of organisational change.

A recurring theme in this study was the notable lack of transparency concerning the objectives and expected outcomes of the organisational restructuring. Employees expressed frustration over vague and ambiguous communications that failed to clearly explain the rationale behind significant changes. This lack of clarity heightens feelings of uncertainty and hinders their willingness to embrace the changes. Transparent communication, clearly outlining the purpose and anticipated results of organisational adjustments, is essential for building trust and reducing resistance, as suggested by Hubbart (2023).

The findings also revealed an absence of strong feedback mechanisms. Employees expressed the need for communication channels through which they could articulate their concerns and seek clarification about the change process. The insufficient interactive nature of both formal and informal communication fosters feelings of undervaluation, resulting in disconnection from leadership. Establishing effective feedback loops, where employees can voice their opinions and receive timely responses, is crucial for cultivating an engaged and committed workforce, an idea supported by Kossoudji and Stankov (2022).

Cultural and linguistic barriers have also undermined effective communication within UUW's diverse workforce, which consists predominantly of English and Zulu speakers. Many employees noted that the use of complex language and specialised terminology alienated those who were not proficient in English or unfamiliar with industry jargon. This barrier creates challenges in understanding and robust engagement, reinforcing the necessity for communication to be tailored and accessible to all staff, as highlighted by Eloff and Wessels (2022). An inclusive communication strategy that accommodates the linguistic diversity within UUW is essential for ensuring a smooth organisational change.

Lastly, employees expressed concerns regarding the irregularity and lack of structure in both formal and informal communication channels concerning organisational changes. Current practices are characterised by infrequent updates, leaving employees feeling uninformed. This sporadic flow of information contributes to anxiety and inhibits their ability to make informed decisions regarding their roles and responsibilities related to organisational processes. Therefore, establishing a consistent and structured approach to change communication, featuring regular updates and informative briefings, is crucial for alleviating uncertainties, promoting buy-in, ensuring inclusivity, and enhancing engagement. This approach aligns with the findings of Hubbart (2023), who stress the importance of maintaining clear and regular communication during periods of transition.

In conclusion, the critical shortcomings identified in communication channels at Uuw highlight the urgent need to reevaluate and enhance communication strategies during organisational change. By prioritising two-way communication, transparency, inclusivity, and fostering open dialogue, Uuw will significantly improve employee engagement, buy-in, and rebuild trust in leadership. A structured and responsive communication framework will not only facilitate a smoother transition but also empower all employees to embrace the change as an integral aspect of the organisation's growth. This focus on effective communication is essential for ensuring the delivery of potable water and decent sanitation to previously underserved communities in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.2.5 Top-down change approach

The study's findings highlight the complexities of employee resistance to change within the context of uMngeni-uThukela Water's (Uuw) shift to a regional water utility. The top-down change process, concerns about potential job losses, and lack of psychological safety have created a difficult environment for transformation. Employees at all levels feel that the top-down approach taken during this transition was implemented with limited input from staff. This lack of involvement in decision-making contributes to disengagement and opposition to change. The authors agree that involving employees in change initiatives enhances their sense of ownership, which can improve acceptance and reduce resistance to transformation efforts. They also note that when changes are sudden or poorly communicated, resistance is likely to increase (Silva, Macedo, and Thompson, 2024; Armenakis & Harris, 2023).

The authors uniformly identify resistance to change as a challenge affecting all employees at different levels within the organisation. They agree that the top-down approach by leadership has often led to feelings of exclusion and a lack of buy-in for organisational changes during the shift from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The authors concur that imposing changes without sufficient engagement can alienate employees and fuel resistance to new processes. They collectively highlight that uncertainty about how these changes will impact daily responsibilities and career prospects exacerbates concerns over job security (Silva, Macedo, and Thompson, 2024; Neves & Mendonça, 2023). They concur that involving staff in discussions about change not only strengthens their sense of ownership of the process but also promotes acceptance and diminishes resistance (Kotter, 1996; McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Uuw employees have voiced significant challenges with the top-down change approach, noting that decisions are often made by senior management without adequate consideration of input from

employees on the shop floor. The authors concur that the rapid implementation of the reconfiguration can lead to feelings of alienation among employees due to the lack of engagement and disregard for their insights. They collectively raise concerns about how the proposed structural changes may affect daily responsibilities and career development. The authors agree that a proactive approach, which includes early engagement with employees to address their concerns, is essential for mitigating resistance and fostering a collaborative environment that facilitates smoother transitions (Silva, Macedo & Thompson, 2024; Thomas et al., 2023).

Employees at various levels within U UW report that resistance often arises from inadequate engagement during the transition from a water board to a regional water utility. The authors agree that some employees feel excluded from organisational change efforts, with uncertainty surrounding their future job roles causing personal disruptions. They highlight that the exclusive top-down approach has the potential to impede the success of the change process, indicating a need for greater engagement strategies to proactively address concerns and encourage a supportive environment for change. The authors agree that shifting mindsets around change involves introducing it in a way that aligns with employees' values. They collectively assert that transparent and inclusive communication is vital during organisational changes, as it keeps employees informed about not only the changes but also the reasons behind them.

Regarding resistance mitigation strategies, the authors agree that early engagement of employees and addressing their concerns can help alleviate prevalent resistance within U UW. They observe that normative pressures, which adhere to established routines and values, and coercive pressures from authority figures or regulatory bodies often trigger resistance in public organisations (Silva, Macedo, and Thompson, 2024; Neves & Mendonça, 2023). They concur that when imposed changes do not align with employees' professional identities or values, resistance is likely to increase. The authors collectively highlight the importance of institutional theory, asserting that organisational change must resonate with employees' established norms to minimise resistance. They agree that resistance can lead to reduced efficiency by diverting time and resources away from achieving service goals. Engaging employees early and ensuring that changes reflect their values are seen as effective means to ultimately smoothen transitions while maintaining productivity and service quality.

Finally, the authors agree that resistance in organisations often arises not only from a top-down approach but also from ineffective communication. They note that many employees feel excluded due to a lack of clarity around the anticipated changes and their implications. There is common agreement that inadequate communication generates uncertainty about how employees can adapt, as many feel uninformed about the specifics of the proposed changes. This uncertainty fosters increased resistance.

The authors emphasise that transparent and inclusive communication strategies during transitional periods are essential. They assert that it is crucial to keep employees informed about what changes are being made, the rationale behind them, and how these changes will directly affect their roles and the organisation as a whole. To encourage a more positive response to change, the authors agree that leadership should prioritise clear messaging and provide opportunities for dialogue and feedback (Silva, Macedo & Thompson, 2024; Thomas et al., 2023). They collectively conclude that by ensuring employees feel informed and included, UuW can lower resistance, maintain morale, and ensure productivity during the transition to a regional water utility. Ultimately, they agree that effective communication is essential for facilitating smoother transitions and enabling employees to confidently navigate new expectations.

5.2.6 Concerns on job loss

One participant articulated their worries regarding the changes occurring within the organisation, stating, “These are my fears. How are my fears going to be addressed? We cannot take away from the process during a change process.” This statement underscores a significant concern about the lack of communication regarding organisational changes. The participant’s anxiety reflects the necessity for direct discussions about fears and expectations, which aligns with Kotter’s (1996) assertion that effective communication is essential for guiding employees through periods of change. When an organisation fails to transparently communicate what changes are happening and how they will affect staff, feelings of uncertainty may escalate, potentially increasing resistance to the change process. Other authors, such as Neves and Mendonça (2023), support this view, indicating that clarity and openness during change are vital to reduce anxiety and build trust among employees.

Another participant expressed their apprehension about job security, asking, “Am I going to lose my job?” This question captures a deep-rooted fear of job loss, which is a major factor contributing to resistance. The anxiety that this participant conveys resonates with the findings of Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), who note that fear can drive employees to adopt defensive behaviours. It demonstrates that resistance is not merely unwillingness to change but rather a genuine concern for personal livelihoods. This connection suggests that organisations must proactively address employees' fears regarding job security to alleviate resistance. More recent research by Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic (2022). This suggests that directly addressing employee fears can foster a workforce that is more adaptable.

UW employees stressed the importance of clear communication from management in addressing fears related to job security. The belief that management should prioritise reassurances about job stability underscores the need for visible leadership during transitional periods. This perspective aligns with Musaigwa's (2023) assertion that engaged and supportive leadership fosters trust. When leaders are not visibly supportive during change, employees may feel uncertain about their future, which can amplify their resistance. McKinsey & Company (2021) echoes this view, emphasising the importance of visible leadership in fostering a sense of security during organisational transitions.

Some UW employees recounted their experiences of historical layoffs, recalling a painful period in 2004 when nearly 400 individuals lost their jobs. One employee who worked for UW for 29 years reflected on the emotional impact of that traumatic event. Such memories can heighten anxiety about the current reconfiguration from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Musaigwa (2023) emphasises that change is not solely about structural adjustments but also about managing the emotional responses of employees. This viewpoint is supported by Armenakis et al. (2023), who indicate that past experiences significantly influence current reactions to change, thereby escalating resistance. Therefore, the emotional scars from past organisational changes can greatly inform employees' apprehensions about the present.

It is evident that the contributing factors to employee resistance at UW stem from challenges such as inadequate communication, fear of job loss, lack of leadership visibility, and lack of psychological support from UW leadership during the transition from the water board to the regional water utility in Kwazulu-Natal. The insights from UW employees from the Executive C-suite, senior managers, middle managers, representatives from organised labour, and employees at large provide assistance to elucidate the reasons behind resistance and provide a human context for understanding employee concerns. The consensus from the authors indicates that resistance to change is a pervasive obstacle that leadership must address effectively. Establishing a comprehension of the underlying reasons for resistance, providing necessary support, and clearly communicating the rationale for change can mitigate these challenges (Musaigwa, 2023; Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022).

By implementing a range of resistance mitigation strategies—such as ensuring effective communication, involving and empowering employees, providing reassurances regarding job security, promoting visible leadership, and acknowledging emotional responses—UW can effectively address the underlying causes of employee resistance. Kets de Vries (2022) supports this approach by emphasising the importance of clear leadership and accountability in facilitating change. In alignment with Kotter (1996), who highlights the necessity of a robust vision and clear communication in building buy-in and overcoming resistance, UW can reinforce its efforts by articulating a compelling narrative

that resonates with employees. Furthermore, Lewin's Change Model (1947) offers a valuable framework for understanding the change process, encouraging organisations to navigate the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing to manage resistance effectively. Burnes (2004) adds to this discourse by advocating for the creation of a supportive organisational culture that fosters innovation and adaptability. By prioritising these strategies and cultivating an inclusive atmosphere where employees feel valued and engaged, organisations can significantly reduce resistance. This not only promotes smoother organisational change but also encourages greater acceptance of change, aligning with a collective commitment to fostering a culture that embraces rather than resists the reconfiguration process. If UuW leadership prioritises the proposed employees' resistance strategies, they can reduce resistance and cultivate a more supportive environment during times of organisational change, promoting smoother transitions and greater employee buy-in and acceptance.

5.3 Proposed employees resistance mitigation measures for effective organisational change within UuW

Drawing on the findings from this exploratory study, it is evident that the leadership at uMngeni-uThukela Water (UuW) faces several challenges that may hinder the smooth transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. To successfully navigate this organisational restructuring, it is essential to implement strategies that address employee resistance across three key themes: leadership visibility and engagement, communication as the cornerstone of change management, and employee involvement and empowerment.

Visible leadership commitment

Leadership must exhibit steadfast commitment to the change process through consistent presence and active engagement. Regular forums for interaction with employees—such as town hall meetings, Q&A sessions, and focus groups—should be established to allow staff at all levels to voice their concerns, ask questions, and provide feedback. This proactive engagement fosters a sense of trust among employees while alleviating feelings of uncertainty about the transformation. Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic (2022) agree that visible leadership is critical for building trust and reducing resistance, reinforcing the notion that leaders must be present and engaged throughout the change process.

In addition, assigning dedicated change champions from various managerial levels can enhance this visibility. These change agents should act as liaisons between leadership and staff, communicating updates about the transformation process and addressing employee concerns. Their presence can legitimize the change initiative and instill confidence in the workforce. This mirrors the findings of

Kets de Vries (2022), who argues that having designated leaders for change initiatives helps create a clearer vision and drives momentum within the organisation.

Regular updates from leadership

Implementing a structured approach to provide regular updates from senior leaders about the progress of the transformation is critical. This strategy ensures that employees remain informed about the goals, timelines, and anticipated impacts of the reconfiguration. As highlighted by Kotter (1996), regular communication is essential during times of change to mitigate speculation and anxiety among staff. The agreement amongst authors on the importance of continuous updates illustrates that keeping employees in the loop can reduce resistance and foster a sense of security.

Communication as a cornerstone of change management

Effective communication is vital to successful change management, particularly within public organisations like UUW. The significance of clear, consistent, and transparent messaging during times of transformation cannot be overstated, as it serves to guide employees through the change process, reduce uncertainty, and foster trust and engagement. Musaiywa (2023) supports this perspective, noting that communication is an essential element in cultivating a culture of engagement that aligns with organisational goals.

Establishing Clear Communication Channels

Creating and maintaining well-defined communication channels is essential for facilitating the seamless flow of information throughout the organisation. Traditional methods, such as newsletters, memos, and meetings, should be complemented by modern digital platforms like intranet sites, email updates, and collaborative tools. This multifaceted approach ensures that messages are widely accessible and clear, reducing the likelihood of misinformation and confusion. Contemporary communication theorists, including Armenakis et al. (2023), concur that a diversified communication strategy is crucial for promoting understanding among employees and enabling them to feel informed and involved in the change process.

Tailored Communication Strategies

Recognising the diversity of roles and perspectives within UUW is fundamental to crafting effective communication strategies. A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate, as different employees will have

varying degrees of interest, knowledge, and concern regarding the change initiative. Employing tailored communications that speak directly to employees' specific roles, responsibilities, and anxieties enhances the relevance and engagement of messages. Supporting this view, recent studies by Dumas and Beinecke (2018) indicate that personalised communication effectively increases employee commitment and reduces resistance to change. In the context of organisational change, it is vital to acknowledge the nuanced nature of communication as described by scholars. Ford and Ford (1995) highlight that communication encompasses what those involved in a change initiative express, perceive, and understand. Sonenshein (2010, p. 477) further elaborates, describing it as the "discursive and other symbolic materials [used] to destroy existing meaning systems and establish new ones." Given that organisational change is dynamic rather than static, Holten et al. (2020, p. 394) note that it can range from transitional to transformational, continuous to episodic, and evolutionary to revolutionary. This complexity necessitates that studies on the role of communication within such contexts account for "the who, what, where, why, and how of the change" (Dumas and Beinecke, 2018, p. 868). Consequently, different types of change will require distinct communication strategies to ensure effectiveness and engagement.

Implementing Feedback Mechanisms

Dynamic communication is inherently a two-way process, making the establishment of robust feedback mechanisms essential for assessing employee sentiment and addressing any concerns. To facilitate this, UUW should develop structured avenues for feedback, such as surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to actively solicit employee input regarding their experiences during the transformation process. Responding to UUW employee feedback at all levels of the organisation is crucial, as it fosters a culture of openness and collaboration during the reconfiguration process. Research by Hadziahmetovic and Salihovic (2022) underscores that such engagement plays a significant role in building trust and enhancing employees' willingness to participate in UUW's organisational change effort. This sentiment is echoed in the work of Hubbart (2023); Jabri & Jabri (2022); and McKenna (2020), who argue that effective feedback loops not only improve employee morale but also contribute to successful organisational change. Additionally, Musheke (2021) emphasises that a transparent dialogue with employees cultivates an environment where they feel valued and understood, further motivating their involvement in the transformation journey. Thus, creating structured feedback mechanisms is vital for UUW to navigate its change process effectively.

Cultivating an Atmosphere of Transparency

Transparency in communication is paramount during organisational change. A transparent communication style during organisational change is underscored by numerous sources (Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022; Yue, Men & Ferguson, 2019), emphasising its importance in

clarifying the process, alleviating employee uncertainty, and promoting stability. Employees must understand the objectives behind the changes and their anticipated impacts. UUW leadership at all levels of the organisation should openly communicate the rationale for the reconfiguration process, expected outcomes, and the steps involved in achieving the organisational change strategic goals. Regular updates on the progress of the organisational change efforts can sustain momentum and enthusiasm while reinforcing the organisation's commitment to keep staff informed. Musaigwa (2023) emphasises that a transparent communication style clarifies the reconfiguration process, reduces employee uncertainty, and fosters a sense of stability among all employees within UUW. A transparent communication style during organisational change is emphasised by many sources, highlighting its role in clarifying the process, reducing employee uncertainty, and fostering stability.

Effective communication serves as a cornerstone for change management at uMngeni-uThukela Water. This reflects the views of numerous scholars and practitioners who have underscored the vital importance of communication in organisational change. For example, Kotter (1996) argues that effective communication is a fundamental leadership behaviour that can impact employee attitudes and actions during times of change. For instance, Lewis (2011) highlights the importance of communicating a clear vision during transformation efforts to engage employees and foster their commitment. Likewise, Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic (2022) contend that transparent and honest communication is crucial for cultivating trust, minimising resistance, and promoting a conducive climate for change. Hara (2023) asserts that effective communication practices can enhance employee morale and encourage participation in change processes. By establishing clear communication channels, implementing tailored strategies, creating feedback mechanisms, and promoting transparency, UUW can significantly enhance employee buy-in and support for the transformation process. This collaborative approach not only alleviates fears and confusion but also nurtures a culture of engagement, collaboration, and trust—essential elements for the successful implementation of organisational change. The collective agreement from various authors underscores the vital role communication plays in enabling employees to navigate change positively and constructively.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the key findings from the study on the change management methods employed during the reconfiguration of the uMngeni-uThukela Water Board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The discussion highlighted several critical aspects that emerged from both the literature review and empirical findings. The change management method employed by uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) during its transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal was characterised by a predominantly top-down approach, which has presented significant challenges throughout the reconfiguration process. One of the most notable

aspects of this approach was the systematic exclusion of employees from crucial decision-making processes. Senior leadership predominantly directed strategic decisions with minimal consultation from middle management or front-line employees. This lack of engagement resulted in widespread feelings of disenchantment, as many employees felt that their insights and experiences were neither valued nor acknowledged during the organisational transformation. In particular, middle managers expressed frustration at being informed only after decisions had already been taken, which hindered their ability to manage and support their teams effectively.

The use of a less structured change pathway further compounded these challenges, leading to increased uncertainty and anxiety among employees. Without clear guidelines delineating their roles and responsibilities or a predefined direction for the organisation, employees experienced significant stress about the changes taking place. This uncertainty also negatively impacted effective communication within the organisation, as reliance on informal communication channels such as mass emails gave rise to misinformation and speculation, exacerbating anxiety and confusion.

Furthermore, the ineffective communication strategy adopted by U UW contributed to diminished U UW employee morale and engagement. Many staff members articulated feelings of being "left in the dark" about the reconfiguration process, resulting in a lack of connection to the broader organisational goals. When employees fail to understand how their individual contributions align with strategic objectives, their motivation often wanes. This disengagement can adversely affect productivity and stifle innovation, as employees may hesitate to propose new ideas when they perceive their input as undervalued.

During the transition, the importance of leadership visibility in driving the change agenda became a critical concern. There was a significant lack of consistent engagement from leadership, leaving employees feeling unsupported and uncertain about the organisation's direction. The absence of visible leadership during times of change can erode trust and commitment, leading to resistance and reluctance to support new initiatives. Employees expressed a desire for proactive involvement from leaders to alleviate their concerns and reinforce a sense of shared purpose.

In conclusion, the change management method employed by U UW during its reconfiguration was predominantly characterised by a top-down approach that resulted in a lack of employee involvement, limited communication, a less structured change pathway, and poor leadership visibility. These factors contributed to heightened employee anxiety, reduced morale, and disengagement. To enhance the effectiveness of the change process, it is essential for U UW to consider adopting a more inclusive, two-way communication approach and participatory model of change management that prioritises clear communication, employee engagement, and active leadership visibility and commitment. Such an

approach would not only facilitate a smoother transition from a water board to a regional water utility but also promote a collaborative organisational culture that fosters innovation and commitment among all employees.

The study underscores significant inadequacies in the communication channels employed by uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) during the reconfiguration from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Primarily utilising a top-down approach, communication has relied heavily on infrequent UUW executive announcements and overreliance on mass emails, which have failed to foster meaningful dialogue between UUW leadership and employees. This one-way communication has led to feelings of being excluded, disengaged, confused, and anxious about jobs, roles, and responsibilities in the change process among employees, many of whom have expressed that their opinions are neither solicited nor valued in decision-making processes. The findings indicate that this top-down communication approach has marginalised UUW employee input, resulting in decreased engagement and a lack of ownership regarding the UUW organisational changes. Moreover, UUW executives' overreliance on impersonal mass emails has obscured important messages and led to confusion, while inadequate feedback channels have exacerbated misunderstandings during the organisational change process. Additionally, certain groups, particularly blue-collar workers, have been left without timely updates. Informal communication channels, such as the grapevine, have further contributed to the spread of misinformation, increasing employee anxiety. The lack of clarity regarding the objectives and outcomes of the changes has fostered uncertainty and hindered employee buy-in. Communication has been irregular and unstructured, leaving employees uninformed and unable to make informed decisions. The use of complex terminology has also alienated non-English speakers, complicating their understanding of key information. To address these issues, UUW must adopt a two-way communication approach that prioritises transparency, inclusivity, and open dialogue. By doing so, the organisation can enhance employee engagement, rebuild trust in its leadership, and facilitate a smoother transition. A well-structured and responsive communication framework will empower all UUW employees to embrace the organisational changes as vital to the growth of the organisation, thereby ensuring effective service delivery of potable water and decent sanitation to previously underserved communities within the KwaZulu-Natal province.

The findings highlighted several underlying factors contributing to resistance among employees, notably the top-down approach, which led to the exclusion of UUW employees at all levels, concerns about job losses, insufficient engagement, and fears surrounding job security. It became clear that addressing these issues proactively is vital for minimising resistance. The chapter concluded by advocating for targeted resistance mitigation strategies, which include enhancing leadership involvement, fostering open channels for dialogue, and cultivating a culture of trust and support. Employee resistance mitigation strategies: The chapter proposed comprehensive resistance mitigation

strategies, emphasising the need for visible leadership commitment, dynamic communication practices, employee involvement, and robust training programs. By focusing on these strategies, UuW can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive environment that not only addresses employee concerns but also fosters a culture of engagement and collaboration. The successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal hinges on effectively addressing management methods, communication strategies, the root causes of employee resistance, and proactive resistance mitigation strategies. By prioritizing inclusivity, clear messaging, and responsive leadership, stakeholders can significantly enhance the likelihood of a smooth and impactful organisational transformation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Following the presentation and discussion of the findings of this exploratory study, this chapter aims to tie the objectives of the study to the main findings and to conclude the study. This exploratory and qualitative study adopted the institutional theory to explore the change management methods used during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter seeks to provide recommendations and areas for future research. The chapter begins by briefly restating the overview and summary of the findings. Thereafter, the chapter presents conclusions, recommendations, and areas for future research.

6.2 Realisation of objectives

The overall objective of the study was to examine the management of change from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. This exploratory study used qualitative in-depth interviews involving twenty employees from uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) from different levels of the organisation, from the executive members, senior management, middle management, representatives of the organised labour, and the employees. Purposive sampling technique was used in this study to primarily select UUW participants. This study incorporated the executive members, middle managers, senior managers, employees, and the organised labour who were employed at the time when this change occurred. All the employees and managers who did not experience the planned change will be excluded, as they may not have insights into how the change was communicated, unfolded, and implemented. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic approaches to get dominant themes depicting change management methods, communication, and employee resistance during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in Kwazulu-Natal.

It is noteworthy that the results in this study provided insights on the change management methods used to ensure the success reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, the communication channels for clarity of messaging that were used to reach all employees during the change process, and the root causes of employee resistance to change and how these have been avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The study revealed that a predominantly top-down approach, a less structured change path, and visible leadership to drive the change agenda were adopted in managing the organisational change. While such a method can expedite the process of organisational change, it often sacrifices inclusivity, leading to employee disengagement and resistance. Incorporating participatory organisational change process

methodology is essential for successful transformation, as it engages employees at all levels, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the organisational change process.

The investigation underscored the importance of clear and effective communication channels for conveying messages during the transition period. Employees across various levels expressed the need for transparent, consistent updates regarding the change process. It was evident that without such clarity, confusion and misunderstandings proliferate, impeding the overall effectiveness of the change initiatives. Establishing diverse communication platforms tailored to different employee needs was identified as imperative for nurturing an informed workforce. The UUW executive primarily uses a top-down approach, heavily relying on infrequent announcements and mass emails for communication, a strategy that has failed to foster meaningful dialogue between UUW leadership and employees. This one-way communication has led to feelings of being excluded, disengaged, confused, and anxious about jobs, roles, and responsibilities in the change process among employees, many of whom have expressed that their opinions are neither solicited nor valued in decision-making processes.

The findings highlighted several underlying factors contributing to resistance among employees, notably the top-down approach, lack of leadership visibility, insufficient engagement, and fears surrounding job security. It became clear that addressing these issues proactively is vital for minimising resistance. The chapter concluded by advocating for targeted resistance mitigation strategies, which include enhancing leadership involvement, fostering open channels for dialogue, and cultivating a culture of trust and support. These results are discussed in detail below.

This section summarises the findings of this study to explicitly indicate how each research objective was realised in the study; these will be considered in formulating recommendations in the section that follows:

Objective 1: To understand change management methods to ensure the successful reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The research objective was realised by the study as the responses of uMngeni-uThukela in KwaZulu-Natal describe the change management methods that were used during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The study aimed to illuminate the change management methodology employed during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. This objective was realised through rigorous qualitative investigation, incorporating semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders within uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW), including executive managers, senior management, middle management, representatives of organised labour, and employees.

The change management method employed by uMngeni-uThukela Water (UUW) during its transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal was characterised by a predominantly

top-down approach, which has presented significant challenges throughout the reconfiguration process. The findings clearly demonstrated a significant reliance on a top-down approach throughout the change process. Decision-making regarding the reconfiguration was predominantly centralised at the UuW Board and executive level, with minimal engagement, consultation, and involvement from lower-tier employees, which are the senior manager, middle managers, organised labour representatives, and employees at large. This lack of inclusivity in the change management process resulted in several challenges, notably a sense of exclusion among employees, diminished morale, and ambiguity regarding reconfiguration change strategic objectives.

One of the most notable aspects of the top-down approach for speedy change was the systematic exclusion of employees from crucial decision-making processes. Senior leadership predominantly directed strategic decisions with minimal consultation from middle management or front-line employees. This lack of engagement resulted in widespread feelings of disenchantment, as many UuW employees felt that their insights and experiences were neither valued nor acknowledged during the organisational transformation efforts. In particular, middle managers expressed frustration at being informed only after decisions had already been taken, which hindered their ability to manage and support their teams effectively.

The study's results indicate that the implementation of a less structured change pathway exacerbated these challenges, resulting in heightened levels of uncertainty and anxiety among UuW employees across all levels. Without clear guidelines defining UuW employees' roles and responsibilities or a predefined direction for the organisation subsequent to the organisational change effort within UuW, employees experienced significant stress about the organisational changes that were taking place. Thus, this uncertainty also negatively impacted the effective communication of the organisational change, as reliance on informal communication channels such as mass emails gave rise to misinformation and speculation, exacerbating anxiety and confusion among UuW employees.

Furthermore, UuW leadership's ineffective communication strategy led to a decline in employee morale and engagement. Many staff members articulated feelings of being "left in the dark" about the reconfiguration process, resulting in a lack of connection to the broader organisational goals. When employees fail to understand how their individual contributions align with strategic objectives, their motivation often wanes. This disengagement can adversely affect productivity and stifle innovation, as employees may hesitate to propose new ideas when they perceive their input as undervalued.

Leadership visibility in driving change agenda emerged as another critical concern during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. There was a significant lack of consistent engagement from UuW leadership, from the C-Suite executive level to the shop floor level, which left employees feeling unsupported and uncertain about the organisation's direction. The absence of UuW visible leadership during times of organisational change eroded

employees trust and commitment, leading to resistance and reluctance to support and embrace the reconfiguration process. Uuw employees expressed a desire for proactive involvement in the organisational change process from Uuw executives, senior managers, and middle managers to alleviate their concerns and reinforce a sense of shared organisational purpose—that of establishing the regional water utility that will primarily serve the previous advantage communities with access to portable water and decent sanitation. Uuw employees were very supportive and very proud to be part of a dream; hence, they were urged to have access to information and updates about the Uuw overall goal of the regional water utility.

In conclusion, the change management method employed by Uuw leadership during its reconfiguration was predominantly characterised by a top-down approach for speedy change, a less structured change pathway, and poor visibility of Uuw leadership in driving the organisational change processes within Uuw, who put less focus on articulating the organisational change compelling vision for the reconfiguration process aimed at obtaining buy-in from Uuw employees from the Executive C-suite to the shop floor level. Subsequent to a lack of employee involvement, lack of inclusivity in the decision-making process about reconfiguration process efforts within Uuw, limited change communication strategies with misinformation and inconsistency messaging, a less structured change pathway, and poor leadership visibility. These factors contributed to heightened employee anxiety, reduced morale, resistance to organisational change, and disengagement. To enhance the effectiveness of the change process, it is essential for Uuw to consider adopting a structure change management framework, a more inclusive, two-way communication approach, open communication channels with the potential to solicit feedback from employees at all levels, and a participatory model of change management that prioritises clear communication, employee engagement, and active leadership visibility and commitment. Such an approach would not only facilitate a smoother transition from a water board to a regional water utility, but it would also promote a collaborative organisational culture that fosters innovation and commitment among all employees.

Objective 2: To identify communication channels for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The study underscores significant inadequacies in the communication channels employed by uMngeni-uThukela Water (Uuw) during the reconfiguration from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Primarily utilising a top-down approach, communication has relied heavily on infrequent Uuw executive announcements and overreliance on mass emails, which have failed to foster meaningful dialogue between Uuw leadership and employees. This one-way communication has led to feelings of being excluded, disengaged, confused, and anxious about jobs, roles, and responsibilities in the change process among employees, many of whom have expressed that their opinions are neither

solicited nor valued in decision-making processes. The findings indicated that this top-down communication approach has marginalised Uuw employee input, resulting in decreased engagement and a lack of ownership regarding the Uuw organisational changes.

Moreover, Uuw executives' overreliance on impersonal mass emails has obscured important messages and led to confusion, while inadequate feedback channels have exacerbated misunderstandings during the organisational change process. Additionally, certain groups, particularly blue-collar workers, have been left without timely updates. Informal communication channels, such as the grapevine, have further contributed to the spread of misinformation, increasing employee anxiety. The lack of clarity regarding the objectives and outcomes of Uuw organisational changes has fostered uncertainty and hindered Uuw employee buy-in. Change communication has been irregular and unstructured, leaving Uuw employees uninformed and unable to make informed decisions about their current job roles and future opportunities that might be presented by the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal.

The results of this study reveal that the use of complex terminology and technical jargon during the dissemination of information via the mass email channel has also alienated non-English speakers within Uuw employees, which made it difficult for them to understand the key messages that were conveyed at that particular time during the organisational change process. For Uuw to navigate the organisational change processes that are underway, it will be beneficial for Uuw leadership to mitigate change communication shortfalls. top down, poor communication channels characterised by predominant mass emails, directive communication, lack of transparency and clarity, inconsistency, and infrequent communication, challenges that have caused negative impacts on Uuw employees at all levels and hindered the smooth transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. To overcome these challenges and improve on realising a smooth transition process, Uuw should consider adopting two-way communication that would encourage open dialogue, actively seek employee input, and involve all Uuw employees in the decision-making process. Provide clear and concise communication about the rationale, objectives, and expected outcomes of the organisational change. Utilise a variety of formal and informal communication channels, including face-to-face meetings, Uuw executive-led staff information sessions, scheduled Uuw brown bag sessions, Uuw executive face-to-face operational area visits, digital platforms where suitable and necessary, and meetings that are aimed to reach all Uuw employees. Create a safe and inclusive environment where Uuw employees feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns without a fear of victimisation.

Establish a regular communication schedule to ensure that employees are informed about the latest developments. Capacitate Uuw managers with the skills to communicate effectively and empathetically with their teams. Regularly assess the effectiveness of communication strategies and make necessary adjustments. By doing so, Uuw organisations can enhance employee engagement,

rebuild trust in their leadership, and facilitate a smoother transition. A well-structured and responsive communication framework will empower all UuW employees to embrace the organisational changes as vital to the growth of the organisation, thereby ensuring effective service delivery of potable water and decent sanitation to previously underserved communities within the KwaZulu-Natal province.

Objective 3: To evaluate the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal

The research objective was realised by the study as the responses of uMngeni-uThukela in KwaZulu-Natal during the evaluation of the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The study realised its objectives by comprehensively exploring the root causes of employees' resistance to the organisational change process during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings have revealed several significant themes that capture the essence of employee resistance, offering valuable insights into potential areas for intervention to mitigate such resistance.

Firstly, the top-down change approach and employee exclusion emerged as predominant themes, with a notable frequency attributed to these factors as causes of resistance. UuW employees at all levels expressed feelings of alienation and disconnection from the change process, which resulted from the lack of engagement in decision-making. Employees at all levels within UuW articulated that an inclusive approach, involving employees at various levels in discussions and decision-making processes, is crucial for fostering ownership and buy-in. By highlighting this, the study effectively fulfilled its objective of evaluating root causes, revealing that UuW employees' robust engagement and the provision of information about the reconfiguration process could mitigate resistance.

Secondly, concerns on job loss, particularly regarding job security and personal impacts of the organisational change, surfaced as critical factors influencing resistance within the UuW during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. As UuW employees at all levels within the organisation voiced fears regarding potential job losses and disruptions to their daily responsibilities, it became evident that a lack of communication regarding human concerns contributed significantly to heightened anxiety and employees' resistance behaviour to organisational change efforts. By documenting these fears and emphasising the necessity for open communication to restore confidence, the study has generated valuable recommendations that can guide leadership in addressing these human concerns, thereby avoiding further employees' resistance to organisational change.

Thirdly, the study examined the psychological strain linked to employees' resistance within UuW, noting that significant levels of stress and frustration were prevalent among UuW employees in

response to the abrupt changes. By acknowledging the emotional toll of the transition from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal and the need for psychological support, the study provided a broader understanding of how employees' resistance within UuW is not merely a reaction to organisational policies but also a natural reflection of the human experience in times of organisational change. This objective was realised by advocating for UuW leadership to offer guidance, tangible and intangible resources, and emotional support to assist employees to navigate the human challenges, such as psychological strains and uncertainties associated with the organisational change process.

Further, the study illuminated the impact of political influence and board instability, factors that contribute to a lack of continuity and coherent strategy during the transformation process. This section of the findings underscored how external and internal instability could erode trust among employees, which ultimately serves to heighten resistance. By acknowledging these influences as root causes, the study provided a more comprehensive view of the challenges at play during the change process, reinforcing the necessity for stable leadership and strategic consistency.

In conclusion, the study has effectively realised its first objective by providing a nuanced evaluation of the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process. By articulating themes related to top-down approaches, human concerns, psychological strains, and political instability, the research has not only identified the underlying issues but has also proposed targeted measures to mitigate these challenges. The insights derived from participant reflections and recommendations for enhancing engagement, communication, and support mechanisms present a pathway towards overcoming resistance and facilitating a successful organisational transition from a water board to a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. This comprehensive qualitative exploratory study deepens the understanding of change management within the context of organisational transformation in KwaZulu-Natal, thus contributing valuable knowledge to the field.

6.3 Recommendations

With the outcomes of this exploratory study, the following recommendations are made:

6.3.1 Key organisation change management for uMngeni-uThukela

Below are the key change management elements to be considered by uMngeni-uThukela Water when crafting the organisational change management improvement plan that outlines the change management strategies and actions necessary to facilitate a successful transition during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal:

1. The importance of leadership in change management: The study highlighted a significant challenge regarding the visibility and involvement of leadership during the reconfiguration at uMngeni-

uThukela Water (UW). A predominant top-down approach without active leadership engagement led to feelings of disconnection among employees and a lack of clarity regarding organisational change strategic objectives.

1.1 Enhance leadership visibility: It is crucial for UW leadership to be visible and actively involved throughout the organisational change process. This can be accomplished through regular staff information session meetings where UW leadership provide detailed updates, communicate changes, and engage in open dialogue with employees regarding the matters related to organisational change. Such visibility not only builds trust but also reinforces leaders' commitment to the organisational change process.

1.2 Promote stable leadership: Stability in leadership is essential for cultivating a sense of security among employees during the process of reconfiguration from the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal. Ensuring that leadership roles remain consistent during the change process will foster trust and encourage employees to embrace the transition.

1.3 Encourage role modelling: Leadership should embody the changes they advocate for, acting as role models for their teams. By demonstrating the desired behaviours and values associated with the transition to a regional water utility, leaders can inspire employees to adopt similar attitudes.

2. Effective communication as a cornerstone of change management: The effectiveness of communication during the reconfiguration process was severely lacking. Employees reported inconsistencies in messaging from leadership, resulting in confusion and uncertainty about their roles in the new structure.

2.1 Develop a comprehensive change communication plan: To drive the organisational change process, UW should establish a clear communication framework that defines the key messages, medium, and frequency of communication updates regarding the organisational changes. This strategy should utilise diverse communication channels, including emails, newsletters, and staff meetings; face-to-face executive site visits; Teams meetings; and Zoom platforms, ensuring that all employees are kept informed.

2.2 Implement regular feedback mechanisms: To facilitate effective communication, UW should create structured feedback loops that encourage employee input. Initiatives such as anonymous surveys and focus groups will ensure that employees have opportunities to voice their concerns, suggestions, and experiences related to the change process.

2.3 Utilise multi-lingual communication: Recognising language barriers is crucial during the organisational change process. To ensure clarity and inclusivity for all employees, UW should produce all communication materials in both English and Zulu, thereby promoting understanding and robust engagement during the organisational change process.

3. Employee involvement and empowerment: The study found that the lack of engagement from lower-tier employees in the decision-making processes significantly contributed to feelings of alienation. Employees expressed a clear desire for involvement, which is vital for fostering ownership and acceptance of changes.

3.1 Adopt a participatory change management approach: Transitioning from a top-down model to a more inclusive approach will empower employees across various levels of the organisation. Establishing cross-functional teams that actively participate in discussions and decision-making will ensure that diverse perspectives are incorporated, making employees feel valued and engaged in the process.

3.2 Foster ownership through information sharing: The open and transparent sharing of information regarding organisational changes is crucial. This can be achieved through dedicated sessions that discuss both the strategic objectives and the implications of reconfiguration, enabling employees to understand their roles better, obtain buy-in, and enhance a state of ownership of the change.

3.3 Encourage employee-led initiatives: Empowering employees at all levels to propose changes and lead initiatives related to the transition can also enhance engagement. By providing a platform for such initiatives, Uuw can tap into the ideas and creativity of its workforce.

4. Addressing resistance to change: The study revealed several root causes of resistance to the change process, including job insecurity and psychological strains resulting from abrupt organisational changes. Addressing these concerns is integral to easing employee fears and fostering a positive transition environment.

4.1 Foster open dialogue about job security: To alleviate fears regarding job losses, Uuw should hold dedicated sessions to discuss employment uncertainties and the potential impacts of the reconfiguration. Providing clarity about job roles and future opportunities will help to restore trust among employees.

4.2 Provide psychological support: Implementing employee assistance programs that focus on mental health and well-being is essential. Regular workshops on stress management and coping strategies can help employees navigate the psychological challenges associated with change.

4.3 Acknowledge the emotional impact of change: By recognising the human elements that were impacted by the transition from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, Uuw leadership can foster a supportive environment. Ensuring that employees have access to tangible resources and emotional support will alleviate resistance and build resilience during the organisational transformation to a regional water utility.

6.4 Areas for future research

There are four key areas for further research, which are as follows:

The current exploratory study looked at the organisational change methods implemented during the organisational change process within uMngeni-uThukela Water, communication channels used for clarity of messaging during the transition process, as well as the evaluation of employees' resistance as a result of the transformation process within uMngeni-uThukela Water in KwaZulu-Natal.

- It is important that future research investigations compare findings of change management methods, communication, and employee resistance from the public sector organisations in different geographical contexts in South Africa. This is critical to enrich or dismiss some of the findings from this study, which is situated in one context of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg head office.
- The future studies should not only enhance the diversity of the context of research results but also increase the sample size. The limitation in this current study is lacking generalisation as the results are from one water board in KwaZulu-Natal and a very small sample size; hence, these results are only transferable to similar contexts.
- This research study largely focused on qualitative insights from uMngeni-uThukela Water within KwaZulu-Natal, leading to potential biases based on the unique organisational culture, leadership dynamics, and employee experiences within this context.
- Additionally, using mixed-method approaches that encompass quantitative data collection alongside qualitative interviews could mitigate the impact of biases stemming from the subjective interpretations of individuals within the same organisational context.

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Appendix 1: Research Interview Guide

Objective 1: To understand change management methods used to ensure successful reconfiguration of water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?

- Describe the specific change management methods that were utilized in the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What role did leadership play in driving successful change within the water utility reconfiguration?
- How were employees and stakeholders involved in the change process, and what strategies were employed to ensure their buy-in and participation? How their interests were managed through change management methods?
- How were employees impacted by the reconfiguration, and how were their concerns addressed?
- What measures were taken to address any resistance to change and ensure that employees were supportive of the reconfiguration?
- How were communication strategies implemented to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the change process?
- How successful were the change management methods in facilitating the goals and objectives of reconfiguration of the regional water utility process?
- What steps were taken to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the change management methods used, and how were adjustments made as needed?

Objective 2: To identify communication channels, for clarity of messaging used to reach all employees during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?

- What role do you see leadership playing in ensuring effective communication and alignment of messaging during this organizational change?
- What are the current communication channels being utilized by the water board to reach employees?
- Are there any key messages or information that you believe should be emphasized or reiterated to ensure all employees are well-informed about the changes taking place?
- How are you monitoring the effectiveness of the communication channels being used during the reconfiguration process to ensure that all employees are being reached and informed?
- How do you plan to adapt or enhance communication channels during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?
- How do employees feel about the transparency and inclusivity of the communication process during the reconfiguration?

- How do employees perceive the overall communication effectiveness of the water board during times of change and transition?
- In your opinion, what steps can be taken to improve the clarity and efficiency of communication with employees during the transition of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?

Objective 3: To evaluate the root causes of employees' resistance to the change process and how these could be avoided during the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?

- How do employees perceive the reconfiguration of the water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are employees' concerns or fears about the reconfiguration of the water board and how can these be addressed effectively?
- How do you think the uncertainty surrounding the reconfiguration is impacting the attitudes and behaviours of employees?
- To what extent leadership have better supported employees through the change process to reduce resistance and promote a smoother transition?
- How have leadership in different levels of the organisation been addressing employee concerns and resistance during this change process?
- What are employees' concerns or fears about the reconfiguration of the water board and how can these be addressed effectively?
- What strategies do you think would be most effective in minimizing resistance and fostering a positive attitude towards the reconfiguration?
- What strategies or approaches do you think could have been implemented to address employees' concerns and alleviate resistance to change in this context?

Appendix 2: Gatekeepers' letter



Improving Quality of Life and Enhancing Sustainable Economic Development

29 April 2024

Ms. Sibongile Mngwengwe

Sibongile.mngwengwe@umgeni.co.za

Dear Ms Mngwengwe

Re: Application to conduct study research at uMngeni-uThukela Water

The subject refers.

After careful consideration of your application to conduct research at uMngeni-uThukela Water for study purposes on "**Examining the management of change from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu- Natal, South Africa**". uMngeni-uThukela Water Research Panel in its meeting held on the 11th April 2024, has approved your application based on the following condition:

- That upon completion of the study, findings and recommendations of the study will be shared with uMngeni-uThukela Water.

We wish you the best of your studies. For any enquiries, kindly contact Ms. Nokuphiwa Mkhize (nokuphiwa.mkhize@umgeni.co.za).

Yours Sincerely



Ms Moketenyane Moleko

Chief Officer : Shared Services

uMngeni-uThukela Water

UMNGENI-UTHUKELA WATER
HEAD OFFICE • P. O. Box 9 • Pietermaritzburg 3200
310 Burger Street • Pietermaritzburg 3201 • Republic of South Africa
Telephone (033) 341-1111 • Fax (033) 341-1084
E-mail: info@umgeni.co.za • Internet: <http://www.umgeni.co.za>

Think water, think uMngeni-uThukela Water

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance



26 July 2024

Sarah Sbongile Mngwengwe (981147129)
Grad School of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear SS Mngwengwe,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006972/2024
Project title: Examining the management of change from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 03 May 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 26 July 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 4: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM:

I..... have been informed about the study entitled: “**Examining the management of change from a water board into a regional water utility in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**” by researcher Sarah Sibongile Mngwengwe Student number 981147129.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on [REDACTED] and email address or sibongile.mngwengwe@umgeni.co.za or 981147129@stu.ukza.ac.za.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001 Durban 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za