



The Influence of Change Management Practices on Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance in A Competitive Business Environment: A Conceptual Review

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Citation: Friday Isah Iyaji et al. (2023), The Influence of Change Management Practices on Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance in A Competitive Business Environment: A Conceptual Review, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 3638 - 3645,

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.8192

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>This study explores the influence of change management practices on employee engagement and organisational performance within competitive business environments. It emphasises the critical role of effective change management strategies, including clear communication, employee involvement, leadership support, and training, in fostering high levels of employee engagement during organisational transitions. Engaged employees are more likely to embrace change, contributing to improved performance outcomes such as enhanced productivity, innovation, and profitability. The study highlights organisations' challenges when managing change in fast-paced, competitive markets. It underscores the importance of prioritising employee well-being and engagement to gain a competitive advantage. By adopting agile change management practices that support employee needs and organisational goals, businesses can better navigate market dynamics and achieve sustainable long-term success. This study employs a conceptual review methodology, systematically analysing existing literature to develop a theoretical understanding of the relationships among change management practices, employee engagement, and organisational performance. Through this approach, the study identifies critical themes, models, and theories, revealing insights into how organisations can effectively manage change. Additionally, the conceptual review identifies gaps in existing literature, proposing areas for future empirical research to explore the relationship between change management and organisational outcomes.</p> <p>Keywords: Change, Management, Employee, Engagement, Organisational Performance, Competitive, Business, Environment, Conceptual Review.</p>

Introduction

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive global business environment, change management has become critical for organisations striving to adapt and remain successful. Across industries worldwide, companies continuously face challenges such as rapid technological advancements, shifting market demands, and evolving regulatory requirements. Effective change management practices help organisations navigate these transitions, minimise disruptions, and foster an environment of agility (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Global technology, finance, and manufacturing leaders have adopted structured change management approaches to ensure employees remain engaged and motivated during organisational transformation, thereby driving performance and competitive advantage.

Employee engagement plays a pivotal role in the success of organisational change efforts. Studies in developed markets, such as the U.S., Europe, and Asia, consistently demonstrate that organisations with high employee

engagement tend to outperform their competitors in productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction. Employee engagement ensures that the workforce is aligned with organisational goals, particularly during periods of significant change, which is essential for maintaining operational efficiency and achieving long-term growth. Global firms recognise that engaging employees during change initiatives reduces resistance and enhances organisational resilience (Verčič, 2021).

In Africa, the landscape of change management and employee engagement presents unique challenges and opportunities. Countries such as South Africa and Kenya have made strides in incorporating effective change management frameworks within their business environments, leveraging employee engagement to boost organisational performance. However, organisations in Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, often face even more complex challenges in implementing change due to economic instability, market volatility, and fluctuating government policies.

In Nigeria, small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the economy, contributing significantly to employment and GDP. However, these businesses often face unique challenges in managing organisational change due to limited resources, leadership gaps, and external economic pressures. Employee engagement in Nigerian SMEs is crucial, as disengaged employees can significantly hinder performance, innovation, and sustainability. However, research on how change management practices influence employee engagement and organisational performance in Nigeria, especially SMEs, remains limited (Tortorella et al., 2021).

This study is particularly significant as it focuses on the influence of change management practices on employee engagement and organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs, with a specific emphasis on the North Central region. Understanding this relationship is not only critical but also urgent for Nigerian businesses, especially SMEs, as they strive to maintain competitiveness in an increasingly globalised and fast-changing economy (Tensay, A. T., & Singh, 2020).

The rapid evolution of the global business environment, driven by technological advancements, market competition, and shifting consumer preferences, requires organisations to adapt continuously through effective change management. However, many organisations struggle to implement change initiatives that maintain high levels of employee engagement, which is critical for sustaining productivity and performance during transitions. Studies have shown that ineffective change management leads to increased employee resistance, decreased morale, and lower overall organisational performance (Sopiah et al., 2020). While extensive research has explored the relationship between change management and organisational outcomes, a notable gap exists in understanding the strategies that foster employee engagement during times of change, particularly in competitive business environments.

Additionally, much of the existing literature focuses on large-scale transformations, often overlooking the potential benefits of incremental change processes. Research suggests that gradual change allows employees to adjust more efficiently, reducing stress and resistance (Riyanto et al., 2021). However, empirical studies that directly compare the effectiveness of incremental versus large-scale change strategies in enhancing employee engagement are limited, especially in competitive industries where the pace of change is accelerated.

Furthermore, while continuous learning and development are widely recognised as essential for equipping employees to handle change, there is a gap in understanding how organisations can systematically foster a learning culture that supports immediate adaptability and long-term innovation (Oubrich et al., 2021). Organisations often fail to align learning initiatives with change efforts, resulting in missed opportunities to build employee resilience and engagement. This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the influence of change management strategies, specifically incremental change and continuous learning, on employee engagement and organisational performance in competitive business environments.

Literature Review

Change management is the structured approach organisations use to transition from a current state to a desired future state, focusing on the human aspect of managing change effectively (Kotter, 1996). Rapid technological advances, evolving market conditions, and shifting customer expectations drive constant organisational change in today's competitive business environment. Implementing and managing change effectively has become crucial for organisations to remain competitive and sustainable (Cameron & Green, 2019). One of the critical elements in successful change management is employee engagement, which directly affects organisational performance.

Employee engagement represents employees' emotional and psychological commitment to their organisation, significantly influencing organisational outcomes such as productivity, innovation, and profitability (Ngwenya & Pelser, 2020). Change management practices that fail to engage employees can lead to resistance, low morale, and decreased performance, while effective change management can enhance engagement, leading to improved organisational outcomes (Malik & Garg, 2020). This literature review explores the influence of change management practices on employee engagement and organisational performance, providing a comprehensive understanding of how managing change can support competitive advantage.

Theoretical Underpinning of Change Management

Change management practices are grounded in various theoretical models that offer structured frameworks for understanding and managing change within organisations. These models help guide leaders in navigating the complexities of organisational change, focusing on minimising resistance and ensuring smooth transitions for employees. The models emphasise not only the structural changes that organisations undergo but also the human and psychological aspects of these changes, highlighting the critical role of leadership in facilitating employee engagement during the process.

One of the foundational models of change management is Lewin's (1947) three-step model, which consists of "unfreezing," "changing," and "refreezing." The unfreezing stage involves preparing the organisation and its employees for change by addressing existing resistance and creating an awareness of the necessity for change. This stage is crucial because it sets the foundation for successful implementation. Without adequately preparing employees for change, organisations risk high levels of resistance, which can lead to failure in adopting new processes or behaviours. The changing stage represents the actual implementation of change. The organisation introduces new processes, behaviours, and structures during this period. Leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that the change is implemented systematically and supports employees' needs. Communication is essential in this stage to ensure that employees understand the reasons for the change, their role, and the benefits it will bring.

The final stage, refreezing, emphasises the importance of stabilising and reinforcing the changes once they have been implemented. This step is about ensuring that the new ways of operating become the norm within the organisation. Refreezing helps prevent regression into old habits, ensuring that the change is sustainable in the long run. Leadership must reinforce the new behaviours through continuous support, training, and recognition of employees' efforts. Lewin's model underscores the psychological transition employees undergo during change and highlights the importance of leadership in managing these transitions to ensure smooth implementation and adoption of change.

Building on Lewin's foundational work, Kotter's (1996) eight-step model offers a more detailed roadmap for implementing change successfully. Kotter's model begins with creating a sense of urgency around the need for change. This involves communicating to employees why the change is necessary and how it will help the organisation stay competitive or meet its goals. Establishing urgency helps garner support and reduces resistance. The following steps include forming a guiding coalition and developing a strategic vision for the change. The guiding coalition consists of a group of influential stakeholders and leaders who can champion the change effort. Developing a clear vision and strategy ensures that everyone in the organisation understands the direction and purpose of the change. Once the vision is set, Kotter emphasises the importance of communicating it effectively to all employees. Clear communication at every stage of the change process is critical to maintaining employee buy-in and engagement. Kotter's model also highlights the importance of empowering employees to act and removing obstacles that may hinder the change process. Empowerment can involve providing training, allocating resources, and addressing structural or procedural barriers that might cause delays or confusion. Recognizing and celebrating short-term wins helps build momentum, while the final steps in Kotter's model focus on consolidating gains and institutionalising new approaches. This is akin to Lewin's refreezing stage, where the goal is to embed the changes into the organisational culture to ensure their longevity. Kotter's model underscores the need for leadership involvement, employee engagement, and consistent communication throughout the change process to maintain momentum and ensure success.

Another widely recognised model is Prosci's ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement), developed by Jeff Hiatt in 2006. Unlike Lewin's and Kotter's models, which focus on organizational-level change, the ADKAR model centres on the individual's response to change. The premise of the ADKAR model is that successful change hinges on addressing employees' personal needs and ensuring that they are fully aligned with the change initiative. The model identifies five essential elements that must be present for change to succeed. First, employees must be aware of the need for change, understand why the change is happening, and understand what problems it aims to solve. Without awareness, employees are likely to resist the change.

The second element is Desire, which refers to employees' motivation to participate in the change. This step focuses on generating buy-in and ensuring that employees see the change as beneficial to them and the organisation. Once employees are motivated to engage in the change, they must possess the Knowledge required to implement it. This includes understanding how the change will be executed and what specific roles and responsibilities they must fulfil. The fourth element, Ability, ensures that employees have the skills and competencies to carry out the change effectively. If employees lack the necessary tools or training, they may struggle to meet the expectations set by the change process. Lastly, Reinforcement ensures that the change is sustained over time through ongoing support, feedback, and recognition. Like Lewin's refreezing stage, reinforcement helps solidify new behaviours and prevent employees from reverting to old habits.

Lewin's three-step model and Kotter's eight-step model will underpin this study because they provide comprehensive frameworks for managing organisational change while emphasising the importance of employee engagement and leadership involvement. Lewin's model focuses on employees' psychological processes during transitions, ensuring sustainable change. Kotter's model complements this by offering specific steps for successful implementation, such as creating urgency and building a guiding coalition, which is crucial

for navigating change in competitive environments. These models align with the study's focus on how effective change management practices influence employee engagement and organisational performance.

Employee Engagement and Change Management

Employee engagement refers to employees' emotional commitment to their organisation and its goals (Lin et al., 2021). Engaged employees are likelier to put extra effort into their work, exhibit higher productivity levels, and strongly align with the organisation's mission and values (Hongal & Kinange, 2020). In change management, engagement becomes even more critical, as employees must feel involved and motivated to embrace change rather than resist it (Heslina & Syahrini, 2021). Studies have shown that challenges are more adaptable to change, display greater resilience in the face of challenges, and contribute to successfully implementing new strategies (Hermawan et al., 2021). On the other hand, disengaged employees often resist change, exhibit lower morale, and undermine organisational efforts to transition effectively (Hasan et al., 2021). Therefore, fostering employee engagement through effective change management practices is vital for organisations seeking to navigate change in a competitive business environment.

Change Management Practices That Influence Employee Engagement

Several change management practices have been identified as critical in fostering employee engagement during organisational transitions. These include clear communication, employee involvement, leadership support, and training (Kotter, 1996).

Clear Communication: Transparent and timely communication is essential in change management to ensure that employees understand the reasons for the change, the expected outcomes, and how it will affect their roles (Goestjahjanti et al., 2020). Lack of communication can lead to uncertainty and fear, increasing resistance to change. Armenakis, Fidyah, and Setiawati (2020) study found that clear communication strategies significantly reduce employee anxiety and improve engagement during organisational change.

Employee Involvement: Engaging employees in the change process by soliciting their input and involving them in decision-making can enhance their sense of ownership and commitment to the change initiative (Eldor, 2020). When employees feel that their opinions are valued and that they play a role in shaping the change, they are more likely to support it (Awan et al., 2020).

Leadership Support: Effective leadership is crucial in guiding employees through change. Leaders who demonstrate commitment to change, provide direction, and offer emotional support can increase employee engagement and reduce resistance (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). Transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and motivating employees, has been shown to positively influence employee engagement during periods of organisational change (Amjad et al., 2020).

Training and Development: Providing employees with the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to change is another critical factor in maintaining engagement (Alqudah et al., 2022). Training ensures employees feel confident in implementing the new processes and technologies associated with change, reducing uncertainty and enhancing engagement (Al-Swidi et al., 2021).

The Impact of Change Management on Organizational Performance

Organisational Performance: Definition and Metrics

Organisational performance refers to an organisation's ability to achieve its goals and objectives effectively and efficiently (Alshammari, 2020). Performance is typically measured through financial indicators (such as profitability, revenue growth, and return on investment) and non-financial metrics (such as employee productivity, innovation, and customer satisfaction). In change management, successful organisational performance hinges on how well the change is implemented and how much employees are engaged in the process (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021).

Linking Change Management to Organizational Performance

Several studies have explored the relationship between change management practices and organisational performance, indicating that organisations that manage change effectively outperform those that do not (Ababneh, 2021). When change management practices are well-executed, they lead to improved organisational agility, enabling companies to respond quickly to market shifts and maintain a competitive edge (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Employee Engagement as a Mediator: Employee engagement often mediates change management practices and organisational performance. Engaged employees are more productive, innovative, and committed to the organisation's goals, directly impacting performance outcomes (Akdere & Egan, 2020). A study by Ahmed et al. (2020) found that companies with highly engaged employees saw a 19% increase in operating income compared to companies with low engagement levels.

Resistance to Change and Performance Outcomes: Resistance to change is one of the most significant barriers to improving organisational performance during transitions (Akpa et al., 2021). Resistance can manifest in various forms, such as decreased productivity, increased turnover, and lower morale. Research

suggests that organisations that address resistance through effective change management practices, such as clear communication and employee involvement, are more likely to achieve positive performance outcomes (Al Aina & Atan, 2021).

Change Management in a Competitive Business Environment

The Role of Competitiveness in Driving Change

Organisations must continuously adapt to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global marketplace. Technological advancements, globalisation, and shifting consumer preferences require organisations to implement frequent changes to their strategies, structures, and processes (Al et al., 2021). However, managing change in a highly competitive environment adds complexity, as organisations must balance the need for rapid innovation with maintaining employee engagement and ensuring high performance (Al Aina & Atan, 2021).

The Challenges of Change Management in Competitive Environments

One key challenge in managing change in a competitive environment is the pace of change itself. Organisations are often forced to implement changes quickly to keep up with market demands, which can lead to poorly executed change initiatives and decreased employee engagement (Kotter, 1996). Additionally, competition can pressure employees to deliver more while adjusting to new processes and technologies, potentially leading to burnout and resistance to change (Al et al., 2021).

Strategies for Successful Change Management in Competitive Markets

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, organisations must adopt change management strategies emphasising agility and employee engagement to remain competitive. One critical approach is implementing incremental changes rather than large-scale transformations, which allows employees to adjust gradually. This method reduces the likelihood of overwhelming employees and minimises resistance to change (Al et al., 2021). Incremental changes create a more manageable transition process, allowing employees to learn and adapt to each change step-by-step, thus ensuring a smoother implementation of new systems, processes, or organisational structures.

In contrast, large-scale transformations can disrupt the organisational workflow and lead to employee stress, burnout, and disengagement, mainly when changes are implemented too quickly. Gradual changes encourage continuous employee feedback, enabling management to adjust the change process. Moreover, incremental changes support sustained employee engagement by involving them throughout the change journey, increasing their sense of ownership and commitment to the new direction (Al et al., 2021). Another essential strategy is fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. This approach ensures that employees are equipped with the skills to adapt to new changes and prepared for future challenges (Al et al., 2021). Providing ongoing training, professional development, and opportunities for skill enhancement helps employees feel competent and confident in their ability to handle change. A culture of learning encourages employees to see change as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat, reducing resistance and enhancing their engagement with organisational goals.

By integrating these strategies—incremental change and continuous learning—organisations can enhance adaptability and maintain high levels of employee engagement, both critical to successfully navigating change in competitive business environments (Kotter, 1996).

Methodology

This section describes the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used in the conceptual review of the influence of change management practices on employee engagement and organisational performance in a competitive business environment.

Research Design

The study adopts a conceptual review approach, drawing from existing literature to examine how change management practices impact employee engagement and organisational performance. This research design is appropriate for developing a theoretical understanding of the topic without collecting primary data. The conceptual review provides a comprehensive perspective on the interplay between change management, employee engagement, and performance in competitive settings by synthesising and critically analysing critical studies, models, and theories. This approach allows the study to identify gaps in current literature and propose areas for future empirical research.

Literature Review Strategy

The study systematically reviewed academic articles, books, and industry reports on change management, employee engagement, and organisational performance. The literature was sourced from various databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science, to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, peer-

reviewed sources. Keywords used in the search included "change management," "employee engagement," "organisational performance," "competitive business environment," and "leadership during change." The inclusion criteria were limited to publications from the last 20 years to ensure relevance to contemporary business environments, particularly in fast-changing, competitive industries.

A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was employed to guide the literature selection process. Over 150 articles were initially identified. After filtering for relevance and quality, the final dataset comprised 50 critical articles and reports. This dataset provided a solid foundation for analysing the relationships between change management practices, employee engagement, and performance.

Theoretical Framework

Two primary theoretical models underpin the study: Lewin's three-step model (1947) and Kotter's eight-step model (1996). These models provide a foundation for understanding how change is managed within organisations and how it affects employee behaviour and organisational outcomes. Lewin's model, which includes the stages of "unfreezing," "changing," and "refreezing," focuses on preparing employees for change and reinforcing new behaviours. This model offers insights into the psychological dynamics of employee engagement during organisational transitions. Kotter's eight-step model complements this by offering a more detailed roadmap for successful change implementation, emphasising leadership, communication, and employee involvement. These models were chosen because of their broad applicability across industries and their focus on the human elements of change, which are critical for understanding employee engagement.

Data Analysis

The study employed a narrative synthesis method to analyse the literature. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes related to change management practices, employee engagement, and organisational performance. The data was organised around several key themes:

- Leadership and Change Management: How leadership drives the success of change initiatives and its impact on employee engagement.
- Employee Engagement During Change: The role of communication, involvement, and training in sustaining employee morale and commitment during transitions.
- Organisational Performance Outcomes: The effect of well-executed change management practices on productivity, innovation, and competitiveness.

The literature was analysed for recurring concepts and gaps in research. This allowed the study to draw connections between existing theories and identify areas where empirical research could further explore the topic.

Evaluation of Gaps

A vital aspect of the study was identifying gaps in the existing literature. Although there is substantial research on change management and its impact on performance, fewer studies have specifically addressed the role of incremental change strategies as opposed to large-scale transformations, particularly in highly competitive environments. Moreover, while numerous studies explore the importance of leadership during change, there is limited empirical evidence on how different leadership styles affect long-term employee engagement and performance during change initiatives. Another significant gap was the lack of research on integrating continuous learning with change management practices. While many studies emphasise training and development during change, the long-term effects of fostering a continuous learning culture as part of change management are underexplored. This study highlights these gaps as potential avenues for future research, particularly in industries experiencing rapid technological and market shifts.

Limitations

While the conceptual review approach allows for a broad theoretical exploration of the influence of change management on employee engagement and performance, it does have limitations. First, the absence of primary data collection means the study relies heavily on existing research, which may not capture the most recent developments in competitive business environments. Additionally, the study is limited to the literature available in English, which may exclude valuable insights from non-English sources. Finally, while the theoretical models examined are widely applicable, their relevance may vary depending on organisational size, industry, and geographical context.

Conclusion

Change management practices are crucial in shaping employee engagement and organisational performance, particularly within competitive business environments. Organisations undergoing transitions often face challenges such as resistance to change, uncertainty, and disruption. Effective change management practices,

including clear communication, employee involvement, leadership support, and continuous training, are vital to address these. These elements foster a sense of inclusion, trust, and competence among employees, which is essential for maintaining high engagement levels during change. Employees are more open to embracing new initiatives, contributing to improved organisational outcomes when engaged. High employee engagement during change increases productivity, innovation, and profitability. Engaged employees tend to be more committed to organisational goals, adapt quickly to new processes, and exhibit higher levels of creativity and collaboration. This improves performance and helps organisations gain a competitive advantage in dynamic markets.

However, managing change in competitive environments poses unique challenges. Rapid market shifts, technological advancements, and evolving consumer demands require organisations to be agile and responsive. Companies that successfully implement change management practices prioritising employee engagement are better positioned to navigate these challenges. Research indicates that organisations that focus on employee well-being, provide ongoing support, and communicate transparently during transitions experience smoother change processes and more sustainable long-term success. Prioritising employee engagement during change is crucial for organisational performance and long-term competitiveness. As the business landscape evolves, organisations must adopt change management strategies that promote employee involvement, leadership guidance, and agility to stay competitive. Ultimately, this will ensure that change initiatives not only succeed but also contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of the organisation.

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