

A Systematic Literature Review

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Our inspiration for this research is rooted in our interest for organizational psychology. We find it fascinating first of all because of its relevance today. A lot of people spend most of their everyday at their workplace, having other roles, expectations and demands than in their private life, either as a leader or an employee. We are grateful for the opportunity to explore this field and investigate the complexities of leadership styles and their impact on organizational change.

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We are now closing this chapter in our life that is our bachelor's degree, feeling grateful, wistful and relieved.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. Literature review.....	5
1.1.1. Leadership and Organizational Change.....	7
1.1.2. Leadership Styles.....	8
1.2. Background for choice of topic	11
2. Methodology:.....	12
2.1. Search Strategy	12
2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	13
2.3. Selection and Data Extraction	13
2.4. Bias Assessment	15
3. Results.....	16
3.1 Results from article 1	18
3.2 Results from article 2.....	19
3.3 Results from article 3.....	20
3.4. Results from article 4.....	22
3.5 Results from article 5.....	24
3.6. Significant findings.....	26
4. Discussion:.....	27
4.1. General interpretation of results	27
4.2. Limitations.....	29
5. Conclusion:	33
7. References:	34

The study of employee's reactions to organizational change affected by leadership styles: A Systematic Literature Review

Abstract

Background: Research has shown that leadership styles significantly influence outcomes of organizational change. Previous studies underline the need to understand how different leadership approaches affect employee reactions during periods of change.

Aims: This systematic literature review aims to try to get a broader understanding of how leadership affects employees' reactions to change and doing so by reviewing the already existing research on the subject. This paper reviews studies that examine different parts of this concept, including different leadership styles and different aspects of employees' reactions, some being trust, self-efficacy and motivation. This review therefore aims to shed light on the subject, emphasizing the significance of understanding this process to develop the most effective techniques for successful organizational change.

Method: A systematic literature review was conducted, focusing on empirical studies published from 2019 to 2024. The review included peer-review journal articles which investigated different aspects of the relationship between leadership styles and employee reactions during organizational change.

Results: The result of this review indicate the importance of fostering trust between the leader and employees, as well as facilitating a work environment that encourages and motivate employees in order to develop high self-efficacy, that will in turn make the change process more efficient.

Conclusion: This systematic literature review emphasizes the influence of leadership styles on employees' reactions to organizational change, highlighting trust as a key mediator. Additionally, it underscores the importance of psychological factors like self-efficacy in shaping employees' attitudes toward change. However, further research is needed to better understand contextual factors, ultimately offering valuable insights for developing effective change management strategies that recognize the significant contribution of employees.

Key words: Leadership, Leadership styles, Organizational change, Organizational development, Trust, Self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

1.1. Literature review

One of the biggest challenges that all organizations are facing today is the rapid development of the market. We live in a time where the market environment evolves more quickly than priorly, and it is therefore crucial for a business to be able to adapt by managing change in their organizations (Lei et al., 2019). Changes in the strategies, structures, and operational procedures of organizations occur frequently and are referred to as organizational change (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 377). These changes can be anything from expansion or shrinking a branch within the company or other form of restructuring due to adapt to development in technology, and cultural, political or societal changes (Kotter, 1995). Unsuccessful organizational changes often stem from inadequate management. It is therefore of interest to most businesses that this topic is studied to develop the most appropriate evidence-based techniques to keep up with their competitors (Kotter, 1995). The change process in an organization has multiple components affecting how successful the transformation is. Hence, it is therefore relevant to consider each of these factors and how they interact with each other to better understand organizational change (Kotter, 1995).

The forces driving change are numerous and typically operate at various levels, reflecting a complex interplay of factors that require adaptation within organizations. These forces can be broadly categorized into several key areas: global politics, economic shocks, technological advancements, competitive pressures, social trends, and workforce dynamics (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 378). Global politics influence organizational strategies through regulatory changes and geopolitical tensions. Economic shocks, such as financial crises or sudden market shifts, require immediate organizational responses to maintain stability. Technological advancements continuously redefine operational capabilities and market opportunities, compelling organizations to innovate. Competitive pressures drive organizations to enhance efficiency and differentiate their offerings. Social trends, reflecting shifts in consumer preferences and societal values, impact organizational practices and product demands. Lastly, changes within the workforce, including demographic shifts and evolving expectations, challenge organizations to adapt their management and operational approaches (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 378). Collectively, these forces shape the landscape within which

organizations operate, demanding agile and strategic responses to navigate the complexities of change.

One of the most recognized change models is developed by Kurt Lewin (1951). This model illustrates the perspective that change is seen as the result of the dynamics between opposing forces (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 378). The process of change is divided into three distinct phases. The unfreezing stage involves acknowledgement of a need for change and preparing people for change. In the second phase, called the changing phase, is where the actual shift occurs. This is where experimenting with new ways of thinking, behaviours and processes takes place. The refreezing phase aims to develop the new changes into stable structures and procedures (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 378). The model has been a great contribution to highlight the importance of managing transitions effectively to ensure that changes are not only implemented, but function as sustainable and ingrained in the organizational culture.

Another model is the transition curve, which describes how change affects people's patterns of reaction in four phases. These phases are called the denial phase, the reaction phase, the exploration phase, and the adaptation phase. This model is based on knowledge about reactions to traumatic events, deaths, accidents, and serious illnesses, but is considered to have utility in other situations where adaptability and adjustment to new conditions are required (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 379). The first phase is known as the denial or shock phase and involves encountering a profound experience that can lead to cognitive and emotional blocking (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 379). In the second phase, known as the reaction phase, a mental resistance to the change in question arises within the individual. In this phase, strong reactions may be triggered, similar to those mentioned above. Physiological reactions may also occur in some individuals. The exploration phase, also known as the processing phase, constitutes the third phase of the transition curve. Here, the processing of difficult or challenging experiences often begins to take effect, making it easier to focus forward on new opportunities. The last phase of the transition curve emphasizes focusing on future endeavours. Here, engagement and positivity re-emerge, and the vision of opportunities expands (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 379). There is great variation in the amount of time it takes for an individual to move through the transition curve (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 379). This model could

be useful for leaders to be more familiar with and to more easily identify various signs associated with reactions to change.

Organizational change capacity (OCC) is a newer theoretical framework for how to successfully manage change (Soparnot, 2011). Judge (2011) defined it as “a dynamic, multidimensional capability that enables an organization to upgrade or revise existing organizational competencies, while cultivating new competencies that enable the organization to survive and prosper” (p. 14). OCC highlights how the success of a change process in an organization highly depends on the leader to have the competencies and ability to navigate the employees through the implementation, i.e. building trust among the employees (Yasir et al., 2016).

A further significant aspect in relation to organizational change is the domain of change management. This field concerns the leadership of change and transformation within organizations. This is a context in which leadership roles frequently can be confronted with particularly challenging tasks (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 382). The process of implementing change places distinct demands on leaders, as it often represents a challenging period for both the management team and the workforce. Given the significant influence management has on employees, regarding behaviour and attitude, it is intriguing to examine how the approach of leadership to organizational change affects employees’ reactions.

1.1.1. Leadership and Organizational Change

Leadership has been defined as one of the most important aspects of making organizational transformation successful (Kotter, 1995). Yukl et al. (2020, p. 26) defined leadership as “a process that can influence others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”. Therefore, in organizational change, leadership works as one of the key components for generating the change, meaning creating and making a vision but also actually implementing it (Tayal et al., 2018). Change in an organization can be unpredictable and cause employees to feel a level of uncertainty. The leaders therefore have the responsibility to facilitate and motivate their members (Yukl et al., 2020, p.126).

There are multiple ways to understand leadership in change, but one way to look at it is that one can either lead change through an attitude-centred approach, or through a role-centred

approach (Yukl et al., 2020, p.127). This suggests that in organizational transformation, one can focus on changing the attitudes in a workplace, meaning aiming to align the employees' visions so that their values correspond with one other, and thereby influencing their behaviour. This happens through, for example, a training program and can in turn also have a positive effect on interpersonal and technical skills (Yukl et al., 2020, p.127). The other approach, the role-centred approach, involves “changing work roles by reorganizing the workflow, redesigning jobs to include different activities and responsibilities, modifying authority relationships, changing the criteria and procedures for evaluation of work, and changing the reward system.” (Yukl et al., 2020, s.127). The idea is that when employees are given a new environment regarding a new expected behaviour or role, they are more likely to engage and adjust their attitudes to align with this new role (Yukl et al., 2020, s.127). Which approach is the most effective has been discussed for multiple years, but Yukl et al. (2020, s.127) argue that a combination where they are mutually supportive is the most effective.

As previously mentioned, unsuccessful organizational changes are often due to deficiencies in management practices (Yasir et al., 2016). When the management fails to provide the support or resources needed, the entire change process can be affected. For that reason, appropriate leadership is essential when guiding and directing the employees in periods of transition within an organization. Multiple leadership styles have been studied in an effort to discern the most effective strategies for organizational change.

1.1.2. Leadership Styles

In discussing well-known leadership styles in change processes, the two central styles often highlighted are transformational and authoritarian leadership styles. The transformational style is characterized by inspiring and motivating employees to achieve common goals and visions. The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by James McGregor Burns (1978) in his book titled “Leadership” (Tang, 2019). This leadership style focuses on developing and empowering employees' skills and potential, and it can be highly effective in mobilizing support for change initiatives through positive influence and visionary leadership (Tang, 2019). On the other hand, the authoritarian style is marked by a more controlling approach, where the leader makes decisions and exercises authority without necessarily consulting or involving employees (Tang, 2019). While authoritarian leadership can be effective in crisis situations or when quick

decisions are needed, it can also create resistance and discontent among employees in change processes (Tang, 2019). By exploring these leadership styles in the context of change processes, insights can be gained into how different leadership approaches can impact employees' reactions and responses to organizational changes.

In general, change management can be challenging as leaders must consider the employees and the various needs that exist within the workplace. The development of strategic abilities in leaders related to the identification of employee reactions enables leaders to carry out change work based on these observations and the knowledge around them. Problem-solving strategies are other methods that can be useful in the context of change management to try to transform negative energy into positive energy (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 384). The development of various strategies will have a positive impact on the work climate and environment and will act as a protective factor in demanding change processes.

1.1.3. Employees during organizational change

Employees play a crucial role in the organizational change process, being the ones who are directly affected by its impact and therefore navigating how the process of the change unfolds. Miscommunication, lack of vision, and resistance to change can further influence the process (Yukl, 2020, s.126). The employees in an organization will contribute significantly to how successful the implementation is, in the way that the degree of how they accept and support the change presented to them by their leadership, is a determining factor (Tayal et al., 2018). This can also be correlated with employees' commitment, in other words, how their aspiration to reach the organizations' objectives translates into their behavior (West and Farr, 1989). West and Farr (1989) also stated that employees' commitment was related to employees' innovative behavior, which can affect how well an organization performs.

One can look at the change process in an organization as a dynamic process between the leader and the employees where they both play a crucial role in the success of the organizational change. To achieve this, leaders need to be able to motivate and align their employees in the change process by certain learning conditions (Tayal et al, 2018; Erdil and Keskin, 2004). A theory that portrays this is the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2022, s.473). It's a theory that highlights the dynamic process between leaders and employees

and its importance in an organization. The theory proposes that the dynamic between leader and member is a dyadic relationship that will continue to constantly develop, preferably in the favor of organizational objectives (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2022, s.473). It also highlights how certain in-groups and out-groups develop, where the in-groups end up building a relationship with their leader where certain roles occur. This in turn gives the leader the possibility to hand out opportunities for the employees to expand their work tasks by, for example, having more responsibility, which can increase both the engagement and effectiveness of an employee (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 473). On the other hand, the out-groups are the ones who choose to have a more neutral relationship with their leader, making them not a part of the “inner circle”, and therefore often accept the work tasks they already have without the need to arise from them (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2022, s.473). This theory enlightens the value of the leader-member relationship, and how to utilize this to the organization’s advantage.

Organizational changes can entail various challenges and different responses from employees within the organization. Change and the accompanying reactions from employees are significantly more demanding and challenging for leaders. Reactions can occur before, during, and after the change takes place. Kaufmann and Kaufmann, in their book on psychology in organization and leadership (2015), include a list of various reactions that exhibit resistance among employees. Negative reactions can arise due to uncertainty and fear of change. In some cases, uncertainty can lead to poorer group performance, thereby affecting the work environment (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015). Experts and researchers have recommended that it is crucial for leaders to be aware of the energy in the resistance that may arise so that they can attempt to transform this energy into positive and sensible forms that can lead to engagement and creative problem-solving (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 382). Confusion, immediate criticism, denial, cunning participation, sabotage, superficial agreement, circumvention, silence, and open rebellion are reactions that are useful to identify and be aware of. Often, it can be challenging to identify this resistance as well as to manage it. It would be beneficial for leaders to acquire an understanding that reactions are to be expected in the face of change, and it can also be helpful to gain an understanding of why resistance occurs (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 383).

The reasons for resistance, according to Conner (1992), can be summarized into several points (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 383). A lack of trust in leaders and distrust regarding

the necessity of the change can lead to negative reactions, such as resistance. Moreover, the belief in the change and its outcomes is crucial. Many might fear economic losses and worry that the costs will be too high. Some may be concerned about the possibility of personal failure and the potential loss of status. The final points address how people can perceive change as a threat to their values and ideals (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 383). One might consider that a common denominator for these reasons is the creation of uncertainty.

1.2. Background for choice of topic

Building upon existing knowledge and research in the field of leadership styles and their impact on employees' reactions to organizational change provide the foundation for this study. Drawing from the established knowledge and prior research, this study was formulated around the central inquiry: "How do leadership styles impact employees' reactions to organizational change?".

Empirical studies have explored the relationship between leadership styles and organizational change. Some previous studies have also demonstrated that leadership can play a role in shaping perceptions of change in the employees. However, various topics regarding reactions and attitudes towards change, such as individual readiness and willingness, have not been explored enough in the literature (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021). Thus, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how leadership styles can have an impact on employees in the process of organizational change. This will provide insights that can inform organizational leadership and change management practices.

2. Methodology:

2.1. Search Strategy

In the development of this systematic review, we adhered strictly to the 2020 updated guidelines for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses outlined in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement, as revised by Page et al. (2020). This recent update was crucial in guiding our methodology, particularly in enhancing transparency, completeness, and reproducibility of our findings. The updated guidelines provided a structured framework for our review process, emphasizing the importance of reporting risk of bias within studies, the integration of a new flow diagram, and the inclusion of additional items specific to the registration and protocol of systematic reviews. This approach ensured that the review maintained the standards of quality and reliability, enabling future researchers to replicate or build upon our work effectively.

In the process of conducting the literature search for the systematic literature review, a set of keywords and combinations were developed to specify the search for relevant literature. This process included evaluating primary search terms, while also considering related terminology, synonyms and various combinations of these. Identical searches were performed across the two databases to enhance the reliability and robustness of the search process, which minimizes potential biases. This approach does also ensure a wider coverage of the literature. The keywords utilized included “Leadership” or “Leadership Style” combined with “Organizational Development” or “Organizational Change”. These combinations were strategically chosen to capture a broad spectrum of relevant literature for the systematic literature review. The search strategy employed Boolean operators, involving utilization of “OR” and “AND” to refine the search strategy and aim at encompassing diverse perspectives within the field of study. The systematic selection and utilization of search terminology and strategies provided a solid foundation for the systematic literature review.

The searches were conducted across two prominent databases named Scopus and PsychINFO. The utilization of two databases provided a broader range of research and peer-reviewed publications. Simultaneously, this was a method for reducing potential bias within the review process. By relying on more than one single database, the systematic literature review

aimed to capture an increased representative sample of the available literature and therefore minimizing potential bias (Siddaway et al., 2019). Overall, the incorporation of both PsychINFO and Scopus in the search process provides a systematic approach to identifying relevant literature for the study.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In establishing the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the article search for the study, careful consideration was given to ensure the relevance of the selected literature. Articles were included if they met the following criteria: (1) publication in peer-reviewed journals, (2) availability of the full text in English and (3) publication date from 2019 to present. If the study did not meet these criteria, they were excluded. The selection of the articles was firstly based on their publication in peer-reviewed journals, ensuring the credibility of the literature. Emphasis was placed on peer-reviewed publications because the studies have gone through evaluation and met established academic standards. The accessibility of articles in English with full text availability was also considered as a criterion to enhance the opportunity to perform a review and an analysis. In the planning of the search process, it was determined that the articles needed to be peer-reviewed to ensure academic quality. The decision to limit the search to articles published from the year 2019 was made to target the most current insights, findings, and developments within the field.

2.3. Selection and Data Extraction

Based on the strategically chosen keywords and the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the literature search for the study was conducted. As a result of the search process, a total of 580 articles were identified through the two databases utilized. Scopus provided 107 articles for the study and the results from the search through PsycINFO provided 473 articles. The total amount of articles retrieved from the search was imported to EndNote to facilitate an overview of the search results. This process also enabled the identification and removal of duplicate articles published in both databases. When the duplicates were removed, 578 unique articles were left for further review.

The following phase included accepting or rejecting the titles of the articles from the searches. After a thorough review of all the titles, 27 remained for further examination of the content of the abstracts and the full texts. The high number of rejected articles based on their

titles was for the reason that the utilization of broad and inclusive keywords in the literature search. The search terms were strategically selected to capture a wide field of relevant literature within the topic. For that reason, a generous number of articles did not meet our inclusion criteria, especially regarding the criteria based on phenomena of interest for the study, which are leadership styles and organizational change. The selection criteria were aligned with the thematic focus of the systematic literature review, prioritizing titles that closely corresponded to the research topic. In accordance with established guidelines and recommendations to perform a rigorous literature selection process, particular emphasis was placed on identifying and selecting titles that demonstrated the greatest relevance and specificity to the systematic literature reviews objectives. The following step was to evaluate the abstracts of the remaining literature to identify which articles that seemed the most suitable for further consideration. After this process, 10 articles were accepted according to the abstract. The final stage involved a thorough evaluation of the full articles remaining to determine their alignment for the review. Ultimately, a total of 5 articles were selected as the most relevant articles for inclusion in the systematic literature review.

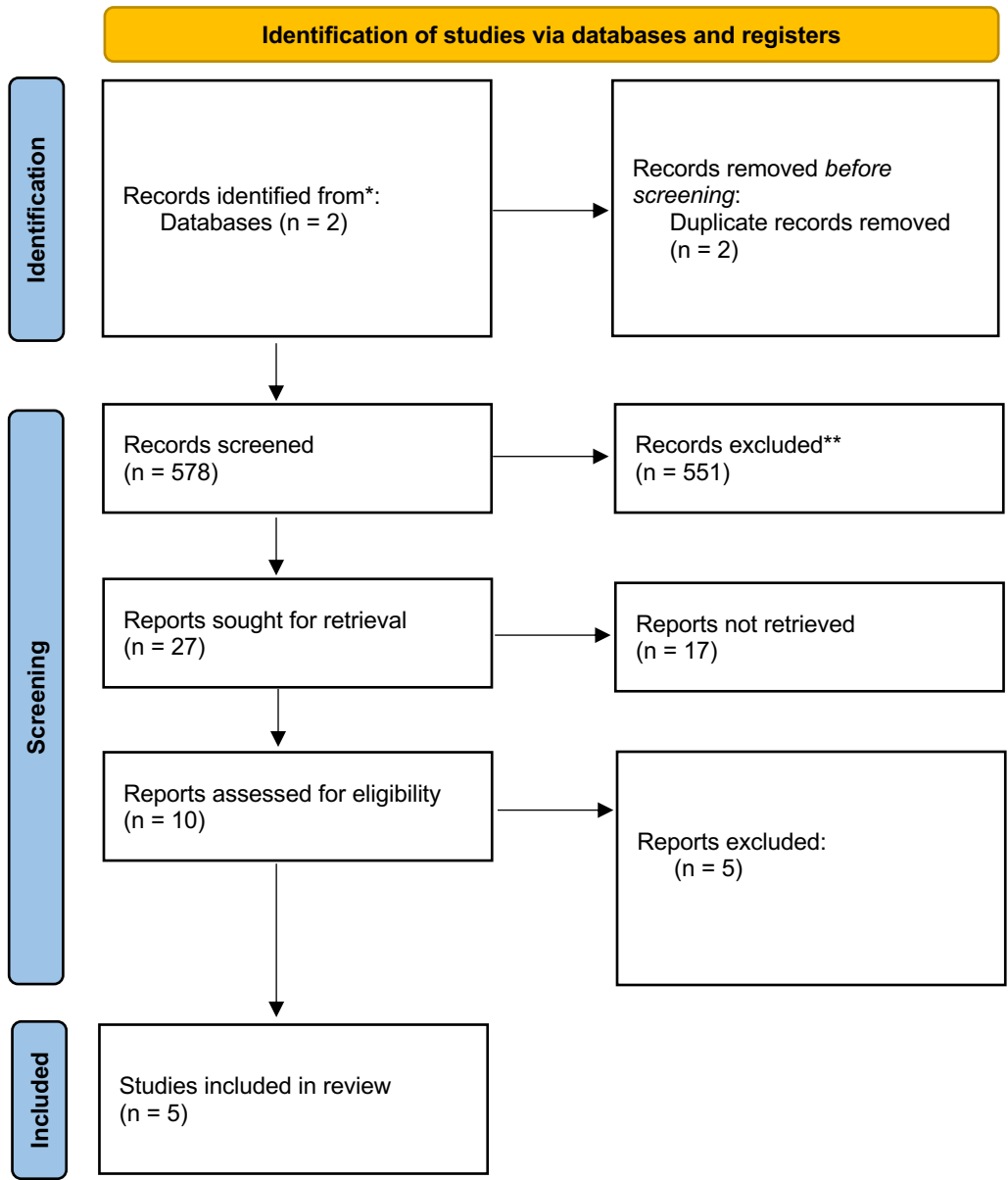


Figure 1. Flowchart of selecting the 5 final articles analysed and systematically reviewed.

2.4. Bias Assessment

In this systematic literature review, various requirements were employed to assess and minimize potential biases at various stages of the systematic review process. Firstly, during the literature search phase, the utilization of two widely recognized databases, Scopus and PsycINFO, resulted in bias reduction by ensuring a broader range of research and peer-reviewed publications. This approach also ensured that the potential risk of missing relevant literature that is exclusive to one

single database was reduced (Siddaway et al., 2019). Using multiple databases was therefore significant for enhancing a higher level of representativeness in the systematic literature review.

Additionally, careful consideration was given to the selection of search strategies and terms to reduce the potential biases in identification of literature. Throughout the selection process of articles, predefined requirements such as inclusion and exclusion criteria played a role in reducing potential subjective biases that may occur during the process.

An important part of the conduction of the systematic literature search for this study is that two researchers have collaborated throughout the process. When conducting a systematic literature search with two researchers, collaborative decision-making plays a crucial role in bias assessment. The cooperation when it comes to selection and rejection of particular articles can reduce individual biases that each researcher may bring to the process. Additionally, having two researchers involved in the systematic literature search and review process can allow a higher level of thorough evaluation of each article and therefore enhance reliability and validity. By employing the named bias assessment measures, the systematic literature review aims to acquire a high level of standards concerning credibility and reliability of the review findings.

3. Results

Detailed characteristics of the five chosen studies are presented in Table 2. Four of the studies are quantitative studies alone, while one of them is a mixed-methods study. All the studies have been conducted during the process of organizational change.

Table 2: Study characteristics

	Author	Document Type	Leadership style	Key constructs	Geographic Location	Sample & Size	Measures	Study Design	Findings
1	Du J, Li NN & Luo YJ (2020)	Journal Article	Authoritarian leadership	Cognitive trust, Low perceived job mobility	China	n = 203 39 work teams	Survey; Likert-type scales	Quantitative	"The results of the model integrating authoritarian leadership, perceived job mobility, cognitive trust in the leader, and the interaction terms between these factors supported all hypotheses." (Du et al., 2020).
2	Cao, T. T. Le, P. B. (2022)	Journal Article	Transformational leadership	Reliance-based trust, Disclosure-based trust	China	n = 376 115 small and medium firms	Survey Likert-type scales	Quantitative	"Employees' trust in leaders mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational change capability." (Cao & Le, 2022). "The findings showed that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and reactions to change. Moreover, the extent of changes experienced by the employees moderated the relationship between self-efficacy and outcome variables. In other words, in high change contexts, self-efficacy appeared as a more salient and instrumental resource leading to positive reactions." (Bayraktar & Jimenez, 2020).
3	Bayraktar, Secil Jimenez, Alfredo (2020)	Journal Article	Transformational leadership	Based on Conservation of resources (COR) theory, Self-efficacy, commitment to change, Intention to change	France	n = 298	Survey	Quantitative	"Results show that work engagement and valence function as mediators in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee behaviour during change, so two motivational mechanisms are identified that shed light on the leadership process. Transformational leadership increases employees' work engagement and perceptions of attractive change consequences, subsequently evoking employee behaviour in support of change."(Faupel & Sus, 2019).
4	Faupel, Stefanie Sus, Stefan (2019)	Journal Article	Transformational leadership	Work engagement, Valence, Employee behaviour	Germany	n = 328	Survey	Quantitative	"The result of this study suggests that the employees are willing to change when they have a sense of perceived control based on collaboration with management. Factors that have an impact on the willingness and ability to change include job function, age, years of job experience, knowledge of values, company background, understanding the current challenges, understanding the urgency for change, positive attitude toward past changes and trust in leadership."(Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021).
5	Heim, Irina Sardar-Drenda, Nibedita (2021)	Journal Article	NP	Change management, Individual willingness and ability to change	Germany	n = 306 (surveys), 9 interviews	Survey, interview	Mixed-methods	

NP = not reported

3.1 Results from article 1

Article 1 intended to investigate authoritarian leadership in organizational change and how employees' low perceived job mobility in have-to exchange situations and high cognitive trust in leaders in willing-to exchange situations affected the change process (Du et al., 2020). The article defined the first condition as:

“When employees under authoritarianism perceive low job mobility, they are more likely to have to actively participate in organizational change; by contrast, employees are more likely to be willing to follow their authoritarian supervisors to involve into organizational change when they trust in the leader” (Du et al., 2020)

Perceived job mobility is portrayed as the employee's perception of the external job environment, in other words the lack of other job opportunities can make an employee commit more to their leader (Du et al., 2020). In addition, the employee's degree of cognitive trust in their leader means their perception of the leader's expertise, competencies and abilities (Du et al., 2020; Butler and Cantrell, 1984). This can in turn affect the employee's degree of willingness to follow their leader in an organizational change process (Du et al., 2020). Based on this they formulated three hypotheses, the first one being: “Hypothesis 1. Authoritarian leadership is negatively related to employees' active support for organizational change.” (Du et al., 2020). The results were significant and confirmed this hypothesis with the results of $\beta = -0.08$ ($p < 0.01$) meaning authoritarian leadership had an effect on employees support for organizational change, after controlling for age, gender, company, education and organizational tenure (Du et al., 2020).

The second hypothesis took the moderator perceived job mobility into account and was formulated as:

“Hypothesis 2. Perceived job mobility moderates the negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and active support for organizational change such as that the relationship is less negative when perceived job mobility is less negative when perceived job mobility is low than when its high.” (Du et al., 2020).

The findings also confirmed this hypothesis showing first that the relationship between individuals perceived job mobility and authoritarian leadership was correlated with their active support for change ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$), and secondly “the relationship between authoritarian

leadership and active support for organizational change was negative when perceived job mobility was high ($b = -0.20, p < 0.05$), and neutral when perceived job mobility was low ($b = -0.20, p < 0.05$)” (Du et al., 2020).

Lastly, their third hypothesis included cognitive trust in the leader as a moderator: “Hypothesis 3. Employees’ cognitive trust in their leader moderates the negative relationship between authoritarian leadership and active support for organizational change such that the relationship is less negative when cognitive trust is high than when it is low.” (Du et al., 2020) The results for hypothesis 3 revealed that when cognitive trust was low, authoritarian leadership had a negative effect on employees ($b = -0.4, p < 0.01$). When cognitive trust in the leader was high, the effect was neutral ($b = 0.03, ns$) (Du et al., 2020).

All hypotheses in this study were therefore confirmed.

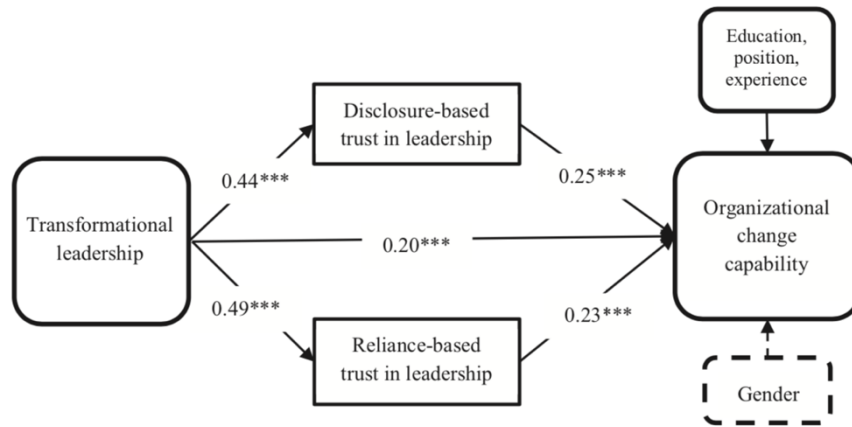
3.2 Results from article 2

As mentioned earlier, article 2 studied two types of trust, disclosure-based trust (LD) and reliance-based trust in leadership (LR), and how it correlates with transformational leadership (TL) and organizational change capability (OCC) (Cao and Le, 2022). The results from the study discovered that TL has a larger influence on reliance-based trust ($\beta = 0.492, p < 0.001$) than disclosure-based trust ($\beta = 0.445, p < 0.001$), confirming hypothesis H2.a.b being: “Transformational leadership has a positive impact on disclosure-based trust and reliance-based trust of employees in leadership” (Cao and Le, 2022).

The next hypothesis was H3.a.b: “Disclosure-based trust and reliance-based trust in leaders have positive impacts on organizational change capability” (Cao and Lee, 2022). The findings were that disclosure-based trust had a bigger effect on OCC ($\beta = 0.253, p < 0.001$) than reliance-based trust ($\beta = 0.230, p < 0.001$) in leaders (Cao and Lee, 2022).

The final hypothesis being “H4a.b. Disclosure-based trust and reliance-based trust in leaders mediate between TL and organizational change capability.” (Cao and Le, 2022). The findings showed that TL’s indirect effect on OCC was $\beta = 0.225 (p < 0.001)$, and therefore TL’s total effects on OCC was $\beta = 0.432 (p < 0.001)$, both very impressive (Cao and Le, 2022). These results support hypotheses H4a.b and therefore confirms that disclosure-based trust and reliance-

based trust in leaders can mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational change capability (Cao and Le, 2022). The results were included and presented in a finalized model being figure 2.



Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$ ---- Non-significant paths

Figure 2. Path coefficients of the structural model, extracted from Cao and Le (2022)

3.3 Results from article 3

Article 3 focused on employees' self-efficacy and how it can be a mediator between transformational leadership and reactions to change, which they define as “affective commitment” and “intention to support” (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). Furthermore, they looked at the change index, being the amount of changes the individual is experiencing, as a moderator to self-efficacy. They developed a model to display this, shown in figure 3.

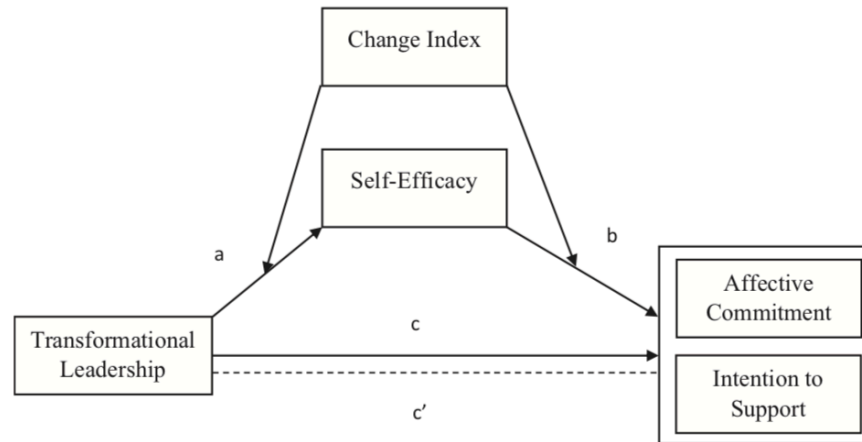


Figure 3. Moderated mediation model, extracted from Bayraktar and Jiménez (2020)

They formulated multiple hypotheses, the first one being “H1. Transformational leadership is positively and significantly related to (a) affective commitment to change (b) intention to support change.” (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). The results being $\beta = 0.457$ ($p < 0.001$) showed confirmation of this.

The following hypothesis were “H2. The relationship between transformational leadership and (a) affective commitment and (b) intention to support change is mediated by self-efficacy of employees.” (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). To explore this, we need to look at both (a) and (b) separately. The findings for (a) were first that in path a: transformational leadership was significantly correlated with self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.332$, $p < 0.001$), and in path b: self-efficacy with affective commitment ($\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), which shows partial mediation (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). They also found that in path c: even when self-efficacy was included in the model, transformational leadership was still associated with affective commitment ($\beta = 0.363$, $p < 0.001$), but in path c, the coefficient was reduced when self-efficacy was included in the model ($\beta = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$) (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). All of this confirms hypothesis H2a. Secondly for (b), path a showed that transformational leadership had a significant correlation with self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.332$, $p < 0.001$), and the same for path b: self-efficacy with intention to support change ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$) (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). Path c: here there was also a decline in the coefficient when they added self-efficacy to the model ($\beta = 0.477$, $p < 0.001$) (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). Hypothesis H2b was therefore also confirmed.

The researchers also wanted to look at a modified mediator, to see if the change index or in other words the context of the change, effected the self-efficacy. More specifically this refers to the fact that even though a workplace is going through a transition, there can still be a different amount of change, demands or pressure on different employees or groups of employees (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). This was formulated through the following hypothesis:

H3a. The relationship between transformational leadership and self-efficacy will be moderated by the extent of change such that this relationship will be stronger if there are fewer numbers of changes (or weaker if greater number of changes). In other words, transformational leadership may be associated with self-efficacy less strongly if the extent of change is high. (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020)

The results did not confirm this hypothesis.

The last hypothesis proposed in this study by Bayraktar and Jiménez (2020) was:

H3b. The relationship between self-efficacy and (a) affective commitment and (b) intention to support change will be moderated by the extent of change. More specifically, the relationship between self-efficacy and commitment and intention to support will be stronger when there are higher number of changes (or weaker when there are a lower number of changes). In other words, self-efficacy may have a stronger linkage to the commitment and intention to support when the extent of change is high.

The results supported this both for affective commitment and intention to support change. For affective commitment it was not significant in situation with low change ($\beta = 0.156$), but in situations with medium or high change, the results were significant ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.001$ respectively) (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). It was the same with intention to support change, where the results for low change situations was $\beta = 0.102$, and in medium and high change situations it was $\beta = 0.193$ ($p < 0.05$), and $\beta = 0.375$ ($p < 0.001$), respectively (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020).

3.4. Results from article 4

The purpose of the study was to explore the connection between transformational leadership and employee behavioural support for change, mediated by work engagement and valence. In this

article, valence is described as the perception of attractive consequences during change (Faupel & Sus, 2019). The findings presented in Article 4 are based on the research made on the effects of transformational leadership on employees during organizational change. Several hypotheses were developed to explore the topic for the study, where two hypotheses were especially interesting for this systematic literature review. The first hypothesis, regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and valence, is supported by a significant positive direct relationship ($y=.469$; $p < .001$) (Faupel & Sus, 2019). The results also support the second hypothesis which show a significant positive direct relationship between transformational leadership and work engagement ($y= .341$; $p < .001$).” (Faupel & Sus, 2019). A structural model with variables of interest is displayed in figure 4.

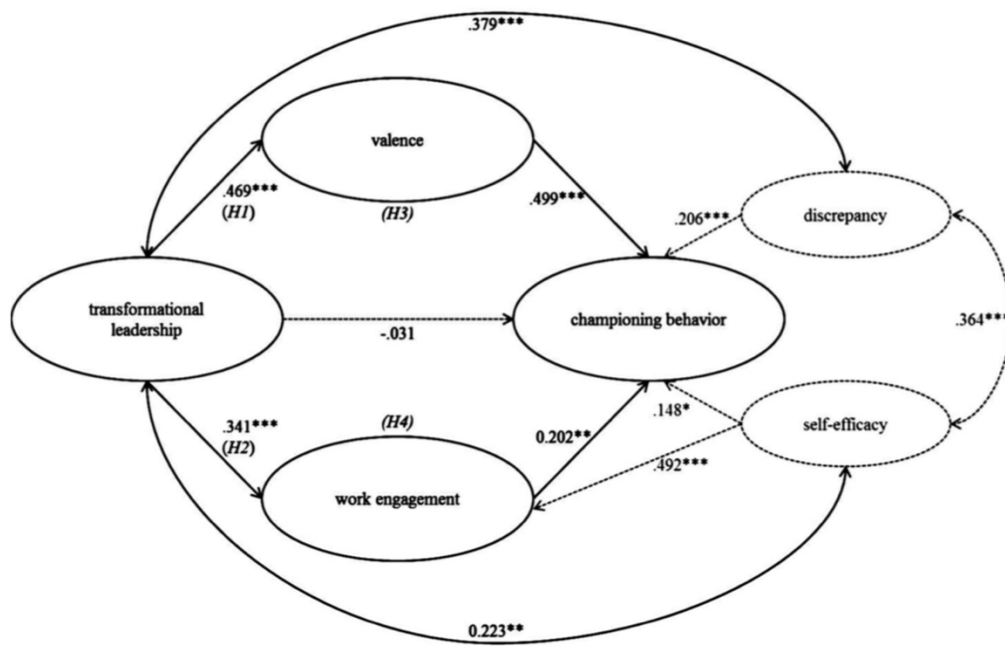


Figure 4. Results model with hypothesized effects and variables of interest. $N = 328$; standardized path coefficients; grey dashed lines: variables of interest; $***p \leq .001$; $** p \leq .05$, extracted from Faupel & Sus (2019).

Consistent with the proposed hypotheses, the findings demonstrated that transformational leaders enhance employees' valence, thereby positively influencing their perceptions of the outcomes of change (H1). Additionally, the study revealed that transformational leaders boost employee engagement during periods of organizational transformation (H2) (Faupel & Sus, 2019).

3.5 Results from article 5

Article 5 aimed to explore the constructs of employee attitude towards change. This was done by performing a study to assess predictor variables and development of an approach to analysing willingness and ability to change (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021). Multiple hypotheses were developed to explore the different aspects of the subject. The study was performed with a mixed-methods approach. Figure 5 shows the conceptual framework of the relationship among variables and willingness to and ability to change.

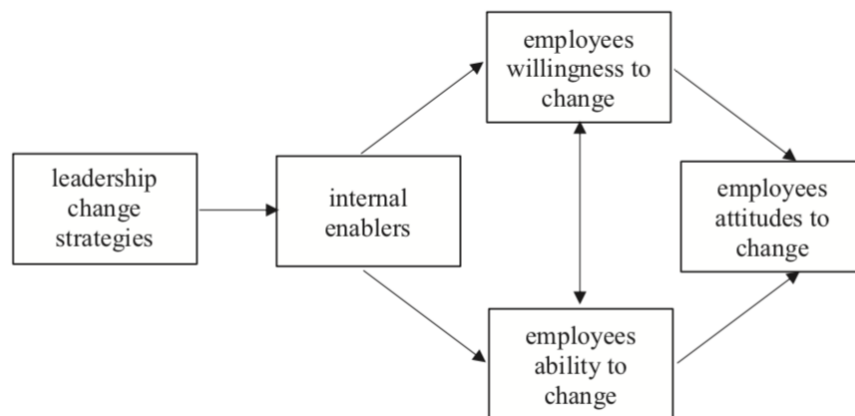


Figure 5. The relationship between variables and willingness and ability to change, extracted from Heim and Sardar-Drenda (2021).

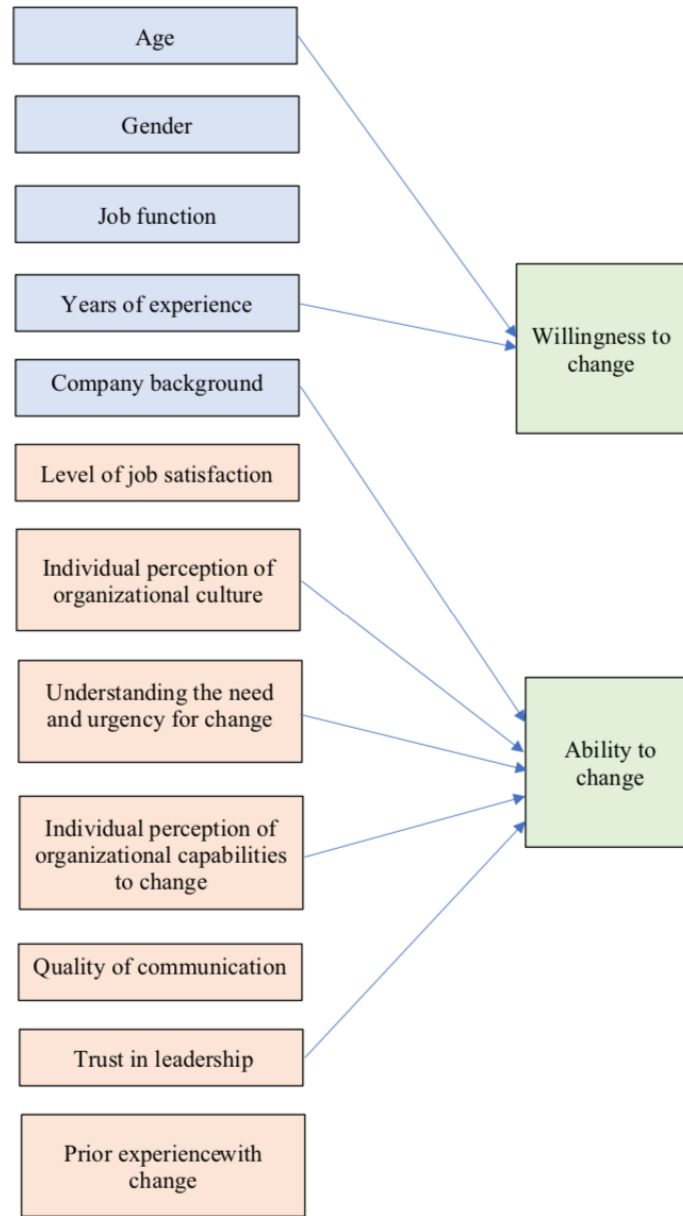


Figure 6. The relationship among variables and willingness and ability to change, extracted from Heim and Sardar-Drenda (2021)

Figure 6, shows an overview of the relationships among variables and willingness and ability to change and their predictors, giving more insight into the broader conceptual framework displayed in figure 4 (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021). This information was assessed by results from a survey developed for the study. Variables being presented to have an effect on willingness to change among the employees are “Age” and “Years of experience”. Variables

being presented to have an effect on ability to change among the employees are “Company background”, “Individual perception of organizational culture”, “Understanding the need and urgency for change”, “Individual perception of organizational capabilities to change” and “Trust in leadership” (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021).

The qualitative component of the study provided a robust aspect to the already stated results. Questions regarding trust in management and its role in change efforts showed positive responses from all of the participants (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021). These findings support findings of previously executed studies, for example by Bouckenooghe et al. (2008), which show that trust in management play a crucial role in change readiness (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021). When participants for the study were asked what leadership behaviours and strategies, they wished their leaders to possess during change, trust and honesty were stated as key factors (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021).

3.6. Significant findings

This systematic literature review present key findings across multiple studies, underscoring the role of leadership in influencing employee engagement, trust, and support for organizational changes. Transformational leadership consistently enhances employee engagement and positive perceptions of change outcomes, as well as increases reliance-based and disclosure-based trust, which are critical in mediating the relationship between leadership and organizational change capability. Additionally, cognitive trust in leaders is shown to mitigate the negative effects of authoritarian leadership styles, indicating that trust plays a crucial role across various leadership frameworks in developing a supportive environment for organizational change. These findings highlight the importance of leadership quality and trust in achieving effective change management and organizational adaptation.

4. Discussion:

4.1. General interpretation of results

The systematic review revealed that transformational leadership consistently enhances employee engagement and positively impacts their perception of organizational change. This aligns with the theory that a specific leadership style is crucial during periods of change. We identified key themes such as leadership impact, trust as a mediator and psychological states. The articles show that transformational leadership has a broad and significant positive impact on how employees perceive and react to change. Leaders who are able to inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their employees are more likely to cause supportive behaviours and attitudes towards change.

Additionally, the role of trust was found to be significant in mediating the relationship between leadership styles and organizational change outcomes. The results from this study could also therefore show support to the leader-member exchange theory previously mentioned, highlighting the significance of fostering a good relationship between leader and employees for successful organizational change. Furthermore, high levels of trust in leaders mitigate the negative impacts of authoritarian leadership styles and enhance the effectiveness of transformational leadership. This finding underlines the importance of building and maintaining trust as a foundational element that supports the transmission of leadership effects on employee attitudes and behaviours during change.

During processes of change and transformation, it is shown that people can have different wishes and needs. A well-known psychological theory that illustrates the importance of covering needs is the hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow (1943). One of the most fundamental categories of needs according to this model is the need for safety (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 2015, p. 115). Various needs regarding security can be threatened during times of uncertainty. This can include perceived safety when it comes to having a stable job or knowing one's position in the organization. One can therefore assume that management and leaders can use knowledge on the hierarchy of needs strategically when planning an organizational change to enhance a positive work environment and positive reactions from employees.

Moreover, the studies reviewed highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and employee attitudes towards change, which were found to be influenced by leadership behaviours. Self-

efficacy, as proposed by Albert Bandura (1989), refers to a person's belief about their own capability to achieve or perform certain tasks (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). In an organizational context, it refers to employees' judgement about their ability to execute change-related tasks. Self-efficacy, and their overall attitudes towards organizational change, affective commitment and intention to support, are crucial for the successful implementation of change initiatives (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). In this setting, the leaders also have a responsibility to provide the supportive attitude needed for the employees to develop confidence (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). The results from the study that mainly focused on self-efficacy provided us with even more reassurance that it is indeed a central aspect and a valuable resource to a successful organizational change process (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020).

Even though self-efficacy has been studied, there is still need for more research to understand its full importance. Especially to gain deeper insights into the significance of self-efficacy within organizational change contexts, and to explore its varying impact across situations of low and high change intensity (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020).

The previously mentioned theoretical frameworks of the transition curve, provide valuable insights into understanding and managing organizational change. The findings from the studies underscore that it is necessary for leaders to be enlightened in these theoretical frameworks to effectively manage the complexities of organizational change, particularly in addressing their employees' reactions. Being aware of phenomena, such as trust and self-efficacy, can significantly enhance organizational transitions. Understanding the emotional journey employees undergo during change, from shock and denial to acceptance and integration, allows leaders to tailor their approach, fostering resilience and reducing resistance. By acknowledging that change is not a linear process but rather a series of psychological shifts, leaders can anticipate and address employees' concerns more effectively. Moreover, the transition curve highlights the importance of providing support and resources at each stage to facilitate a smoother transition.

The converging evidence from the reviewed literature underscores the integral role of leadership in shaping successful organizational change. By fostering an environment of trust and actively developing the transformative capabilities of leaders, organizations can enhance their adaptability and effectiveness in navigating the complexities of change. These findings not only

reinforce existing theories on change management but also offer practical insights for organizations aiming to refine their leadership development and change management strategies.

4.2. Limitations

The systematic literature review and the analysis of the results from the selected studies offer insights into how leadership styles influence employee reactions to organizational change. However, it's essential to acknowledge several limitations in the methodologies of the included studies and the process of analysis. We restricted our focus to only five studies, which may not fully capture the breadth of research on the topic. Moreover, the predominance of quantitative cross-sectional methods in these studies might bias insights toward short-term, measurable outcomes, potentially overlooking the long-term and qualitative aspects of organizational change, such as cultural shifts or changes in employee morale over time.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on published data, which could introduce publication bias, where studies with positive findings are more likely to be published than those with neutral or negative results. This bias might overestimate the effectiveness of certain leadership styles in facilitating organizational change. Additionally, the variability in measurement scales and constructs used across studies poses challenges in directly comparing results. Different definitions and operationalizations of concepts like transformational leadership can hinder the incorporation of overall findings.

Furthermore, while one of the studies included in the review adopted a mixed-methods approach, the integration of qualitative data into the analysis may not be as robust as the quantitative data. Systematic reviews often prioritize quantifiable metrics, potentially underutilizing the contextual insights provided by qualitative data. Additionally, some studies in the review only examined leadership styles at one moment in time, overlooking the dynamic process of leadership influence on organizational change, which evolves over time and with changing circumstances.

Despite these limitations, the systematic literature review offers valuable insights that organizations can leverage to enhance leadership capabilities and support effective change management. Future research should aim to address these gaps by incorporating a broader range

of studies, including longitudinal and culturally diverse research designs, and by utilizing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the complex and dynamic nature of leadership influence on organizational change.

Moreover, the findings suggest that organizations should prioritize enhancing leadership capabilities to support effective change management. Future research should explore the impact of various leadership styles across different types of changes, such as strategic versus operational, to differentiate the leadership approaches that are most effective in each context. Investigating the role of trust in varying cultural settings could provide deeper insights into how global organizations can better manage change.

While the studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership and change management, there are some limitations. First, they utilize self-reported data, which may introduce bias such as the participants developing response sets, faking good or faking bad (Morling, 2021, p. 161-163).

Additionally, most of the studies are conducted within specific cultural or organizational contexts. For instance, the findings from studies conducted in one geographical region or within certain industry sectors may not be directly applicable to different organizational or cultural settings. The limited scope of this review may limit the applicability of the conclusions. For instance, the absence of studies from i.e. America among those included in this systematic review suggests a potential gap in geographical representation.

Furthermore, most of the studies have applied a cross-sectional design, which restricts our ability to confirm causality in the relationships. A longitudinal approach could be an option to be able to grasp a better understanding of the observed associations. In other words, future research should consider employing other designs, such as a longitudinal approach, to enhance the robustness of their findings.

Regarding the sampling techniques utilized in the studies, Article 1 and 2 may be affected by common source-bias due to the fact that all measured variables were self-reported. Article 3 chose to pick their sample through thin-slicing and could potentially suffer from biases because of this. As for Article 4, they put out the survey online where anyone who experienced an organizational change could participate. This is a form of convenience sampling and may

therefore not result in the most representative sample of the population (Morling, 2021, p.183). In addition, they may also be affected by common-source bias. Lastly for Article 5, they only gathered data from one organization, but chose to invite all employees to participate in the survey. With a response rate on 17,39%, they may be affected by self-selection (Morling, 2021, p.185).

During the selection process of articles, it came to our notice that the existing research in the field of leadership styles and organizational change focuses mainly on transformational leadership, often overlooking alternative leadership styles and their potential impacts. The bias towards transformational leadership may originate from confirmation bias where researchers only seek to confirm their established hypothesis and consider the evidence that supports the widely accepted leadership approach (Morling, 2021, p. 590).

As research has shown, there is no doubt that there is an association between transformational leadership and guiding the employees to successful organizational change. That being said, how can we know for sure that transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style, when researchers time and time again choose to mostly only focus on this one. First, because we can't know for sure if there are other leadership styles who have a stronger correlation because studies frequently choose to concentrate on a singular type of leadership rather than conducting analyses across multiple styles and then do a comparison of their effectiveness.

Furthermore, studies rarely explore the implications of a low degree of transformational leadership. When participants in a study report a low degree of perceived transformational leadership, it implies that they perceive their leaders to express minimal characteristics and qualities associated with this leadership style. The problem that arises regarding this is that researchers beforehand have developed the question format to fit into a specific type of leadership style, and when a leader potentially scores significantly low after conducting a survey, one can question what this implies. Every leader possesses some type of leadership style(s), so we know it doesn't mean that you don't have a leadership style at all. The problem is that researchers don't necessarily identify what scoring low during a survey determines.

Based on what has been discussed, this indicates a need for researchers to address this problem by conducting more studies that look at multiple leadership styles set up against each other and develop a question format within the surveys accordingly.

5. Conclusion:

Based on the comprehensive exploration of organizational change, leadership styles, and employee reactions presented in this paper, several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, this systematic literature review has highlighted the significant role of leadership styles in influencing employees' reactions to organizational change. Transformational leadership has come forward as one of the most central leadership styles in this process, being a consistent driver of employee engagement and effectiveness in an organization.

Secondly, trust has also been identified as one of the most crucial mediators in the relationship between leadership and change outcomes, showing how it can severely affect employee's attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, the review underscored the importance of other psychological states such as self-efficacy and its effect on employees' attitudes toward change. Furthermore, self-efficacy has been argued to be a valuable resource in enhancing employee's intention to support change and affective commitment.

Nevertheless, it has been discussed how further research is necessary to uncover the best ways to navigate transformation, especially in terms of understanding more of the contextual factors and their significance.

In conclusion, this systematic review underscores the essential role of leadership in guiding successful organizational change and offer valuable insights for developing optimal change management strategies, in addition to trying to emphasize the significant contribution of the employees in this process.

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