*Ready for change?*

# *The relation between the simple organisational structure and employee change readiness: a multiple case study*

*Msc Business Administration – thesis*

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# Abstract

In today's complex and dynamic business environment, organisations must constantly change in response to the evolving circumstances. Employee change readiness is a critical factor during change, as organisations cannot succeed without employees embracing and supporting change. While employee behaviour is shaped by the organisational structure, most research on organisational change is focused on larger, more complex structures, leaving simple structures relatively underexplored. Additionally, the complexity that arises from the simplicity of the structure is frequently underestimated or overlooked in the literature. Therefore, the research question of this study is: "Which aspects of a simple organisational structure influences the change readiness of employees?"

To address this research question, a multiple case study was conducted across three organisations with a simple structure, all of which were currently undergoing an organisational change. In each case, three employees, who were directly affected by the change, participated in semi-structured interviews. The results revealed three key findings. The first key findings shows that direct supervision, informal coordination, and the flat structure leads to minimal distance between employees and the central leader, which has a positive relation with the sense of appropriateness and efficacy, and perceptions of management support. The second key finding shows that varying levels of involvement in direct supervision, informal coordination, and vertical and horizontal centralisation lead to different roles and attitudes of the employees, which has a positive or negative relation with the sense of appropriateness and efficacy, and the perception of management support, depending on the role and attitude of the employee. The third key finding shows that the strategic apex, as key part of the organisation, and the flat structure lead to the organisation's focus on operational core activities and overlapping functions of employees, which has a positive relation with the sense of efficacy, and perceptions of management support. Notably, the study found that personal valence was not influenced by the organisational structure. Additionally, organisational culture was identified as a moderator in many of the relationships. Finally, the findings highlight that the central leader plays a decisive role in shaping employee change readiness. While the simple structure enables this influence, the leadership style, personality, and behaviour of the central leader ultimately determines how employees perceive change and their change readiness.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on employee change readiness by providing new insights into how the simple organisational structure influences employee change readiness. Additionally, the findings offer a foundation for future comparative studies. Moreover, understanding the aspects influencing employee change readiness enables organisations to develop targeted change strategies that effectively foster employee change readiness. In practice, such targeted change strategies should incorporate certain practical considerations identified in this study as transparent and direct communication, expectation management, active employee involvement, leadership style and attitude, and a balance between guidance and centralisation.

*Key words: employee change readiness, organisational structure, simple structure, multiple case study*

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# 1. Introduction

In today's increasingly complex and dynamic business environment, organisations are constantly striving to adapt and change their operations in response to the evolving circumstances (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Today's world can be described as VUCA (Pearse, 2017). VUCA is an acronym for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Widodo et al., 2022). As a response to this VUCA world, organisations must make commitments to implement change in order to adapt to the rapidly and constantly evolving environment (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). However, managing organisational change is challenging. Many companies fail to effectively accomplish the desired change (Peng et al., 2020). A 70% failure rate is often reported for organisational change initiatives (Heracleous & Bartunek, 2020). However, the origins and supporting evidence for this specific statistic have been questioned (Hughes, 2011). Beyond the more technical issues of defining change and measuring success or failure, scholars such as Hughes (2011) have deemed this claim as unsubstantiated (By, 2020). Therefore, determining the exact statistic remains challenging (Hughes, 2022). Nevertheless, the high failure rates continue to raise concern and interest in identifying the aspects that can reduce failure and increase the success of organisational change (Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Therefore, successful change management has become a critical topic for organisations (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

Organisational change is according to Ott (1996) referred to as a "*relatively enduring alternation of the present state of an organization or its components or interrelationships amongst the components, and their differential and integrated functions totally or partially, in order to attain greater viability in the context of the present and anticipated future environment*" (p. 81). Successful organisational change depends on employees maintaining a positive attitude towards organisational change and actively participating during the change (Jung et al., 2020). Additionally, the involvement of employees is crucial for successfully implementing changes and fostering organisational growth, as organisations cannot succeed without employees embracing and supporting the change (Da Ros et al., 2023). As organisations merely announce the change, while implementation is carried out by their employees (Shah et al., 2017). Change readiness is arguably one of the most crucial factors in securing employees' initial support for change (Holt et al., 2007). Holt et al. (2007) defined change readiness as "*the extent to which an individual or individuals are cognitively and emotionally inclined to accept, embrace, and adopt a particular plan to purposefully alter the status quo.*" (p. 235). Holt et al.'s analysis indicates that change readiness is a multidimensional concept consisting of four dimensions: appropriateness, efficacy, management support, and personal valence (Holt et al., 2007).

Research shows that employee behaviour within organisations is influenced by the organisational structure of that organisation (Ahmady et al., 2016). Organisational factors like support, communication, transparency and decision-making processes play a role in shaping employee change readiness (Gomathy, 2023). For example, organisational structures that support strong communication and provide transparency help to enhance employees' trust and willingness to adapt (Albrecht et al., 2022). Lunenberg (2012) describes organisational structure as "*the formal configuration between individuals and groups regarding the allocation of tasks, responsibilities, and authority within the organization.*" (p. 1).

There are many frameworks for differentiating organisational structure (Lunenberg, 2012), one of which is Mintzberg's configurations of organisational structure. Mintzberg (1980) suggests that organisations can be differentiated along three basic dimensions: key part of the organisation; prime coordinating mechanism; and type of decentralisation. Using the three basic dimensions,

Mintzberg proposes that the strategy an organisation adopts, along with the degree to which it practices that strategy, leads to five structural configurations: simple structure; machine bureaucracy; professional bureaucracy; divisionalized form; and adhocracy (Lunenberg, 2012). It is argued that an effective organisation will lean toward a particular configuration as it seeks harmony in its internal processes and alignment with its environment (Mintzberg, 1980).

The simple structure is the most basic configuration of Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1980). Simple structures are often found in smaller, newer organisations or those undergoing crises (Mintzberg, 1980), for instance start-ups, relatively small corporations and new government departments (Lunenberg, 2012). As the initial stage in the organisation life cycle, the simple structure lays the foundation for the development of more complex and formalised configurations. Consequently, change is not only inevitable for organisations operating within this structure, but is also essential for those aiming to grow or scale the organisation (Mintzberg, 1984). However, despite the simple structure is labelled as "simple", the simplicity of this structure can be unexpected complex (Hopej-Kaminska et al., 2015). The simple structure is characterised by minimal elaboration and horizontal and vertical centralisation. The organisation is composed of a top manager and a couple workers in the operative core (Lunenberg, 2012). The strategic apex, often embodied by one individual, holds significant influence, making the organisation highly dependent on that individual's personality and leadership style (Mintzberg, 1984). Additionally, in increasingly VUCA environments, the adaptability of the simple structure is gaining attention due to its ability to respond quickly to dynamic changes, a necessity in today's business landscape (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). It was found that there is a relation between the simple organisational structure and employee change readiness. However, there is still limited understanding of which specific characteristics of the simple structure influence the various dimensions of change readiness, and to what extent each dimension is influenced (Shah et al., 2017). Additionally, research on organisational change is largely focused on larger, more complex organisational structures, leaving simple structures relatively underexplored in the literature (Schwarz & Huber, 2008). Furthermore, the complexity that arises from the simplicity of the structure is frequently underestimated or overlooked in the literature (Johannessen, 2022; Seel, 2000). Moreover, given that the simple structure represents the starting point of the organisation life cycle, understanding how employee change readiness operates within it holds relevance for all organisations (Mintzberg, 1984). These gaps highlights the need to study how employee change readiness operates within these simple structures, as employee behaviour and change management strategies can differ significantly from those in larger, more formalised organisations.

The study aims to provide organisations with a simple organisational structure with a more tailored and effective approach to implementing change by addressing the research question: "Which aspects of a simple organisational structure influences the change readiness of employees?".

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. The research contributes to the existing literature on employee change readiness by providing new insights on the influence of the simple organisational structure on employee change readiness. The research builds further upon the study of Holt et al. (2007), which describes the dimensions of change readiness, and the framework of Mintzberg (1980), which describes five configurations of organisational structures. While prior research predominantly focused on larger, more formalised organisational structures (Schwarz & Huber, 2008), this study provides valuable insights into the aspects of the simple organisational structure that influence the employee change readiness. Additionally, the research offers a foundation for future comparative studies, providing a benchmark for exploring the

similarities and differences across diverse organisational structures. This knowledge will pave the way for broader studies on organisational change management across diverse structural contexts.

From a practical perspective, this research provides actionable insights for organisations with a simple structure. Managing organisational change is a process that does not have an one-size-fits-all solution, since the best approach will recognise the complexity of the organisational structure (Da Ros et al., 2023). By understanding the specific aspects within a simple structure that influence change readiness, organisations can develop targeted strategies that promote involvement, commitment, and readiness to change. It emphasises that organisations with a simple structure should tailor their change approach in alignment with the attitudes and roles of both employees and the central leader. Additionally, organisational culture should be recognised as an enabler of change. Beyond tailored approaches, certain practical considerations should always be integrated into change strategies. By adopting these principles, organisations with a simple structure can enhance change readiness.

# 2. Theoretical framework

## 2.1. Change readiness

Change readiness is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, multifaceted construct. It is widely considered as one of the most important factors influencing individuals' initial support for change initiatives (Holt et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2023). Countless websites, articles and tools provide information about change readiness. It is important to acknowledge that the concept of change readiness can take on various forms and conceptualisations (Caldwell, 2013). For instance, Wang et al. (2023) describes readiness for changes as "*a multidimensional construct influenced by beliefs among employees that (a) they are capable of implementing a proposed change (i.e., change-specific efficacy), (b) the proposed change is appropriate for the organization (i.e., appropriateness), (c) the leaders are committed to the proposed change (i.e., management support), and (d) the proposed change is beneficial to organizational members (i.e., personal valence).*" (p. 1041). However, Vakola (2013) conceptualizes readiness to change as "*a broad construct, reflecting a combination of a number of factors that indicate the likelihood that someone will start or continue being engaged in behaviours associated with change such as support and participation.*" (p. 97).

Armenakis et al. (1993) provided the most frequently cited conceptualisation of change readiness, defining it as "*an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully undertake those changes.*" (p. 681). However, Rafferty, Jimmieson and Armenakis conducted a multilevel review of the change readiness literature and identified a significant limitation. While there is substantial consensus on the key cognitions underlying change readiness, the affective element of this attitude has not been examined. They argue that incorporating the affective element into the definition of change readiness is essential (Rafferty et al., 2012). Therefore, this study adopts the definition of change readiness proposed by Holt, Armenakis, Field and Harris. Holt et al. (2007) defines change readiness as "*the extent to which an individual or individuals are cognitively and emotionally inclined to accept, embrace, and adopt a particular plan to purposefully alter the status quo.*" (p. 235). This definition incorporates both cognitive and emotional elements, making it more suitable for this study as it offers a more comprehensive understanding of change readiness.

Holt et al. (2007) combined insights from existing literature and published change readiness instruments with a qualitative analysis of interviews and open-ended questionnaires from managers in both the public and private sectors. This analysis identified the four most influential dimensions of change readiness: (a) appropriateness, which is the belief that a change is necessary; (b) efficacy, which is the belief that the change can be successfully implemented; (c) management support, which is the belief that the organisational leaders are committed to the change; and (d) personal valence, which is the belief that the change will be personally beneficial (Holt et al., 2007).

The four dimensions of Holt's typology are affective or cognitive in nature. This distinction is important, as attitudes and behaviour, such as change readiness, consists of affective and cognitive components. The affective component refers to individuals feelings and emotional responses towards the attitude object, while the cognitive component refers to individuals beliefs and thoughts about the attitude object (Netzer et al., 2018). In essence, the components of

change readiness are primarily cognitive in nature, as they are grounded in individuals' thoughts and beliefs towards the change. However, the dimensions efficacy and personal valence also encompass affective components, since they can cause emotional responses regarding the change (Verplanken et al., 1998).

## 2.2. Organisational structure

There are numerous definitions of organisational structure (Esashika & Santos, 2017). For this study, the definition of organisational structure by Lunenburg will be applied. According to Lunenberg (2012), organisational structure refers to "*the formal configuration between individuals and groups regarding the allocation of tasks, responsibilities, and authority within the organization.*" (p. 1).

The organisational structure is a critical element in shaping how an organisation operates and is governed. It is based on the segmentation of activities to achieve the execution of previously planned activities, where the functions, obligations, and authority of the members are determined (Galván, 2019). An organisational structure includes both tangible and intangible elements. Tangible elements encompass groups and hierarchical units, while intangible elements are the relationships between these groups and units (Ahmady et al., 2016).

## 2.3. Mintzberg's framework for organisational structures

Henry Mintzberg, one of the world's most influential writers in the field of management, particularly on the topic of strategy (Matheson, 2009), suggests that organisations can be differentiated along three basic dimensions: (1) the key part of the organisation; (2) the prime coordinating mechanism; and (3) the type of decentralisation used (Lunenberg, 2012).

The first dimension focuses on the key part of the organisation, which plays a crucial role in determining the organisation's success or failure (Lunenberg, 2012). Mintzberg identified five different key parts.

- Operating core: consist of the workers who directly carry out the organisation's tasks (Lunenberg, 2012). At the foundation of any organisation are its operators, those individuals who perform the basic work of producing goods and delivering the services (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Middle line: consists of middle- and lower-level management (Lunenberg, 2012). As an organisation grows, additional managers become necessary. Not only to manage the operators, but also to manage other managers. This leads to the creation of a middle line, forming a hierarchy of authority between the operating core and the strategic apex (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Technostructure: includes the analysts such as engineers, accountants, planners, researchers, and personnel managers (Lunenberg, 2012). As an organisation becomes more complex, it typically requires a group of people who perform administrative duties related to planning and controlling the work of others, but of a different nature, often referred to as "staff". These analysts constitute the technostructure, operating outside the line authority (Mintzberg, 1989);

- Support staff: consists of the individuals who provide indirect services (Lunenberg, 2012). Most organisations also include additional staff units that provide various internal services. These units, along with the functions they perform, are referred to as the support staff (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Strategic apex: comprises top management and its support staff (Lunenberg, 2012). Except for the simplest organisations, at least one fulltime manager is typically needed to oversee the entire system (Mintzberg, 1989).

The second dimension involves the prime coordinating mechanism, which is the primary method an organisation uses to coordinate its activities. This includes the following mechanisms:

- Mutual adjustment: occurs when work is coordinated through informal communication (Lunenberg, 2012) and is typically between two operating employees (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Direct supervision: involves one individual being responsible for overseeing the work of others, this relates to the principles of unity of command and scalar (Lunenberg, 2012). Coordination is achieved when one person issue orders or instructions to several others whose work is interrelated (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Standardisation of work processes: occurs when the content of work is specified or programmed (Lunenberg, 2012). Coordination is achieved by specifying the work processes of individuals carrying out interrelated tasks (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Standardisation of skills: occurs when the required training for preforming the work is specified (Lunenberg, 2012). Coordination is achieved through the related training the workers have received (Mintzberg, 1989);
- Standardisation of output: exists when the results of the work are specified (Lunenberg, 2012).

These coordinating mechanisms are fundamental elements of organisational structure, serving as the "glue" that holds organisations together. They appear to follow a general progression: as organisational tasks become more complex, coordination tends to shift from mutual adjustment to direct supervision, then to standardisation, and often back to mutual adjustment. No organisation relies on a single one of those mechanisms. While they may be somewhat substitutable, they are all typically be found in every reasonably developed organisation. In particular, mutual adjustment and direct supervision are almost always essential, regardless of the extent to which various forms of standardisation are employed (Mintzberg, 1989).

The third dimension is the type of decentralisation employed, which refers to the extent to which the organisation involves subordinates in the decision-making process. There are three types of decentralisation:

- Vertical decentralisation: involves the distribution of power down the chain of command, or shared authority between superordinate's and subordinates within an organisation;
- Horizontal decentralisation: refers to the extent to which non administrators (including staff) are involved in decision-making, or the sharing of authority between line and staff;
- Selective decentralisation: pertains the extent to which decision-making power is delegated to different units within the organisation (Lunenberg, 2012).

Using the three basic dimensions, Mintzberg proposes that the strategy an organisation adopts, along with the degree to which it practices that strategy, leads to five structural configurations (table 1): (1) simple structure; (2) machine bureaucracy; (3) professional bureaucracy; (4) divisionalized form; and (5) adhocracy (Lunenberg, 2012). In essence, these configurations function as systems where it is more meaningful to discuss networks of interrelationships rather than a single variable driving another (Mintzberg, 1989). It is argued that an effective organisation will lean towards a particular configuration as it seeks harmony in its internal processes and alignment with its environment (Mintzberg, 1980).

*Table 1: Mintzberg's five organisational structures (Lunenberg, 2012)*

| Structural Configuration | Prime Coordinating Mechanism | Key Part of Organization | Type of Decentralization |
|---|---|---|---|
| Simple structure | Direct supervision | Strategic apex | Vertical and horizontal centralization |
| Machine bureaucracy | Standardization of work processes | Technostructure | Limited horizontal decentralization |
| Professional bureaucracy | Standardization of skills | Operating core | Vertical and horizontal decentralization |
| Divisionalized form | Standardization of outputs | Middle line | Limited vertical decentralization |
| Adhocracy | Mutual adjustment | Support staff | Selective decentralization |

## 2.3.1. Simple structure

This study focuses on the simple structure, which typically exists in a simple and dynamic environment. A simple environment can be comprehended by a single individual, while a dynamic environment necessitates an organic structure. Simple structures are often found in smaller, newer organisations or those undergoing crises. Young and small organisations commonly adopt this structure, as they have neither had the time nor the operational scale required for bureaucratisation. In times of extreme hostility, most organisations, regardless of their usual structure, are compelled to adopt a simple structure. To navigate crises, organisations tend to temporarily centralise at the top and suspend their standard operating procedures (Mintzberg, 1980).

The entrepreneurial firm is a classic example of the simple structure. These firms are aggressive and often innovative, constantly seeking risky environments where bureaucratic organisations hesitate to operate. However, they also tend to remain within market niches that their entrepreneurs can fully comprehend. Entrepreneurial firms are typically small, allowing them to remain organic while enabling their entrepreneurs to retain tight control. They are often young, partly due to the high attrition rate among entrepreneurial firms and partly because those that survive tend to evolve into bureaucracy as they age (Mintzberg, 1980). Other examples of simple structures includes start-ups, relatively small corporations, new government departments, medium-sized retail stores, and small elementary school districts (Lunenberg, 2012).

The prime coordinating mechanism of the simple structure consists of direct supervision (Lunenberg, 2012). The activities revolve around the chief executive, who personally controls the activities (Mintzberg, 1980). Due to the organisation's small size, coordination is informal and maintained through direct supervision. This allows for rapid adaption to environmental changes. The goals stress innovation and long-term survival, although innovation might be difficult for small organisations due to the lack of resources (Lunenberg, 2012). Given the unpredictability of the

future environment, coordination through standardisation is not feasible. As a result, the organisation formalises little of its behaviour and makes minimal use of planning and training (Mintzberg, 1980).

Power over important decisions is typically centralised in the hands of the chief executive (Mintzberg, 1980). Thus, the key part of the organisation is the strategic apex. The organisation is composed of a top manager and a couple employees in the operative core. There is little to no technostructure, and the support staff is minimal. As a result, employees perform overlapping tasks (Lunenberg, 2012).

In the simple structure there is both vertical and horizontal centralisation. There is minimal elaboration (Lunenberg, 2012). The strategy is usually a visionary process that is broadly deliberated, yet emergent and flexible in details. The leaders role is adaptable and usually strong (Mintzberg, 1980).

## 2.3.2. Relation between simple structure and employee change readiness

Several studies have explored the relationship between a simple structure and employee change readiness. Simple structures are typically more flexible and adaptable to change compared to complex or bureaucratic organisations (Mintzberg, 1980), as they lack extensive procedural and hierarchical constraints. Research suggests that the informal nature of simple structures enables employees to adapt to new situations more easily because they experience fewer procedural constraints (Carpenter & Fredrickson, 2001). Employees in simple structures may feel more empowered and involved during change, as they often have closer access to decision-makers and leadership. This increased involvement can foster a higher level of commitment to change, as employees feel a sense of ownership (Kotter, 2012). However, some studies suggest that this empowerment depends heavily on leadership style, as leadership plays a crucial role in maintaining trust and engagement (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Furthermore, the vertical and horizontal centralisation in a simple structure might reduce the autonomy of employees, which may negatively affect change readiness. If decisions are perceived as being made without their input, it can lead to disengagement or resistance to change (Lines, 2004).

Since the early developments in organisational theory, the stages of organisational growth have been explored. Mintzberg (1984) contributed to this by introducing a life cycle model that aligns with his five configurations of organisational structure. In this model, the simple structure aligns with the autocracy configuration, representing the initial stage of the organisation life cycle. This stage of formation is characterised by the presence of an organisational mission and limited resources, but without formal structures, standards, ideologies, and processes. In the absence of clear procedures, authority tends to be highly concentrated at the central leader, often resulting in a leadership style that is personal, direct, and dominant. New organisations often attract strong-willed individuals who are drawn to the opportunity for broad decision-making authority. These leaders are positioned to shape the organisation in such a way that reflects their personal preferences and leadership style (Mintzberg, 1984). This centralisation of power and lack of formalisation has an influence on employee change readiness. Employees rely on the leader for direction, clarity, and motivation, and the absence of formalisation or distributed authority can lead to uncertainty and varied attitudes regarding change. Consequently, change readiness in simple structures is not only influenced by the organisational structure, but also by the leadership style and trust between the central leader and employees. Therefore, understanding how this shapes the employee change readiness is essential for guiding organisational change.

The simple structure is the most basic organisational configuration identified by Mintzberg (1980). However, this simplicity can cause complexity, particularly through the informal processes and a high dependency on the central leader (Mintzberg, 1980). The absence of formal procedures, clear roles, and standardisation fosters ambiguity, which can lead to inconsistencies in how change is perceived and implemented. Moreover, the strategic apex, often consisting of a single individual, exerts substantial influence, meaning that the decision-making and leadership are highly dependent on the personality and leadership style of that specific individual. This centralisation of authority, combined with the absence of formalised processes, means that while the organisational structure is capable of rapid adaptability, it is equally prone to volatility (Mintzberg, 1984). The simplicity of the simple structure creates a paradox where flexibility is balanced with an unexpected complexity in the form of ambiguity and reliance on a specific individual.

While the relationship between the simple organisational structure and employee change readiness is acknowledged, existing research has yet to clarify which specific characteristics of the simple structure influence the distinct dimensions of change readiness. Moreover, it is possible that not all dimensions of change readiness are equally affected by each characteristic of the simple structure. Understanding these possible differences in the relationship is essential, as it equips organisations with the knowledge to align their change strategies, thereby enhancing employee change readiness (Shah et al., 2017).

It is expected that the hierarchy will enhance employee change readiness by fostering a closer relationship between leaders and employees, increasing trust and engagement during change. Additionally, it is expected that informal and direct communication will positively impact change readiness by reducing ambiguity and fostering a better understanding of change. Furthermore, it is expected that the flexibility of a simple structure will positively influence employee change readiness by enabling a more adaptable response to change.

# 3. Methods

## 3.1. Research design

A qualitative design was selected to examine the aspects of a simple structure organisation that influences employee change readiness. The selected methodology was a multiple case study. Case studies provide an in-depth understanding of a specific entity within its real-world context, based on the assumption that comprehensive investigation can yield knowledge of the wider phenomenon (Gorman et al., 2005). This approach is particularly valuable when the distinction between phenomenon and its context is unclear (Yin, 2017). Change readiness is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and multifaceted construct (Wang et al., 2023). Detailed, contextual analysis is essential for comprehending multifaceted issues. In this study, the primary contextual factor was the organisational structure of the cases. However, additional contextual factors, such as leadership style, were also expected to play a role. A multiple case study was therefore appropriate, as it accounts for contextual differences across the cases. In the multiple case study, three cases with different characteristics were included. Not every case showed the same extent of a simple organisational structure. By analysing three cases, both within each individual case and across the cases, the data enhanced the generalisability to the theory (Gustafsson, 2017). If only one single case had been included, certain characteristics of the simple structure and contextual factors might have remained underexplored, which would have limited the depth of the analysis.

This study was conducted in the Netherlands in November 2024. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences faculty at the University of Twente, under reference number 240925.

## 3.2. Cases

### 3.2.1. Case selection criteria

The interviews were conducted across three different change processes. The research utilises three change processes to be able to generalise the results to theory. These change processes do not necessarily need to be within different organisations. The organisations are the contexts of the cases. The organisations with the change processes that are included in this study, were determined based on their organisational structure. Other characteristics, such as the number of employees of the organisation, are irrelevant as long as the organisation fits the criteria of a simple structure.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Simple structure organisation according to Mintzberg's framework for organisational structures;
- An department that is currently undergoing an organisational change.

### 3.2.2. Case access

Organisations were approached through existing networks of the researcher. A customised email was prepared for each organisation. The email explained how participation in the study has benefits for the organisation, what insights they gain from participation and how the collaboration looks like. The organisation will gain insights into the change readiness of employees and how the employees perceive the change process. The email also emphasised that the identity of the organisation and its employees will remain anonymous at all times. Additionally, it was emphasised that the research does not assess how effectively and correctly the change is being implemented, but only focuses on gaining insights into how the change process is taking place and how employees react to it.

### 3.2.3. Case description

Based on the case selection criteria, the following organisations were selected:

- *Case 1: Organisation A*
  Organisation A is a Dutch organisation focused on data-driven energy reduction. With a team of approximately ten employees, the organisation provides user-friendly dashboards through its smart meter technology for the manufacturing and process industries, offering clients valuable insights into their energy consumption. In addition to monitoring and improving efficiency, Organisation A provides coaching and advisory services. The organisation is undergoing a change to internalise processes and activities that are currently outsourced. The primary person managing the change, the director, has been actively involved in communicating the change to the organisation.
- *Case 2: Organisation B*
  Organisation B is a Dutch organisation focused on employment services. With a team of approximately seven employees, it supports both companies and job seekers. For job seekers, the organisation provides mediation, technical consultancy, and recruitment services. For companies, it offers recruitment and selection, specialist consultancy, and interim recruitment. The organisation is currently undergoing a change aimed at adaption of their own employment conditions policy. This change involves the implementation of a bonus system. The primary person managing the change, one of the directors, has been actively involved in communicating the change to the organisation.
- *Case 3: Organisation C*
  Organisation C is a Dutch organisation focused on digital hardware design. With a team of approximately twenty employees, their goal is to help businesses develop innovative products by selecting the optimal compute platform for their applications, in collaboration with their business partners. The organisation has expertise in FPGA and ASIC design. The organisation is currently undergoing a change aimed at improving their quality assurance management system. This change involves the implementation of quality standard ISO9001. The primary person managing the change, one of the directors, has been actively involved in communicating the change to the organisation.

### 3.2.4. Participants

If the organisation was approved, the person managing the change sent an email, written by the researcher, to all employees within the relevant department, inviting them to participate in the study. The employees that were willing to participate in the study, needed to contact the researcher through an email. To identify suitable participants within the organisation, the inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Currently experiencing organisational change within an department where the outcomes directly affects the participant;
- Speaks and understands the Dutch language. Since it is probably the native language of most employees. This will avoid language barriers and allows participants to fully express their thoughts and opinions.

Within each of the cases, interviews were conducted with three employees. Employees were asked by their central leader whether they would like to voluntarily participate in this study. The first three employees that were willing to participate, were selected. The researcher then personally contacted the selected participants to schedule the interviews.

## 3.3. Data collection

### 3.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview is a form of an exploratory interview (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). It is valuable because it provides a comprehensive overview, helps interpret language, and offers in-depth insights from participants. They allow participants to express themselves in their own voice and share their personal thoughts and feelings (Alshenqeeti, 2014). An advantage of semi-structured interviews is the reciprocity it fosters between the interviewer and the participant. Although the interview follows a guide that is developed prior to the interview and is focused on the research topic (Magaldi & Berler, 2020), it also allows the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on participant's responses and creating space for participants' individual verbal expression (Kallio et al., 2016).

All interviews were conducted uniformly in a one-on-one face-to-face setting and in the Dutch language. The interview location was a place where both the participant and researcher feel comfortable, ensuring the interview can proceed uninterrupted and with limited noise and other distractions (Knott et al., 2022). Additionally, it ensures that the researcher can gather richer information, since a comfortable setting helps the participant to feel at ease, making them more likely to share honest and in-depth responses.

At the start of the interview, the participant was asked to read and sign the informed consent form, which is available in Appendix A: Informed consent form. By signing the form, the participant agreed to participate in the interview and consented to having the interview audio recorded. It was explicitly stated that all information remains confidential and will be processed anonymously. By emphasising the confidentiality and anonymity, the research safeguards the participants' privacy, promotes ethical conduct and enhances the quality of the collected data.

Appendix B: Interview guide contains the interview guide and a visual aid. To help the participant feel comfortable, a casual conversation was initiated first. This was followed by a brief introduction outlining the research purpose. The audio recording was started on a phone, and

verbal consent was once again requested. Recording the interviews was important for capturing participants' responses verbatim (Knott et al., 2022). The interview was guided by the visual aid, which included the aspects of the simple structure, as outlined in the Theoretical framework. The researcher needed to make sure that all the aspects of organisational structure and all four dimensions of change readiness, as described in the Theoretical framework, were discussed during the interview. At the end of the interview, the participants were thanked for their contribution and asked if they would like to receive the final research report. Those who were interested provided their email addresses. Each interview needed approximately forty-five minutes.

## 3.3.2. Validity and reliability

Social desirability bias may occur when participants respond in ways they believe will be viewed favourably by other participants. Participants might provide distorted information due to concerns about potential negative consequences for themselves. Fears that their responses could be traced back to them or impact their job security, performance reviews, or relationships with colleagues might lead them to offer what they perceive as more acceptable or correct answers (Okoko et al., 2023). Social desirability bias is reduced through two strategies. First, the study used indirect questioning techniques to allow participants to express their views without feeling pressured to conform social norms (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). This approach is a projective technique that encouraged participants to respond to questions from the perspective of another person or from the past (Fisher, 1993). By doing so, participants unconsciously projected their biases into ambiguous responses, revealing their own attitudes. Second, the research incorporates the use of the visual aid as part of a forced-choice items method to cope with social desirability. This forced-choice items method requires participants to choose between items that are supposedly have an equal degree of social desirability. The rationale behind this approach is that when the items appear equally desirable or undesirable, participants' choices are not influenced by social desirability (Nederhof, 1985). In this study, participants use the visual aid to select the topics they wish to discuss with the interviewer, further ensuring that their responses are guided by personal preference rather than social expectations.

Furthermore, linguistic inclusion is an important consideration in this study. Linguistic inclusion ensures that all linguistically diverse participants of the research can adapt their linguistic repertoires to fit the communicative environment (Pokorn & Čibej, 2018). However, the selection criteria requiring participants to speak Dutch may exclude individuals who could offer valuable insights. Despite this, the Dutch language criterion remains necessary, as the research is conducted in Dutch. Conducting the interviews in another language could increase the risk of miscommunication or mistranslation (Squires, 2009). When interviews are conducted in a different language, there is an increased risk that key concepts or nuanced meanings may not be fully captured or accurately communicated. This impacts the validity. Additionally, participants may give inconsistent or unclear responses if they are not comfortable with the language that is used. This can affect test-retest reliability, as the participant might provide different answers at different moments due to misunderstandings or discomfort with the language (Hsiao & Tseng, 2022).

## 3.4. Data analysis

### 3.4.1. Data analysis method

The interview recordings were transcribed using the software tool Amberscript. The transcriptions captured every spoken word verbatim, including 'uh' and instance of stuttering, to accurately reflect the participants' exact words and support detailed analysis (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). All the transcripts were anonymised. After the transcripts were completed, the original recordings were deleted. The transcriptions were securely stored online at the University of Twente.

The data analysis method employed in this study is the Gioia analysis. The Gioia methodology is a qualitative approach for concept development that balances the need to inductively develop new concepts (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). The aim of using the Gioia analysis is to identify different patterns and themes related to simple structure and employee change readiness.

The Gioia method enhance rigor by employing a systematic research approach that involves three key stages:

1. Developing analytic codes and categories, which are organised into a data structure comprising first-order (informant-centred) codes and second-order (theory-centred) themes and aggregate dimensions.
2. Creating a grounded theoretical model through constant comparison of data over time and across informants.
3. Presenting the study's findings through a detailed, data-based narrative that typically uses second-order themes and aggregate dimensions, frequently referencing informants' first-order quotations (Magnani & Gioia, 2023).

The software tool ATLAS.ti was employed for coding with the Gioia method.

### 3.4.2. Validity and reliability

Audio recordings often capture tone, pauses, emphasis, and other verbal cues that can be crucial for interpreting participants' responses (Tahir et al., 2016). However, those nuances were lost during the transcription process, as the audio files were deleted. This may affect the accuracy and depth of the data analysis, which could impact the validity of the interpretations. To mitigate this issue, notable body language observed during the interviews were mentioned by the researcher, so that they are captured on the recording as well.

The Gioia method is a systematic approach to data analysis that enhances the validity of the research. It provides the researcher with a clear structure for the data analysis. To ensure the validity, the first-order concepts were constructed using participants' own words rather than the interpretation of the researcher (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). This minimised the subjectivity of the researcher. Additionally, periodic feedback from the research supervisor helped mitigate the observer bias, further increasing the validity of the research.

# 4. Results

This chapter discusses the data that was collected in order to answer the following research question: "Which aspects of a simple organisational structure influences the change readiness of employees?"

## 4.1. Case 1

Case 1 takes place within Organisation A, a Dutch organisation specialised in data-driven energy reduction. The organisation has approximately ten employees and is currently undergoing a change to internalise processes and activities that are currently outsourced, resulting in changing work processes.

Organisation A has a strategic apex that consists of a single director. Direct supervision is at its maximum, as the director has full control. Informal coordination is also highly present, as the director works closely alongside the employees. With regard to vertical and horizontal centralisation, all employees are involved in the decision-making process, but the final decision rests with the director. The organisation operates in an extremely flat structure with minimal hierarchical layers.

### 4.1.1. Minimal distance between employees and central leader

The first key finding is defined as: "Visibility and accessibility of the central leader, flat structure of the organisation, and short lines of communication influences employees' commitment to change, perception and understanding of the change, and perceived management support to the change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The central leader's visible high level of commitment to the change and visible appreciation of the employees, give the employees a sense of being seen and valued within the change, and influences the employee's perception and commitment to the change."

The interviews revealed that employees are highly attentive to the central leader's stance on the change. Employees carefully observe the central leader's attitude and level of commitment, which influences their own perception of and commitment to the change. When the central leader is visibly committed and supportive, employees embrace and actively get involved in the change.

*"But yes, what I said, it's not really our boss, so it's more as a team, but if you see him as management indeed, it's really definitely supported by him, and he himself is positive about the change so to speak."*

This suggests that the commitment of management and the central leader is not only observed but also interpreted as a signal of legitimacy and necessity of the change. Employees recognise that for change to be successful, it requires commitment at all levels, not just among employees, but also within management. A strong, visible commitment from the central leader reassures employees that the change is necessary and beneficial, and reduces uncertainty and resistance, fostering a sense of trust in the success of the change.

*"I think when I look at my colleagues and myself that we are all open to change and that we are also all behind this change. I think that is also very important. So I think that that will go well and when I see how my boss wants this change very much, who is fully behind it, so I think that will go well."*

Furthermore, one employee emphasised that the central leader's commitment is crucial because he represents the organisation. The central leader is seen as a role model whose actions and commitment set the tone for the rest of the organisation.

*"Interviewee: If you ask me if he is 100% committed to [project name], I say I don't know. Interviewer: Okay, and in your view, is that needed to make it a success? Interviewee: Yes, sure. He is the owner of the company. He is the company."*

The following supporting finding is defined as: "Approachability of the central leader and short lines of communication, gives the employees understanding of the change, a sense of involvement and support from management in the change."

The interviews revealed that the few hierarchical layers of the organisation facilitates the implementation of change. Employees are more involved in the change, stay informed, and understand the necessity of the change.

*"Now I do think we are a small company or that an implementation is then easier than in a big company when you really change a way of working for a hundred people, for example."*

A key characteristic is the lack of hierarchy. Multiple employees stated that although there is a central leader, he does not feel like a traditional boss, but more like a colleague. The leader adopts an informal and approachable style, remaining open to input, feedback, and questions. This fosters a collaborative team dynamic, where employees feel involved and valued, particularly in their area of expertise.

*"If I look at the word hierarchy, for example, at our company, actually we have very little hierarchy. There are seven of us in total as a team, and actually the only one who is above me then is my boss, is the owner of the company. But he is very informal, very approachable, so it doesn't really feel like a boss, but more just like a colleague as well. So we don't really have a hierarchy in the company and you notice that during the change."*

*"Hierarchy. Within the company right now, we don't really have that. [name of director] is the boss. Ultimately, his word is leading, so to speak. But he stands more like an employee than a boss so to speak. You can actually see it that everyone is a kind of manager of his specialisation."*

Additionally, employees appreciate the leader's direct and transparent communication. He does not sugarcoat information, which creates a sense of clarity and trust among the employees. They always know where they stand, reducing uncertainty during the change. The leader's openness and honesty further strengthens his approachability, ensuring that employees feel comfortable sharing their perspectives.

*"And my boss is also very, he just tells it like it is, he doesn't make pretty stories out of it, so it's nice to know that you always know where you stand."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Transparent and short lines of communication, and documentation of decision-making during the change, preserves the intended message and minimises noise, enhancing clarity and understanding of the change and employee's commitment to change."

Interviews revealed that employees highly value transparent and short lines of communication, especially during periods of change. They want to be actively involved in the change process by staying informed about the status, next steps, and expectations. Regular updates, such as monthly meetings, help ensure clarity and alignment. Additionally, informal communication fosters mutual understanding, collaboration, and involvement. Employees appreciate being able to openly discuss matters, provide feedback, and address concerns. This creates an environment where they feel involved and heard.

*"So I personally do experience that as very nice. That there is just good communication with each other and that we are well informed about the change."*

*"We have very informal communication with each other. We can always call each other on everything and give feedback on it, so that is very nice. Especially I think in the change if something goes too fast then that can just be pointed out."*

For a successful change process, communication must be clear, structured, and consistent. If informal communication alone is not sufficient, formal agreements should be made about how and when the communication should be. This includes communication during meetings and follow-up communication to ensure decisions are effectively shared with all employees.

*"Yes, that we document decisions more clearly of what we are going to do and just document that also in decisions of okay, this is what we are going to do and that is what we are going to do."*

## 4.1.2.    Varying levels lead to different roles and attitudes of employees

The second key finding is defined as: "Varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the employees' roles and attitudes, which determine whether their commitment, understanding, and perception of management support are strengthened or weakened regarding change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The level of employee involvement in decision-making during change requires different roles and attitudes from the employees, either strengthening or weakening their understanding and commitment to change."

Interviews revealed that employee involvement in decision-making enhances their sense of involvement and support for the change. When employees are actively involved in discussions and their input is considered, they feel a greater connection to the change, making them more likely to embrace it.

*"Then we actually all came to the conclusion of how are we going to improve the business? Well, so that's [project name]. So that's that change. So by going and getting more in-house. And my boss totally agreed with that. But so did the rest of the team. So I feel like everyone does support that change in that way."*

Employees particularly appreciate when the central leader values their expertise and actively seeks their input on topics where the employees have specialised knowledge. They recognise that the central leader cannot be an expert in every field, so when employees with relevant knowledge are consulted, it strengthens their trust in the decision-making process. Knowing that knowledgeable colleagues are involved reassures employees that decisions are well-informed and credible.

*"I also have the feeling that if I contribute something that it is actually listened to and not that I contribute something and it's like well thanks, we won't do anything with it. Then it's actually taken up and then they go and find out whether they can do something with it."*

*"We have our [name director], our business manager or our director. He has knowledge of a lot of things, but not everything. So when you then start talking about server things, for example, he has no idea what I'm talking about. And so I am seen as a specialist in his eyes, and so we have a few more people who are all specialists in their own field. We all sit together when we have these conversations and we all go from our expertise to bring something in. And all that input ultimately ensures that a decision is taken."*

Despite valuing involvement, employees acknowledge that the final decision ultimately rests with the central leader. They respect this authority, recognizing that management is responsible for the direction of the organisation. While occasional resistance to decisions is inevitable, employees understand that when a change is necessary, they must adapt and move forward. Some employees even believe that in certain circumstances, resistance should be pushed aside to ensure the success of the change.

*"Interviewee: Sometimes people also just need to be pulled through something. Do you understand what I mean when I say that? Interviewer: Yes, it's something that just has to be done. Interviewee: You just have resistance. Okay, fine. We're going to do it anyway."*

*"Changes, I can go against it, but that just makes no sense and only makes it difficult for myself. I may not like it, but well that is something that is also personal. But in the end, I either have to grit my teeth and just do it if I don't like it or I have to start making it fun for myself by maybe making it more challenging for myself than I initially thought it would be."*

The next supporting finding is defined as: "Direct supervision from the central leader and informal coordination between the central leader and employees regarding the change provide employees with clarity and a sense of guidance about change."

Interviews revealed that employees often underestimate the importance of supervision and coordination in the early stages of change. They only recognise its significance when issues arise, such as confusion, inefficiency, or lack of responsibility. Employees expect the central leader to ensure proper coordination. When this is lacking, employees experience uncertainty and feel that responsibilities are unclear.

*"We have actually only recently found out that good coordination is needed, and not all things are mixed up called out and everyone just does their own thing."*

*"Coordination, I say because when you describe it like that, it seems like a very small simple thing, but it turns out to be quite a big project, actually bigger than we ourselves expected as well."*

Despite initially overlooking the need for structured supervision, employees acknowledge that effective coordination benefits change. They recognise that someone must be responsible for monitoring progress, setting clear expectations, and ensuring follow-through. This clarity fosters trust in the process and provide employees with a sense of guidance and direction.

Interestingly, employees do not believe that this responsibility must always fall to the central leader. Instead, they see it as a role that could be assigned to someone else, depending on the nature of the change. However, they acknowledge that in most cases, the central leader naturally takes on this role.

*"That sometimes it is too diffuse in the sense of okay, that happens too little, I think that we are discussing something and then you should write down or agree of okay, this is what we are going to do and that person is going to do it and no later than that date and then when that date gets close, there should be a check if that did happen. And somebody has to manage that. For me that doesn't necessarily have to be [name of director]."*

*"I do think that with more coordination it would benefit. And supervision maybe also because that we actually do what we say."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "The lack of clarity on supervision and coordination leads to a lack of understanding of the change, sense of powerlessness and low sense of support from the central leader during change."

The interviews revealed that uncertainty about the approach to change leads to chaos, frustration, and agitation among the employees. Without a clear direction, employees engage in uncoordinated efforts, resulting in inefficiency and a sense of powerlessness. Differing opinions on the right approach create further complications, as employees want to have a say in the process, yet no final decision is made by the central leader. This lack of decisiveness leaves employees feeling unsupported by the central leader and uncertain about change.

*"I sense resistance there. People have to do things differently, have experiences with changes or with different work. For example, I know the person implementing the software who has worked at another company where it was chaos and who now thinks of first we have to define everything down to the last nail before we start writing a single piece of software at all."*

A significant issue in this case is the absence of coordination and clear decision-making. Employees feel powerless, unable to understand what is happening, and lacking a structured approach. Without coordination, change stagnates, as employees continue operating without a unified approach or take on a passive attitude.

*"Interviewee: Well, if I would say of what is missing I think is coordination, centralisation. Interviewer: And how do you mean that? Interviewee: Well, that what you notice is that we are kind of circling around the place. What I see is like if you have a project, then you have a start and an end. But if you want to start then you have to have clarity of what are we going to do. And that's where we're kind of spinning around like that."*

### 4.1.3.  Operational focus and overlapping functions

The last key finding is defined as: "The organisation's focus on operational activities and overlapping functions of employees foster responsibility, flexibility, and involvement, cultivating an attitude that supports during change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The choice between outsourcing or internalizing activities during change depends on prioritizing operational, value-added tasks, or prioritizing involvement and independence, with employee's and central leader attitudes being decisive in this choice and influencing involvement, commitment, and perceived management support regarding change."

Interviews revealed that working with external personnel creates dependency and potential frictions. Employees feel that external personnel primarily focus on their own company's interests rather than prioritizing the organisation they are hired by. Unlike internal employees, external personnel are not as deeply involved or committed to the organisation's long-term success. Employees believe that processes will improve when they are managed internally, as this fosters greater responsibility and involvement. They recognise that this attitude is needed during change.

*"I don't know if I should call it a big necessity, but I do indeed see a difference between people who are really in the team and those who are not in the team, who are involved, who are still maybe crazy to say, but more often a bit more on the money, so they send the invoice at the end of the month and they have their money back in. And I think people who are really working internally are a bit more involved so in that respect it's a necessity. I think for this company that the process will be really improved though if we just start doing a bit more internally."*

When employees do not support outsourcing activities, it can create resistance. They dislike feeling reliant on external personnel, as it makes them feel less in control over processes and decisions. This can lead to resistance to change, because they feel unsupported by management and lack trust.

*"We are now dependent on external so to speak. Personally I think that's a bad thing."*

However, outsourcing can also provide advantages, such as allowing internal employees to focus on their core operational activities and bringing in specialised expertise that may not be available within the organisation.

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Overlapping functions and activities for employees within the organisation foster greater responsibility, commitment, and diverse roles for employees, requiring an open and flexible attitude, which also is essential during change."

Interviews revealed that employees primarily focus on their own functions and activities during change. Their main concern is how the change affects their specific role, rather than the broader organisational impact. However, given the small size of the organisation, this individualistic approach is not feasible. There are not enough employees to allow each person to work in isolation, making it essential for them to adopt a more holistic approach.

*'I think some people are totally supportive of completely rewriting the software of the meters and making the meter so we can look into that. But I think those people again might not be interested in a new dashboard.'*

To enhance change readiness, employees must go beyond their own defined roles and understand how their work connects with and influences others. Clearly defined functions are important, but equally important is recognizing how different functions and activities interconnect. This requires an open, flexible, and involved attitude, fostering broader responsibilities, stronger collaboration, and greater knowledge sharing during change.

*'Interviewee: In this company, we are not in a situation where you can say such a small piece of it is my piece and the rest is out of the picture. Interviewer: So it blends in a bit more. Interviewee: Yes, it's not so much of that it's not clearly defined what your function is. It's more of what is your function and how does that flow into other people's functions.'*

## 4.2. Case 2

Case 2 takes place within Organisation B, a Dutch organisation focused on employment services. The organisation has a team of approximately seven employees, and is currently undergoing a change focused on adapting their own employment conditions policy. This change involves the introduction of a bonus system, which requires both the implementation of a new system and adjustments to work processes.

Organisation B's strategic apex consists of three directors, each with their own area of expertise, and is together forming the Management Team. Supervision is shared, with each director overseeing their respective specialism. As a result, employees report to different directors depending on the topic at hand. Informal coordination remains strong, but is more complex due to the multiple directors. Employees tend to have closer informal coordination with the director most relevant to their role, rather than with all three directors equally. Regarding vertical and horizontal centralisation, employees with relevant knowledge and experience are involved in the decision-making process, but the final decision-making authority rests with the Management Team. The organisation maintains a relatively flat structure, though there is some hierarchical differentiation between the directors.

### 4.2.1. Minimal distance between employees and central leader

The first key finding is defined as: "Visibility and accessibility of the central leader, flat structure of the organisation, and short lines of communication influences employees' commitment to change, perception and understanding of the change, and perceived management support to the change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The central leader's visible high level of commitment to the change and visible appreciation of the employees, give the employees a sense of being seen and valued within the change, and influences the employee's perception and commitment to the change."

The interviews revealed that visible appreciation from the central leader and management has a strong motivational effect on employees. When employees feel valued for their contributions, such as through bonuses or other forms of recognition, they experience a greater sense of worth within and stronger connection with the organisation. This increases their willingness to actively involve in change, since the change also brings personal benefits.

*"We see in the job services a lot that people get motivated by a certain bonus or get an extra reward if they do their job well."*

*"If you then start looking at how much you are going to try your best for a bonus, so whether that makes you work harder? Then the answer is yes definitely."*

Additionally, employees emphasised that appreciation from management and the central leader fosters a reciprocal relationship. When employees feel valued, they are more inclined to give back to the organisation through their commitment and involvement in, amongst others, change.

*"And they also said, you know we have really well, they started well, and you also want to give back to the employees."*

Employees recognise the commitment of management and the central leader to the organisation and change, such as ongoing innovations, which makes them feel seen and valued. This fosters a positive perception of changes and the organisation.

*"Interviewer: Do you think the employees see it that way? That management is committed to this? Interviewee: Yes, I think so. Our first employee who started is still there. You also notice for example with him like oh nice, nice to see that also towards the employees, they try to share and give more and that we keep innovating."*


The following supporting finding is defined as: "Approachability of the central leader and short lines of communication, gives the employees understanding of the change, a sense of involvement and support from management in the change."

The interviews revealed that the few hierarchical layers of the organisation enables short lines between the central leader and the employees, allowing changes to be implemented smoothly with minimal resistance. Employees feel more involved in change because they are constantly informed, and management remains accessible for input, feedback, and questions.

*"That's because we are actually still a very small company and the lines are very short, that we haven't had a lot of trouble getting this change to land well with people."*

A key advantage of the organisation's few hierarchical layers is its flexibility. Decision-making is quick and adaptive, and employees have direct access to the central leader and management, fostering a strong sense of involvement, which enhances their change readiness. However, this also presents challenges, such as limited internal expertise and resources.

*"Of course, we are still relatively small, there are three owners, which also makes it a bit tricky at times. But on the other hand, because the barriers are very low here, you get a lot done. So I think it's just really nice that it's still so malleable right now."*

The flat structure and short lines communication allows employees to get actively involved in decision-making. Management demonstrates engagement and commitment by consulting employees before implementing change, ensuring they feel heard and seen. Employees contrast

this approach with experiences in larger organisations, where decision-making is more rigid and top-down.

*"What I said, it's very approachable, you can think about anything. And they do that very well anyway I think. Because well, they also have the experience of a very large organisation where it is very difficult to get changes through. So I think they listen carefully here. And I have sometimes experienced management that is really on an island and that you just have to accept whatever is decided, but here things are very much done in consultation. Then I also really feel that they show commitment by consulting well and not just firing off ideas but really sparring about it with each other."*

Additionally, the organisation's few hierarchical layers allows changes to be implemented at a rapid pace. With fewer layers, decisions can be executed efficiently. Employees view collaboration as a key driver for readiness to change. When they are actively engaged in discussions and decision-making, they develop a sense of responsibility, increasing their confidence in the change.

*"But with such a small company like [organisation name], you actually have that when something needs to be changed or is going to be changed, it goes pretty fast."*

*"This is precisely how you get everyone involved. And you have the feeling that you can actually change something within the organisation."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Transparent and short lines of communication and documentation of decision-making during the change, preserves the intended message and minimises noise, enhancing clarity and understanding of the change and employee's commitment to change."

Interviews revealed that communication processes can be used to share experiences, opinions, and expectations. It is a two-way process, where both employees and the central leader exchange information. This open dialogue ensures that everyone is involved, leading to greater clarity and mutual understanding throughout change, improving their readiness to change.

*"I think what has been important in this change is also communication, that we have also already looked with the employees, for example, we have now hired a guy, [employee name], who already had a bonus system, hey what did that look like? What did you think was important? What's good for you? And I think actually that communication, both with the management and also some employees that we still looked at what do people need, that it is also as interesting as possible for everyone."*

Employees emphasise the need for transparent and short lines of communication during change. They want to understand what the change entails, what is expected from them, and how it benefits them. Their involvement in discussions about the change increases their involvement and understanding.

*"I think communication, because I personally really like that if there is just open and good communication about what it all means for you and what is going to happen."*

## 4.2.2. Varying levels lead to different roles and attitudes of employees

The second key finding is defined as: "Varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the employees' roles and attitudes, which determine whether their commitment, understanding, and perception of management support are strengthened or weakened regarding change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The level of employee involvement in decision-making during change requires different roles and attitudes from the employees, either strengthening or weakening their understanding and commitment to change."

Interviews showed the importance of active employee involvement during change. When employees are included in discussions and informed about upcoming changes, it reduces uncertainty and minimises resistance. Additionally, if the change has a positive outcome for employees, resistance is naturally lower. However, even in favourable situations, it remains essential to provide employees with opportunities to ask questions, give input, and express concerns. This reinforces their sense of being valued and involved during change, enhancing their change readiness.

*"If you already indicate that we are working on that, it's already a moment of hey it's a change. Of course, it's a positive change for staff, so they don't have to change their behaviour, so you get a bit less friction, you can expect in advance. But you already give them the opportunity to approach one of us and possibly give their opinion on it."*

Additionally, involving employees with relevant experience and expertise in the decision-making process can be beneficial. Their insights contribute to well-informed decision-making while also fostering a sense of involvement and recognition. Employees feel more involved and respected when their knowledge is acknowledged and utilised.

The next supporting finding is defined as: "Direct supervision from the central leader and informal coordination between the central leader and employees regarding the change provide employees with clarity and a sense of guidance about change."

The interviews revealed that as the organisation grows, new challenges emerge, including the need for clearer oversight and coordination. Employees recognise that grow brings new questions that were previously unconsidered, one of the most pressing one being how to maintain oversight.

*"You really see that the organisation is growing. And in it, more and more thought has to be given to certain things that were not yet in place. So that definitely does contribute. I saw supervision mentioned. I think that's a funny one. It's not quite supervision, but the question that still prevails a bit now is how do you maintain the overview?"*

A key issue in this case is uncertainty about responsibilities. Employees are unsure who is in charge of coordination and supervision, leading to confusion and unanswered questions about accountability. This lack of clarity leads to resistance to change.

*"But it is not entirely clear then who is indeed ultimately responsible for that now."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "The lack of clarity on supervision and coordination leads to a lack of understanding of the change, sense of powerlessness and low sense of support from the central leader during change."

In this case, the change revolves around the implementation of a bonus system, with the allocation of bonuses depending on supervision. Employees express concerns based on past experiences, where similar processes have led to ongoing discussions. Given this history of uncertainty and lack of clarity, employees approach the current change with scepticism and hesitation. They anticipate potential issues in how supervision and coordination will be handled, leading to a passive and uncertain attitude toward change.

*"Interviewer: So that still needs some oversight in the rollout and ongoing as well. Interviewee: Yes and that is always the question, and that will remain a perpetual discussion, I know that from my previous employers."*

One factor influencing this scepticism is the small size of the organisation. Employees recognise that this organisation relies on a manual supervision system, unlike larger organisations that use structured systems. They perceive this as prone to errors and inconsistencies, raising concerns about fairness and transparency. This makes employees question the reliability of the process, further reinforcing their uncertainty and passive attitude towards change.

Additionally, the role of management support is crucial in shaping employees' perceptions of the change. The absence of management support creates further uncertainty. Without clear direction from the central leader, employees feel unsupported and powerlessness. When employees feel supported by the central leader and management, they feel more ready to change.

## 4.2.3.   Operational focus and overlapping functions

The last key finding is defined as: "The organisation's focus on operational activities and overlapping functions of employees foster responsibility, flexibility, and involvement, cultivating an attitude that supports during change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The choice between outsourcing or internalizing activities during change depends on prioritizing operational, value-added tasks, or prioritizing involvement and independence, with employee's and central leader attitudes being decisive in this choice and influencing involvement, commitment, and perceived management support regarding change."

Interviews revealed that employees in case 2 prefer to focus on operational activities that directly contribute to the organisation's growth and success. They are not inclined to invest time and attention in support tasks and appreciate when such responsibilities are either outsourced or assigned to a specific employee.

*"Interviewer: Maybe also the supporting administration and HR maybe also outsourced to an external party? Interviewee: Yes, also and it is also partly taken up by management so that is also very nice. So we don't have that here. And that makes that everyone can just focus on uh the growth of the company."*

While employees acknowledge that outsourcing has some drawbacks, they believe the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. They see it as a way to streamline operations, reduce distractions, and allow them to concentrate on core business activities. They feel supported by the central leader to focus on the core business activities. This reinforces the believe that when employees must adapt to change, it is necessary and cannot be outsourced, therefore increasing their readiness to change.

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Overlapping functions and activities for employees within the organisation foster greater responsibility, commitment, and diverse roles for employees, requiring an open and flexible attitude, which also is essential during change."

Interviews revealed that in this particular change, employees are expected to take a less active role in driving change themselves. Instead, management takes the lead in overseeing the bigger picture, ensuring that strategic objectives are met while still keeping employees informed and involved. This results in employees being more involved in the background rather than directly taking responsibility. However, when employees do provide input, they are expected to consider the organisation as whole rather than focusing solely on their own role or function. This broader perspective helps ensure that changes align with overall organisational goals rather than serving only the individual interests. This strengthens the sense of importance for the whole organisation, increasing employees readiness to change.

A key characteristic of this organisation is the significant overlap between functions, which naturally encourages employees to collaborate and share knowledge. Because responsibilities are interconnected, employees frequently seek each other for support, leading to a work environment where knowledge sharing occurs naturally.

To successfully navigate this, employees must maintain an open and flexible attitude. They need to be receptive to feedback, willing to engage in discussions beyond their immediate activities, and proactive in offering insights that benefit the whole organisation. This attitude has an positive effect on the readiness to change of employees, since they feel they are doing change together.

## 4.3. Case 3

Case 3 takes place within Organisation C, a Dutch organisation specializing in digital hardware design. The organisation has a team of approximately twenty employees, and is currently undergoing a change to improve their quality assurance management system. This involves implementing the ISO 9001 quality standard, which requires both the introduction of a new system and changing work processes.

The strategic apex of Organisation C consists of three directors, each with their own area of expertise, along with an Advisory Board. Direct supervision is shared among the directors. Informal coordination remains strong, but is more complex due to the multiple directors and the Advisory Board. For this specific change, one director has been assigned for the supervision and coordination. Regarding vertical and horizontal centralisation, employees with relevant knowledge and experience are involved in the decision-making process, but the final decisions are made by the director(s), potentially in collaboration with the Advisory Board. The organisation remains relatively flat, though there is some hierarchical differentiation between the directors and the Advisory Board.

## 4.3.1. Minimal distance between employees and central leader

The first key finding is defined as: "Visibility and accessibility of the central leader, flat structure of the organisation, and short lines of communication influences employees' commitment to change, perception and understanding of the change, and perceived management support to the change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The central leader's visible high level of commitment to the change and visible appreciation of the employees, give the employees a sense of being seen and valued within the change, and influences the employee's perception and commitment to the change."

In this case, the commitment of the central leader is visibly recognised by employees, who see it as essential for their readiness and commitment to change. Employees believe that the central leader must take an active role in guiding change. They perceive the central leader as responsible for ensuring that the change is applicable and effectively implemented for all the employees, also for those with no relevant knowledge and experience.

*"Interviewer: But is management committed to this change? Interviewee: Yes, yes, I think so. Interviewer: And is that something you also think is necessary? Interviewee: Yes, otherwise it won't get through obviously. And you always need people to take the lead in this. Also because it is of course for the applying parties, so to speak, they must of course know what it entails, but there are also of course a lot of things that are of course not interesting for the engineers to go through, but which must have been read once, signed, et cetera."*

Additionally, employees view the central leader as a role model whose attitude and actions influence the entire organisation. Their level of commitment sets the tone for how employees get involved with change.

*"They are role models."*

The following supporting finding is defined as: "Approachability of the central leader and short lines of communication, gives the employees understanding of the change, a sense of involvement and support from management in the change."

Interviews revealed that the fact that there are few hierarchical layers in the organisation plays a crucial role in change. With fewer bureaucratic structures to navigate, change becomes more flexible and hands-on. Employees perceive this as an advantage, as it gives them confidence that change can be successfully executed without prolonged waiting periods. This enhances their readiness to change.

*"That as a small company, it's easier to just do some stuff without really having a structure for it. Because everything you do is just pretty hands-on and in that moment. And then it's easier to make the right choices."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Transparent and short lines of communication, and documentation of decision-making during the change, preserves the intended message and

minimises noise, enhancing clarity and understanding of the change and employee's commitment to change."

Interviews revealed that employees feel comfortable voicing their questions and concerns about the change. This openness reflects a strong sense of involvement and shows the transparency and short lines of communication between the central leader and employees.

*"I do think people will feel the freedom to raise if they notice oh, this is not quite according to procedure or why are we doing this in this way?"*

Employees further emphasise the importance of short lines of communication. They expect the central leader and management to discuss decision-making processes openly and explain the reasoning behind decisions. By breaking down change step by step, employees can better understand the process, feel more involved, and adapt more easily, enhancing their readiness to change.

*"I think communication is a very important point and that is also something that is done very clearly within [name of the organisation]. So the choices from management are discussed very clearly and also pointed out why those choices are made."*

*"I think people are quite open to change, but you shouldn't suddenly just pour a bucket over them all at once. So when you take them step by step through the process you are working on, then they can get used to it and then the change goes gradually."*

Additionally, employees highlight the importance of documenting decision-making to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings.

*"It all becomes a bit more formalised and of course that does give a bit of clarity."*

## 4.3.2. Varying levels lead to different roles and attitudes of employees

The second key finding is defined as: "Varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the employees' roles and attitudes, which determine whether their commitment, understanding, and perception of management support are strengthened or weakened regarding change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The level of employee involvement in decision-making during change requires different roles and attitudes from the employees, either strengthening or weakening their understanding and commitment to the change."

Interviews reveal that employees tend to view change as either objectively necessary or unnecessary. When change is deemed necessary, employees feel they must accept it, regardless of their personal opinions. While this pragmatic approach ensures change readiness due to the appropriateness, it can also lead to a sense of lack of involvement, as employees feel their perspectives are not considered.

*"The reason I find that difficult is because I myself think it is somehow objectively necessary or not."*

To foster a greater sense of involvement, employees emphasise the importance of involving individuals with relevant experience and expertise in the decision-making process. When employees with specialised knowledge are consulted, it not only leads to more informed and well-considered decisions, but also enhances employees' sense of being valued and heard, enhancing their understanding and involvement to change.

> *"There where knowledge or expertise is with any of the employees, they will involve them."*

The next supporting finding is defined as: "Direct supervision from the central leader and informal coordination between the central leader and employees regarding the change provide employees with clarity and a sense of guidance about change."

The interviews revealed that employees recognise the importance of coordination in ensuring collective support for change. Without proper coordination, alignment among employees becomes challenging, which can lead to confusion and inefficiencies. However, employees emphasise that coordination is not the sole responsibility of the central leader, it requires a collaborative effort across the entire organisation.

Additionally, employees view supervision as a shared responsibility rather than something that should be exclusively from the central leader. They believe that effective supervision involves mutual accountability, where colleagues oversee each other's contributions to the change process. This fosters a sense of collective responsibility and reinforces involvement and clarity, enhancing their understanding and commitment to change.

> *"I don't think it's something one person can do on their own. I think it's something that needs to be picked up and carried by the whole organisation. So you also need some coordination with that to get that done."*

> *"Interviewee: So I think with that it is very important that you also supervise each other. Interviewer: Is that also supervision from management? Or is that then mainly just with each other? Interviewee: I think you understand it more among one another within a project, for example. But that's still something we don't have to deal with at the moment, but I expect it's mainly mutual."*

The last supporting finding is defined as: "The lack of clarity on supervision and coordination leads to a lack of understanding of the change, sense of powerlessness and low sense of support from the central leader during change."

Interviews revealed that, in this case, there is minimal ambiguity and little evidence of a passive attitude among employees. Unlike other change characterised by uncertainty and hesitation, this particular change is accompanied by external supervision, which provides employees with a sense of trust in its successful implementation. The presence of an external supervisory body offers a structured framework, ensuring that change follows a clear and well-defined process. Enhancing employees trust and thereby their readiness to change.

Despite this external support, employees still raise questions about how the supervision and coordination will be managed internally. They recognise the need for clarity within the organisation to complement the external supervision and ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency. However, rather than relying on the central leader, they believe in mutual

supervision, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and accountability. The role of the central leader is supportive. Rather than imposing strict supervision and coordination, management provides guidance from the background, ensuring that employees have the autonomy to take an active role. This reinforces a sense of responsibility and involvement, further enhancing their readiness to change.

### 4.3.3.    Operational focus and overlapping functions

The last key finding is defined as: "The organisation's focus on operational activities and overlapping functions of employees foster responsibility, flexibility, and involvement, cultivating an attitude that supports during change."

The first supporting finding is defined as: "The choice between outsourcing or internalizing activities during change depends on prioritizing operational, value-added tasks, or prioritizing involvement and independence, with employee's and central leader attitudes being decisive in this choice and influencing involvement, commitment, and perceived management support regarding the change."

Interviews revealed that within this organisation, collaboration with external partners is primarily driven by necessity. Employees are accustomed to working with external personnel and have adapted their working methods accordingly. Given the nature of their industry, external collaboration is unavoidable, as employees rely on specialised knowledge and expertise that external personnel brings. Rather than viewing this dependency negatively, they accept it as an integral part of their work. By leveraging the skills and knowledge of external personnel, employees enhance their own capabilities, ultimately benefiting both their professional growth and the organisation's overall development. As a result, the advantages of working with external personnel outweigh the disadvantages. Employees are ready to change, because they understand the necessity and the benefits.

The last supporting finding is defined as: "Overlapping functions and activities for employees within the organisation foster greater responsibility, commitment, and diverse roles for employees, requiring an open and flexible attitude, which also is essential during change."

The interviews revealed that while each employee's work is highly specialised, they rely on one another to piece together the bigger picture. The interconnected nature of their tasks means that collaboration is essential for ensuring smooth operations and achieving overall organisational goals. However, some employees have broader functions that extend beyond specific tasks. These individuals play a crucial role in overseeing the bigger picture, ensuring alignment between various functions, and facilitating coordination across different areas of the organisation. Their ability to monitor and integrate different aspects of the organisation helps maintain structure and clarity.

To support this interconnected way of working, employees have designated moments for knowledge-sharing and input, such as during monthly meetings. These structured interaction points provide opportunities for employees to exchange insights, address challenges, and align their efforts. Regular discussions ensure that all employees remain informed and can contribute

their perspectives, fostering a sense of involvement and shared responsibility, enhancing their readiness to change.

For employees to be change ready, they must adopt an open and active attitude. They should be willing to collaborate, engage in discussions beyond their immediate responsibilities, and proactively contribute to the organisation's growth. An open attitude also strengthens commitment, as employees recognise the value of collective efforts and shared goals.

## 4.4. Cross-case analysis

This section compares the findings from the three cases by identifying similarities and differences within each key finding.

### 4.4.1. Conceptual model

The results lead to the following conceptual model. The complete table with the first order codes, second order themes, and aggregate dimensions can be found in Appendix C: Gioia table.
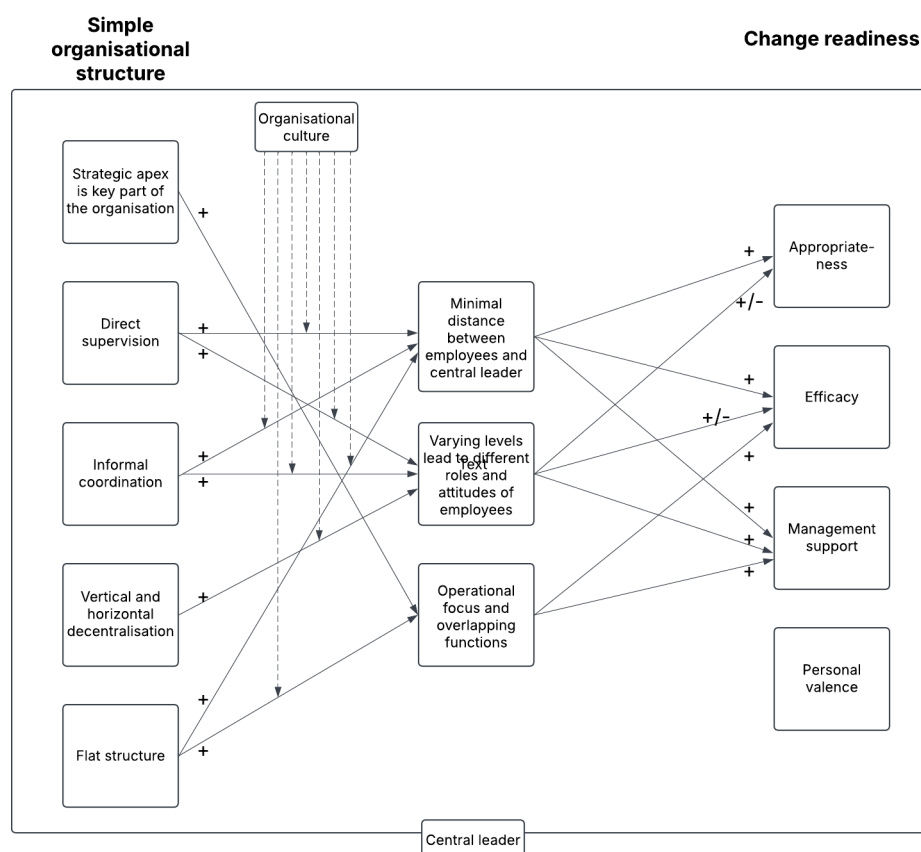


*Figure 1 Conceptual model*

The conceptual model is further explained in the following paragraphs.

## 4.4.2. Minimal distance between employees and central leader

The first key finding is defined as: "Visibility and accessibility of the central leader, flat structure of the organisation, and short lines of communication influences employees' commitment to change, perception and understanding of the change, and perceived management support to the change." Those variables have a positive influence on the change readiness dimensions appropriateness, efficacy, and management support.

A high level of commitment from the central leader emerged as a key factor influencing employee involvement in all three cases. When employees perceive their central leader as actively supporting change, they are more likely to trust the process, proactively involve, and view the change as necessary. Additionally, appreciation from the central leader fosters motivation, a sense of being valued, and creates a reciprocal attitude where employees are more willing to involve. This has a positive influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness and efficacy.

A key similarity across all cases is that employees consider the central leader's role crucial in legitimizing and guiding change. Employees observe the central leader's stance and base their own perception of change on their level of commitment. A leader who is confident, enthusiastic, and supportive sets a positive tone, encouraging employees to adopt a similar attitude. Conversely, a lack of visible support or appreciation can lead to disengagement and scepticism. This has a positive influence on change readiness through the dimension management support.

Despite these common agreements, the underlying reasons differ. Case 1 emphasises the team aspect, viewing the organisation as one collective unit. Since there is only one central leader, employees may feel a stronger sense of unity and shared responsibility. Case 2 highlighted the importance of appreciation and feeling valued and seen. They see commitment as a sign that their efforts are recognised, which motivates them to get actively involved. Case 3 focuses more on the content aspect of change, with employees seeing the leader's role as ensuring that change is applicable and effectively implemented.

These differences may be explained by the composition of the strategic apex in each case. In case 1 there is only one leader, which may explain why employees emphasise the importance of teamwork more strongly than in cases 2 and 3, where multiple leaders exist.

When looking at the flat structure of the organisation, the three cases reveal a common agreement. The flat structure and few hierarchical layers of the organisation provide significant advantages regarding change. Across all cases, employees emphasised that fewer bureaucratic layers allow for faster decision-making, greater flexibility, and stronger involvement in change. The approachability of the central leader and short communication lines between the central leader and employees contribute to a work environment where employees feel informed and involved. Moreover, direct and transparent communication reduces uncertainty and resistance. This has a positive influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness and efficacy.

Despite these shared advantages, notable differences exist in how employees perceive their role in the decision-making process. Case 1 acknowledges that while the organisation is flat and employees are involved, the final decision-making lies with the central leader. They appreciate the leader's informality and approachability, while also understanding the hierarchy that exists. Case

2, on the other hand, places a stronger emphasis on collaborative decision-making, where employees expect their input to be actively considered before final decisions are made. Case 3 focuses on hands-on decision-making, rather than on hierarchical dynamics or collaboration. Employees believe that changes should be efficient. These differences suggest that while a flat structure enhances change, the role of the central leader and employee expectations around decision-making may vary depending on the organisational culture.

When zooming in at communication, across all cases transparent and short lines of communication is identified as a critical for change readiness. Employees emphasise the need for transparency, regular updates, and involvement in discussions. They want to understand what is happening, why it is happening, and how it affects them. Uncertainty can lead to resistance or confusion. Additionally, employees express a strong desire to be actively involved in change by providing input, sharing opinions, and being consulted before final decisions are made. Furthermore, a key agreement across cases is the need to document decisions to ensure clarity and consistency. Employees recognise that without proper documentation, miscommunication can occur, leading to misunderstandings and inefficiencies. This has a positive influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness and efficacy.

However, while all cases recognise the importance of communication, they differ in their preferred communication structure. Case 1 favours a blend of informal and formal communication, where regular updates and direct, ongoing conversations help ensure clarity. Case 2 emphasises the importance of open dialogue, where both employees and management shares experiences and expectations in a two-way communication process. Case 3 stresses structured communication with step-by-step explanations to ensure understanding, along with formalised documentation for transparency. The cause for these differences may originate from the different organisational cultures.

### 4.4.3. Varying levels lead to different roles and attitudes of employees

The second key finding is defined as: "Varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the employees' roles and attitudes, which determine whether their commitment, understanding, and perception of management support are strengthened or weakened regarding change." Those variables have a positive influence on the change readiness dimensions appropriateness, efficacy, and management support.

In all three cases, employees express a preference for being involved in decision-making, as it fosters a greater sense of involvement and understanding of change. Employees appreciate when their input is recognised and utilised, leading to more trust in decisions and increased willingness to embrace change. Additionally, employees emphasise that relevant expertise should be considered in decision-making. When employees with specialised knowledge are involved, they feel valued and perceive the decisions as more credible and well-informed. This has influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness and efficacy.

However, the degree to which employees expect to be involved and have influence varies across the cases. Case 1 accepts the balance between being involved and decision-making authority of

the central leader. However, case 2 is advocating for the highest level of involvement. They expect to be involved in every aspect of the change process. Case 3 prioritises necessity over personal influence. Employees focus on whether change is objectively necessary.

Furthermore, the results highlights that while all employees recognise the importance of supervision and coordination, their views on how supervision and coordination should be structured differ. A common theme across all three cases is the recognition that supervision and coordination provide clarity and guidance, reducing uncertainty and confusion during change. Employees across cases express that when responsibilities are unclear, it leads to inefficiencies, lack of direction, and resistance to change. Additionally, employees recognise that someone must be responsible for ensuring progress of change. They highlight the importance of monitoring tasks, setting expectations, and ensuring follow-up, this ensures that employees are involved and there is clarity. This has a influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness, efficacy, and management support.

However, a key difference among the cases is the perceived role of the central leader in supervision and coordination. Case 1 expects the central leader to take responsibility for coordination, but acknowledges that this role could be assigned to someone else. They see the central leader as the prime figure ensuring supervision. Within case 2 employees are unclear about who is responsible for supervision and coordination, indicating a gap in leadership. They seek for a sense of responsibility and clarity. Case 3 advocates for a decentralised approach, where supervision and coordination are shared across the organisation. This shows that employees in case 3 take an active role, while those in case 1 and case 2 primarily look to the central leader for guidance.

Additionally, a key similarity across all cases is that unclarity regarding supervision and coordination leads to a passive attitude from employees. In case 1 and case 2 employees experience uncertainty, frustration, and hesitation due to the absence of clarity regarding supervision and coordination during change. This results in inefficiency, a sense of powerlessness, and a lack of involvement to change. Employees struggle to align their efforts, which leads to stagnation and dissatisfaction. In case 3 uncertainty is less present, however employees still express concerns about how internal supervision will be managed. Employees across all cases emphasise the need for defined responsibilities, structured decision-making, and strong guidance from the central leader. This has influence on change readiness through the dimensions appropriateness, efficacy and management support.

However, the cases differ in the level of supervision required and how it is structured. Case 1 shows a situation where there is no clear direction, leading to chaos and frustration. The lack of coordination results in employees circling around without progress. Stronger supervision and coordination from the central leader is needed. Case 2 involves a change which by default requires supervision for fair allocation. The challenge here lies in employees' scepticism toward fairness and effectiveness of the supervision. Case 3 differs from both previous cases as external supervision is already present, reducing ambiguity and providing employees with confidence in the change. Internal supervision is shared among employees, with management offering support rather than direct control.

Additionally, unlike in case 1 and case 3, personal interest plays a significant role in case 2, as employees have a direct financial interest in how the bonus system is implemented. This influences their perceptions of fairness and creates scepticism about supervision regarding change.

It can be seen that the varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape different roles and attitudes from the employees. Across cases, employees value clarity but differ in their expectations of the central leader and their own role. Some employees seek strong central direction, while others prefer shared responsibility. A lack of supervision leads to passivity and inefficiency, yet the level of required supervision varies based on the specific change. Balancing horizontal decentralisation with employee involvement, and vertical decentralisation with a clear role of the central leader, is crucial for employee change readiness. The effect on appropriateness, efficacy, and management support is dependent on the role and attitude of the employee, determining if the relation is strengthened or weakened.

### 4.4.4. Operational focus and overlapping functions

The last key finding is defined as: "The organisation's focus on operational activities and overlapping functions of employees foster responsibility, flexibility, and involvement, cultivating an attitude that supports during change." Those variables have a positive influence on the change readiness dimensions efficacy and management support.

Across all three cases, a key factor influencing the choice between internal and external activities is the attitude of employees towards outsourcing. While all cases recognise that outsourcing can bring advantages, such as efficiency and specialised expertise, their perspectives differ based on their past experiences and the organisational context.

In case 1, employees generally have a negative attitude toward outsourcing, influenced by their past experiences. They feel that external personnel prioritise their own company's interests over those from the hiring organisation, leading to a lack of commitment and friction. Employees believe that internal activities fosters greater responsibility, involvement, and long-term improvement. Those are crucial for their readiness to change. Their resistance to outsourcing is largely driven by concerns over dependency and loss of control, possibly leading to resistance to change.

Case 2, on the other hand, does not share these negative experiences and instead views outsourcing as a strategic advantage. Employees prefer to focus on value-added operational tasks that directly contribute to the organisation's growth. They see outsourcing activities as an effective way to optimise their workload and maintain efficiency. Their attitude remains largely neutral, as they are spared from any major outsourcing-related challenges and feel supported by the central leader in their focus on core activities. This reinforces the believe that when employees must adapt to change, it is necessary and cannot be outsourced, therefore increasing their readiness to change.

Case 3 differs from both previous cases as outsourcing is seen as a necessity rather than a choice. Due to industry-specific demands, employees are accustomed to working with external personnel and have adapted to this collaboration. Rather than resisting external involvement, they view it as an essential part of their operations, allowing them to leverage specialised knowledge and skills. Their attitude is pragmatic, as they have found a way to integrate external expertise while maintaining their own effectiveness. Employees are ready to change, because they understand the necessity and the benefits.

This has influence on change readiness through the dimensions efficacy and management support.

Across all three cases, the presence of overlapping functions and activities influences employee involvement and knowledge sharing. A key similarity is that in each case, the attitude of employees plays a decisive role in determining their readiness to change. An open and flexible attitude is necessary for employees to collaborate effectively, engage beyond their immediate responsibilities, and ensure alignment with the organisation's goals. Employees who embrace this approach are more likely to feel change readiness, while those who remain focused only on their own tasks may feel resistance to change.

However, notable differences exist between the cases regarding the nature of change, the extent of knowledge sharing required, and how much functions overlap. In case 1, employees tend to focus on their own tasks and functions, making it challenging to implement change within a small organisation where cross-functional collaboration is essential. The need for knowledge sharing is high, but it does not always happen naturally, requiring a shift in attitude towards broader responsibilities. In case 2, overlapping functions naturally foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, but employees take a more passive role during change, as management primarily drives decision-making. Employees still need to be open to discussions and provide input with a holistic perspective, but their level of direct involvement is lower. In case 3, work is highly specialised, and while collaboration is crucial for getting the bigger picture, certain employees take on broader roles to oversee coordination. Structural moments for knowledge sharing, such as monthly meetings, support this process, ensuring that employees remain informed and involved. This has influence on change readiness through the dimension efficacy.

These findings suggest that while overlapping functions and knowledge sharing are beneficial for change, the degree to which they are necessary varies depending on the organisational structure and nature of the change process. In all cases, an open and flexible attitude remains essential for employee change readiness.

### 4.4.5.  Influence of organisational culture

Both organisational structure and organisational culture play significant roles during change. However, they influence change in different ways. Organisational structure defines the formal distribution of power, responsibilities, and communication channels, directly impacting the practical and organisational aspects of change. It establishes the framework within which change occurs by setting preconditions for decision-making, coordination, and execution. In contrast, organisational culture has a deeper, more pervasive influence by shaping employees' emotional

responses, attitudes, and behaviours toward change. It encompasses the shared values, norms, and informal practices that guide how employees interact and engage with change.

The conceptual model (figure 1) illustrates that organisational culture moderates most relationships emerging from the organisational structure characteristics, as indicated by the dotted lines. However, not all relationships are moderated.

Organisational culture influences the process, but not directly the final outcome. Therefore, the moderating effect is only present on the left side of the model. Organisational culture shapes how organisational structure characteristics function and are perceived. On the right side of the model, the effects of organisational culture are no longer direct, but have already manifested through the processes caused by the organisational structure characteristics, which mediate the outcomes.

## 4.4.6.   Influence of central leader

Across all three cases, the influence of the central leader was consistently visible, although the nature and extent of this influence varied. The findings indicate that the central leader plays a central role in shaping employee change readiness, thereby mediating the overall conceptual model.

The influence of the central leader is rooted in the characteristics of the simple structure, which typically places authority in the hands of a single individual. The minimal formalisation and centralised decision-making, strengthens the leader's role, making leadership highly personal. Employees closely observe the leader's behaviour, attitude, and engagement regarding change, using these as references to form their own attitude regarding the change.

Although all cases operate within similar organisational structures, the outcomes differ depending on who occupies the central leadership role. In case 1, the leader shows an informal and approachable style, which builds trust and a sense of unity. This motivates employees to engage with change. Case 2 demonstrates a lack of visibility and decisiveness from the central leader, resulting in uncertainty, reduced motivation, and potential resistance, as employees feel unsupported and unclear about their roles and expectations. In contrast, case 3 shows that the pragmatic approach from the central leader contributes to trust in the effectiveness and necessity of the change. This enhances the change readiness through clarity and direction.

Moreover, the expectations employees hold concerning their own involvement, communication, and supervision are often reflections of the central leader's modelled behaviour and leadership norms. Furthermore, the cases show that the central leader functions not only as a decision-maker, but as a symbolic anchor within the organisation. Their ability to foster appreciation, clarity and transparency plays an essential role in shaping attitudes that support employee change readiness.

## 4.4.7.   Absent relationship with personal valence

The lack of a relationship with personal valence suggests that it is not directly determined by organisational structure characteristics. In this study, personal valence only emerged as a

relevant factor in case 2, where the change involved implementing a bonus system, offering financial benefits to the employees. Since it was not mentioned in the other cases, this indicates that personal valence is influenced by the nature of the change itself, rather than by the organisational structure characteristics.

# 5. Discussion

This research aimed to analyse the influence of a simple organisational structure on employee change readiness. The study addressed the following research question: "Which aspects of a simple organisational structure influences the change readiness of employees?"

## 5.1. Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the existing literature on employee change readiness by offering new insights on the influence of the simple organisational structure on employee change readiness. While previous studies have predominantly focused on larger, more complex organisational structures (Schwarz & Huber, 2008), the influence of the simple organisational structure remains underexplored in the literature.

The first finding reveals that the simple structure characteristic minimal distance between the central leader and the employees, has a positive relation with the change readiness dimensions efficacy, appropriateness, and management support.

Employees highly value the visibility and accessibility of the central leader, expecting them to demonstrate commitment, legitimise the change, foster trust, and provide guidance. This finding aligns with Walk (2023), who established a link between employees' resistance to change and the leader's stance toward it, as well as Kramer and Staw (2003), who argued that leaders must actively motivate others to follow. The flat organisational structure supports flexibility, transparency, and employee involvement, further influencing change readiness. This supports Kotter (2012), who arguments that employees in simple structures may feel more empowered and involved, due to their closer access to decision-making and leadership, fostering a higher level of commitment and a sense of ownership. However, employees' expectations regarding their role in decision-making vary. Some prioritise hierarchical clarity, while others seek collaborative or hands-on approaches of decision-making. Portoghese et al. (2012) emphasises that employees' expectations of change significantly influence change readiness and commitment, with clear information playing a crucial role in shaping employees' expectations and fostering a positive attitude toward change. This shows the critical role of the attitude of employees on employee change readiness. Consistent with Jung et al. (2020), the findings show that a positive and involved attitude toward change is essential change readiness.

Additionally, communication emerges as a critical factor in shaping change readiness. Transparency and short lines of communication reduce uncertainty, enhances alignment, and foster trust during change. This aligns with Albrecht et al. (2022), who found that strong communication and transparency fosters employees' trust and willingness to change. Similarly, Whelan-Berry and Somerville (2010) suggested that transparent and efficient communication facilitates the rapid flow of key information and perspectives throughout the organisation. Furthermore, continuous communication throughout during change is essential. From the beginning, it plays a determining role in shaping employees' attitudes toward change, influencing whether they accept or resist change. Effective communication should aim to enhance understanding and foster commitment to change (Mento et al., 2002). This study builds on these findings by demonstrating that that short lines of communication help preserve the intended message and minimise noise, ensuring clarity and understanding of change.

*Proposition 1: In a simple organisational structure, the minimal distance between the central leader and employees positively influences change readiness, by enhancing efficacy, appropriateness, and management support.*

The second finding reveals that the simple structure characteristics varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the employees' roles and attitudes, which have a positive or negative relation with the change readiness dimensions appropriateness, efficacy, and management support.

Employees prefer to be involved in decision-making, particularly when they have specialised knowledge. This is line with the study from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) that suggests that employees rate involvement and the opportunity to express themselves highly, creating commitment to change. However, expectations regarding the level of involvement vary. Some accept leadership authority, others seek full participation, and some focus mainly on content. This influences change readiness, as employees are more likely to embrace change when their involvement aligns with their expectations. This suggests that a balance between horizontal centralisation (employee involvement) and vertical centralisation (leadership authority) is needed, as suggested by Altamimi et al. (2023), who emphasises that there are positive and negative sides of centralisation and it needs to be balanced according to the type of change. Fayol and Storrs (2016) further argued that the balance is a matter of proportion and finding the optimal degree for a particular case. The study showed that the involvement of employees and the perceived management support and guidance, shape the change readiness.

Supervision and coordination are crucial for clarity and direction. A lack of clarity leads to passivity. The study of van Assen (2021) notes that organisational change creates uncertainties which affect the employees, increasing their need for information regarding expectations and progress. However, the degree of supervision required differs based on the nature of the change process. This is in line with the study of Altamimi et al. (2023), who writes that the type of change is crucial for deciding on the right approach, as some changes are more disruptive and conflictual than others.

Lastly, personal interests shape change readiness, as individual motivations influences involvement and commitment. There are diverse opinions about the effect of efficacy. Cunningham (2006) found that higher efficacy enhances higher readiness for change. However, Neves (2009) suggests that the impact of efficacy depends on other contextual variables, such as the characteristics of the change. The findings of the study align with Neves' perspective, showing that the impact of efficacy is shaped by the nature of the change. Employees with high efficacy are more ready to change when they perceive change as necessary.

*Proposition 2: In a simple organisational structure, the balance between horizontal centralisation (employee involvement) and vertical centralisation (leadership authority) influences change readiness by shaping perceptions of appropriateness and efficacy, with supervision and coordination mediating this relationship through clarity, guidance, and employees' expectations regarding change.*

The third finding reveals that the simple structure characteristics lead to operational focus and overlapping functions, which have a positive relation with the change readiness dimensions efficacy and management support.

Employees' roles and attitudes are critical factors in determining employee change readiness. While perspectives on outsourcing may vary, there is a shared consensus that maintaining an open and flexible attitude is essential for fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and alignment with organisational goals, resulting in an open and flexible attitude of employees. This aligns with Jung et al. (2020), who emphasise that an involved and committed employee attitude is crucial for change readiness.

Furthermore, prioritizing core operational activities and overlapping functions can enhance efficiency and strengthen the perceived management support. Essuman et al. (2020) suggests that focusing on these aspects enables organisations to absorb disruptions more effectively while maintaining operational stability. The findings of this study indicate that employees who primarily engage in operational activities experience more change readiness, as their familiarity with the core activities fosters trust in the necessity of change when it arises. Additionally, overlapping functions increase the overall responsibility and flexibility of employees, resulting in an open and attentive attitude, further strengthening their change readiness.

Additionally, when employees take responsibility beyond their individual tasks, organisations experience stronger commitment and greater overall effectiveness during change. Jung et al. (2020) highlight that encouraging employees to involve in broader responsibilities fosters increased commitment to change. Similarly, Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) emphasises that employees who take on responsibilities beyond their defined roles become more adaptable, further supporting organisational success during change. This results in an open and attentive attitude from employees, further strengthening their change readiness.

*Proposition 3: In a simple organisational structure, the focus on operational activities and overlapping functions enhances change readiness by improving efficacy and management support, by fostering an open and flexible attitude, encouraging involvement in broader responsibilities, and promoting adaptability, which collectively contribute to stronger commitment, and greater overall effectiveness during change.*

Organisational culture plays a vital role in shaping change readiness, influencing how employees perceive and respond to change. Onyeneke and Abe (2021) argue that leadership behaviours significantly influence organisational culture. The study showed that the attitude of the central leader towards change shape the employees' perception of change. The attitude of the leader can therefore strengthen or weaken the change readiness of employees. Similarly, Mbeba (2018) highlights that organisational culture can either facilitate or hinder change, emphasizing the importance of aligning change strategies with the existing organisational culture to improve efficiency.

*Proposition 4: The central leader's attitude toward change, shaped by the organisational culture, influences employee change readiness.*

The findings highlight the central role of the central leader in shaping employee change readiness. While the simple structure is characterised by minimal formalisation and centralised authority, it

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is the central leader's behaviour, personality, and leadership style that primarily influences employee change readiness. The findings support prior research by Herold et al. (2008) and Armenakis and Harris (2009) suggesting that leadership plays a critical role in how change is perceived and implemented. In simple structures, leadership is highly personal and symbolic, making the leader a key reference point for employees (Mintzberg, 1984). The cases illustrate that differences in leadership explains variations in change readiness.

Multiple studies, including Choi (2011), highlight the impact of leadership style on employee change readiness. However, there is no consensus on which leadership style is most effective within a simple structure to enhance change readiness. Caldwell et al. (2009) identify transformational leadership as particularly supportive to foster change readiness, as such leaders express a vision for the future and encourage employees to challenge existing norms (Belschak et al., 2015). Metwally et al. (2019) further argues that ethical leadership is especially effective in enhancing change readiness. Conversely, Steyn (2020) argues that in simple organisational structures, directive leadership is more prevalent. This style is characterised by clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations, which can enhance engagement by reducing ambiguity. Muczyk and Reimann (1987) further distinguish between directive autocrats, who makes decisions individually and closely supervises implementation, and directive democrats, who involve employees in decision-making while maintaining strict supervision of performance.

Additionally, a relationship is found between the organisational culture and leadership, as leadership can shape the culture of an organisation. A culture oriented towards effectiveness and encouragement can enhance employees' readiness to change (Metwally et al., 2019)

Furthermore, the findings align with the concept of role modelling, where employees adopt attitudes and expectations based on the leader's example (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).

*Proposition 5: Employee change readiness is influenced by the personal characteristics and leadership style of the central leader, indicating that the effectiveness of change efforts depends not only on characteristics of the simple structure, but also on who occupies the leadership role.*

Finally, the research showed that there is no relationship with personal valence. This implies that it is not directly determined by the organisational structure. However, it is possible that there is an indirect relationship, stemming from the other dimensions of change readiness.

*Proposition 6: Personal valence is not directly influenced by the characteristics of the simple organisational structure. However, it may be indirectly influenced through its impact on the other change readiness dimensions.*

## 5.2. Practical implications

From a practical perspective, this research provides valuable insights into how specific aspects of a simple organisational structure influence employee change readiness. By understanding these aspects, organisations can develop targeted change strategies that foster greater involvement, commitment, and readiness to change. The findings highlight that organisations with a simple organisational structure should tailor their change approach to align with the attitudes and roles of both employees and the central leader. This alignment enhances

understanding, engagement, and support for the change process. Additionally, organisational culture should be viewed as a key enabler of change, meaning that change strategies should be adapted to fit the existing cultural context, allowing for flexible and context-specific approaches.

Beyond tailored approaches, certain practical considerations should always be integrated into change strategies. First, organisations must prioritise open, transparent, and direct communication between employees and the central leader, as clear communication reduces uncertainty and fosters trust. Second, managing expectations about roles and responsibilities of employees in the change process is crucial to preventing misunderstandings and resistance. Third, employees express the need for active involvement in change processes, reinforcing the importance of participatory decision-making. Fourth, the central leader's attitude significantly impacts the success of change processes, because employees expect leaders to be visible, approachable, and supportive. Lastly, organisations should strike a balance between centralisation and guidance. While employees appreciate autonomy and responsibility, they also require direction and support to navigate change effectively.

By incorporating these principles, organisations with a simple organisational structure can strengthen employees change readiness and enhance the overall success of change processes.

## 5.3. Limitations and future research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, this research employed a cross-sectional research design, meaning data was collected at a single point in time. Since all cases were at the start of the change process, this approach does not capture how employee attitudes and change readiness evolve over time. As prior research suggest, attitudes are dynamic and can shift throughout the different stages of the change process (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021; Portoghese et al., 2012). To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research should adopt a longitudinal research design, to examine the change readiness of employees at different stages of the change process to analyse how attitudes develop and what aspects influence these shifts.

Second, participants were approached by their central leader whether they would voluntarily participate in the study, raising the issue of volunteer bias. Volunteer bias occurs when participants who choose to participate may differ in important ways from those who opt out, potentially skewing the results (Jordan et al., 2013). Employees who declined participation might have offered valuable perspectives on resistance to change or disengagement, which were not captured in this study. Future research should employ random sampling or directly approach employees to ensure a more diverse sample.

Lastly, this research did not account for additional individual aspects that may influence employee change readiness. For example, personality traits have been found to impact how employees react to organisational change (Oreg, 2006). Future studies should explore other psychological and contextual variables, such as personality and organisational environment to provide a more holistic view of the dimensions of change readiness.

# 6. Conclusion

This study explored which aspects of the simple organisational structure influences employee change readiness. The results revealed three key findings of the organisational structure that influences employee change readiness: (1) minimal distance between employees and central leader, (2) varying levels lead to different roles and attitudes of employees, and (3) operational focus and overlapping functions.

The first key findings shows that direct supervision, informal coordination, and the flat structure leads to minimal distance between employees and the central leader, which has a positive relation with the sense of appropriateness and efficacy, and perceptions of management support. The second key findings reveals that varying levels of involvement in direct supervision, informal coordination, and vertical and horizontal centralisation lead to different roles and attitudes of the employees, having a positive or negative relation with the sense of appropriateness and efficacy, and the perception of management support, depending on the role and attitude of the employee. The third key findings reveals that the strategic apex, as key part of the organisation, and flat structure results into the organisation's focus on operational core activities and overlapping functions of employees, which has a positive relation with the sense of efficacy, and perceptions of management support.

Furthermore, the study found that personal valence was not influenced by the organisational structure. This indicates that it is the nature of the change, not the organisational structure, that influences personal valence.

Additionally, organisational culture is hypothesised to moderate most relationships between organisational structure characteristics and the process, reinforcing that organisational culture influences how employees respond and perceive organisational structure characteristics.

Lastly, the central leader plays a central role in influencing employee change readiness. While the simple structure enables this influence, the leadership style, personality, and behaviour of the central leader shapes how employees perceive and respond to change. The role of the central leader mediates the relationship between the characteristics of the simple structure and employee change readiness, highlighting that change not only depends on the simple structure, but also on the person occupying the central leadership role.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Informed consent form

**Informatieblad voor onderzoek 'Examining the Influence of Simple Organisational Structure on Employee Change Readiness: Key Influencing Factors'**

**Doel van het onderzoek**

Dit onderzoek wordt geleid door Nikki Koehorst.

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om inzicht te verkrijgen in de veranderingsbereidheid van werknemers.

**Hoe gaan we te werk?**

U neemt deel aan een onderzoek waarbij we informatie zullen vergaren door u te interviewen en uw antwoorden op te nemen via een audio-opname. Er zal ook een transcript worden uitgewerkt van het interview.

**Potentiële risico's en ongemakken**

Er zijn geen fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan deze studie. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Uw deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt uw deelname op elk gewenst moment stoppen.

**Vergoeding**

U ontvangt voor deelname aan dit onderzoek geen vergoeding.

**Vertrouwelijkheid van gegevens**

Wij doen er alles aan uw privacy zo goed mogelijk te beschermen. Er wordt op geen enkele wijze vertrouwelijke informatie of persoonsgegevens van of over u naar buiten gebracht, waardoor iemand u zal kunnen herkennen.

Voordat onze onderzoeksgegevens naar buiten gebracht worden, worden uw gegevens zoveel mogelijk geanonimiseerd.

In een publicatie zullen anonieme gegevens of pseudoniemen worden gebruikt. De audio-opnamen, formulieren en andere documenten die in het kader van deze studie worden gemaakt

of verzameld, worden opgeslagen op een beveiligde locatie bij de Universiteit Twente en op de beveiligde (versleutelde) gegevensdragers van de onderzoekers.

De onderzoeksgegevens worden bewaard voor een periode van 10 jaar. Uiterlijk na het verstrijken van deze termijn zullen de gegevens worden verwijderd.

Tot slot is dit onderzoek beoordeeld en goedgekeurd door de ethische commissie van de faculteit BMS (domain Humanities & Social Sciences).

**Vrijwilligheid**

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is geheel vrijwillig. U kunt als deelnemer uw medewerking aan het onderzoek te allen tijde stoppen, of weigeren dat uw gegevens voor het onderzoek mogen worden gebruikt, zonder opgaaf van redenen. Het stopzetten van deelname heeft geen nadelige gevolgen voor u.

Als u tijdens het onderzoek besluit om uw medewerking te staken, zullen de gegevens die u reeds hebt verstrekt tot het moment van intrekking van de toestemming in het onderzoek gebruikt worden.

Wilt u stoppen met het onderzoek, of heeft u vragen en/of klachten? Neem dan contact op met de onderzoeksleider.

Naam: Nikki Koehorst

Email: n.g.koehorst@student.utwente.nl

Voor bezwaren met betrekking tot de opzet en of uitvoering van het onderzoek kunt u zich ook wenden tot de Secretaris van de Ethische Commissie / domein Humanities & Social Sciences van de faculteit Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences op de Universiteit Twente via ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd vanuit de Universiteit Twente, faculteit Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences. Indien u specifieke vragen hebt over de omgang met persoonsgegevens kun u deze ook richten aan de Functionaris Gegevensbescherming van de UT door een mail te sturen naar dpo@utwente.nl.

Tot slot heeft u het recht een verzoek tot inzage, wijziging, verwijdering of aanpassing van uw gegevens te doen bij de Onderzoeksleider.

**Door dit toestemmingsformulier te ondertekenen erken ik het volgende:**

1.      Ik ben voldoende geïnformeerd over het onderzoek door middel van een separaat informatieblad. Ik heb het informatieblad gelezen en heb daarna de mogelijkheid gehad vragen te kunnen stellen. Deze vragen zijn voldoende beantwoord.

2.      Ik neem vrijwillig deel aan dit onderzoek. Er is geen expliciete of impliciete dwang voor mij om aan dit onderzoek deel te nemen. Het is mij duidelijk dat ik deelname aan het onder- zoek op elk moment, zonder opgaaf van reden, kan beëindigen. Ik hoef een vraag niet te beantwoorden als ik dat niet wil.

Naast het bovenstaande is het hieronder mogelijk voor verschillende onderdelen van

het onderzoek specifiek toestemming te geven. U kunt er per onderdeel voor kiezen wel of geen toestemming te geven. Indien u voor alles toestemming wil geven, is dat mogelijk via de aanvinkbox onderaan de stellingen.

| | JA | NEE |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Ik geef toestemming om de gegevens die gedurende het onderzoek bij mij worden verzameld te verwerken zoals is opgenomen in het bijgevoegde informatieblad. Deze toestemming ziet dus ook op het verwerken van gegevens betreffende mijn gezondheid/ras/etnische afkomst/politieke opvattingen/religieuze en of levensbeschouwelijke overtuigingen/lidmaatschap van vakbond/seksueel gedrag/seksuele gerichtheid en/of over mijn genetische gegevens/biometrische gegevens. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. Ik geef toestemming om tijdens het interview opnames (geluid) te maken en mijn antwoorden uit te werken in een transcript. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. Ik geef toestemming om mijn antwoorden te gebruiken voor quotes in de onderzoekspublicaties. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. Ik geef toestemming om de bij mij verzamelde onderzoeksdata te bewaren en te gebruiken voor toekomstig onderzoek en voor onderwijsdoeleinden. | ☐ | ☐ |
| Ik geef toestemming voor alles dat hierboven beschreven staat. | ☐ | |

Naam Deelnemer:                              Naam Onderzoeker:

Handtekening:                              Handtekening:

Datum:                              Datum:

## Appendix B: Interview guide

Hallo, en bedankt dat u de tijd neemt om deel te nemen aan dit interview.

Mijn naam is Nikki Koehorst en ik ben een masterstudent Business Administration aan de Universiteit Twente. Ik doe onderzoek naar de veranderingsbereidheid van werknemers. Uw inzichten zullen waardevol zijn voor deze studie.

Ik zou het interview graag willen opnemen om ervoor te zorgen dat ik alles wat u zegt nauwkeurig vastleg. De gegevens worden geanonimiseerd en vertrouwelijk bewaard. De opname zal na het analyseren verwijderd worden en het transcript zal alleen voor onderzoeksdoeleinden worden gebruikt en veilig worden opgeslagen. Als u zich ongemakkelijk voelt bij een van de vragen, hoeft u deze niet te beantwoorden. Het interview zal ongeveer 60 minuten duren.

Geeft u toestemming voor deelname aan dit interview en voor het gebruik van uw antwoorden in dit onderzoek? Geeft u toestemming dat dit interview wordt opgenomen en getranscribeerd?

INDIEN JA: Oké, dan zal ik nu de opname starten. Tenzij er nog vragen of opmerkingen zijn ten aanzien van de introductie.

### (1)  Verandering

Ik zou het graag willen hebben over verandering XXX die momenteel plaatsvindt binnen de afdeling waarin u werkzaam bent. Kunt u iets vertellen over deze verandering?

### (2)  Praatplaat

Tijdens de rest van het interview zullen we de praatplaat gebruiken die voor u ligt. Deze praatplaat leidt het gesprek en op basis van uw antwoorden zal ik u vervolgvragen stellen.

- Welk woord op deze praatplaat is het meeste van toepassing tijdens verandering XXX? Kunt u een voorbeeld geven?
- Over welk woord kunt u nog meer wat vertellen? Kunt u een voorbeeld geven?
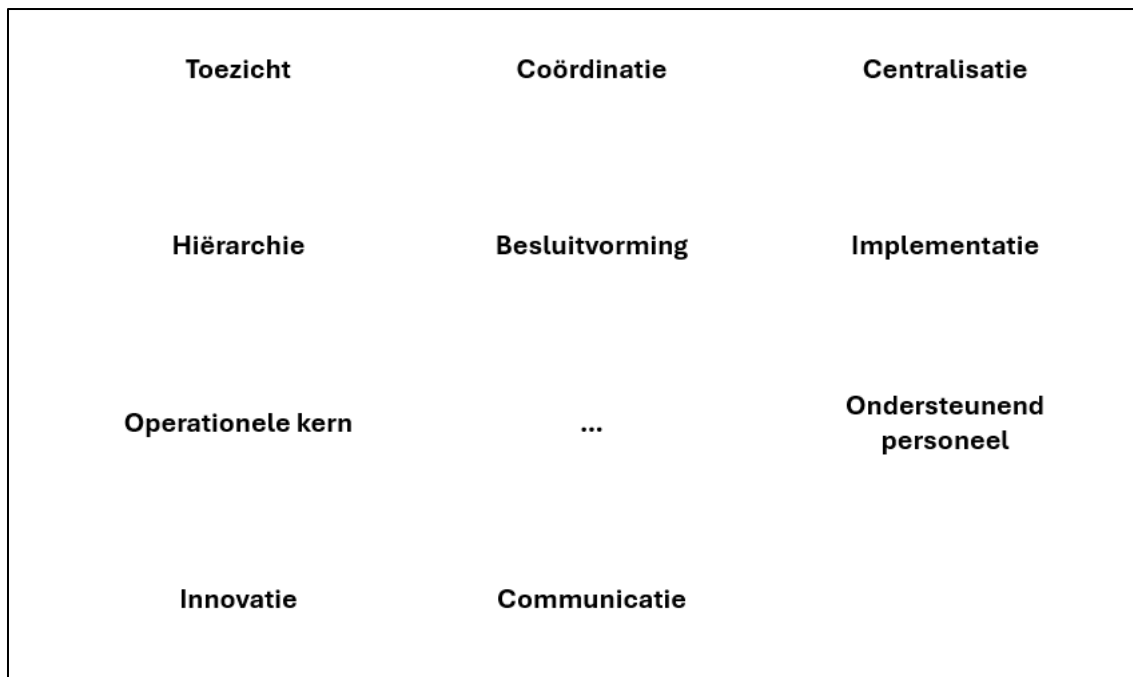
| Toezicht | Coördinatie | Centralisatie |
|----------|-------------|---------------|
| Hiërarchie | Besluitvorming | Implementatie |
| Operationele kern | ... | Ondersteunend personeel |
| Innovatie | Communicatie | |

*Figure 2: Visual aid interviews*

**(3) Conclusie**
- Is er nog iets dat u zou willen toevoegen over dit onderwerp?
- Heeft u nog vragen aan mij over dit onderzoek?

Dan wil ik u enorm bedanken voor uw tijd en inzichten. Wees alstublieft gerust dat alle informatie die u hebt verstrekt vertrouwelijk zal blijven en uitsluitend zal worden gebruikt voor de doeleinden van dit onderzoek. Uw identiteit zal niet worden bekendgemaakt in rapporten of publicaties die uit deze studie voortvloeien.

Heeft u interesse om het uiteindelijke verslag van dit onderzoek te ontvangen?

INDIEN JA: Dan zou ik graag uw e-mail adres willen noteren.

Ik zal nu de opname stoppen.

# Appendix C: Gioia table

| 1ste order concepts | 2nd order themes | Aggregate dimensions |
|---|---|---|
| Visible commitment from the central leader contributes to a positive perception of change from the employees. | The central leader's visible high level of commitment to the change and visible appreciation of the employees, give the employees a sense of being seen and valued within the change, and influences the employee's perception and commitment to the change. | Visibility and accessibility of the central leader, flat structure of the organisation, and short lines of communication influences employees' commitment to change, perception and understanding of the change, and perceived management support to the change. |
| Visible appreciation of the employees from the central leader has a motivating effect on employees. | | |
| Approachability between the employees and the central leader creates clarity, accessibility and a sense of being involved. | Approachability of the central leader and short lines of communication, gives the employees understanding of the change, a sense of involvement and support from management in the change. | |
| The few hierarchical layers of the organisation allows for short lines of communication between the employees and the central leader. | | |
| The few hierarchical layers of the organisation enables quick decision-making and makes the employees feel that management is committed. | | |
| Transparent, personal, and direct communication ensures clarity and involvement among the employees. | Transparent and short lines of communication, and documentation of decision-making during the change, preserves the intended message and minimizes noise, enhancing clarity and understanding of the change and employee's commitment to change. | |
| High degree of communication on decision-making ensures clarity and understanding among the employees. | | |
| Clearly documenting and communicating decision-making ensures clarity and transparency among the employees. | | |
| Involving the employees with relevant knowledge and expertise creates a sense of involvement. | The level of employee involvement in decision-making during change requires different roles and attitudes from the employees, either strengthening or weakening their | Varying levels of involvement in decision-making, direct supervision of the central leader, and informal coordination between the central leader and employees, shape the |
| Involving the employees creates involvement and support. | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The final decision-making lies with the central leader and the employees must go along with it. | understanding and commitment to change. | employees' roles and attitudes, which determine whether their commitment, understanding, and perception of management support are strengthened or weakened regarding change. |
| It is important that someone takes responsibility for informal coordination so that there is clarity. | Direct supervision from the central leader and informal coordination between the central leader and employees regarding the change provide employees with clarity and a sense of guidance about change. | |
| Supervision provides clarity and guidance for the employees. | | |
| The lack of coordination leads to resistance among the employees. | The lack of clarity on supervision and coordination leads to a lack of understanding of the change, sense of powerlessness and low sense of support from the central leader during change. | |
| The lack of clarity on direct supervision leads to a passive attitude among the employees. | | |
| Outsourcing activities creates time to focus on operational activities. | The choice between outsourcing or internalizing activities during change depends on prioritizing operational, value-added tasks, or prioritizing involvement and independence, with employee's and central leader attitudes being decisive in this choice and influencing involvement, commitment, and perceived management support regarding change. | The organisation's focus on operational activities and overlapping functions of employees foster responsibility, flexibility, and involvement, cultivating an attitude that supports during change. |
| Picking up work internally increases involvement and reduces dependency compared to outsourcing to an external party. | | |
| The organisation requires fast switching and a broad view that extends beyond one's own function, ensuring a large and broad role for the employees. | Overlapping functions and activities for employees within the organisation foster greater responsibility, commitment, and diverse roles for employees, requiring an open and flexible attitude, which also is essential during change. | |