

# ***Leadership styles and their influence on employees regarding the acceptance of organizational change***

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of leadership styles on the acceptance of organizational change by employees. We introduce a conceptual framework to elaborate on the relationship between employees and the acceptance of organizational change. The focus on employees lies in their openness to experience, something that is considered to be related to the acceptance of change.

This framework will be complemented with a set of propositions drawn from the literature. The propositions explain how an employee will be influenced by a certain leadership style in his/her acceptance of organizational change. These propositions have practical implications for grasping the way that psychology can be used in an organization when implementing a change. More specifically, leadership styles will be linked to the openness to experience of employees, and propositions are formed to predict how individuals are influenced by the leadership styles when it comes to acceptance of organizational change.

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**Second supervisor:** Marlies Stuiver MSc

**Key Concepts:** *leadership styles, managers, organizational change, business, acceptance of change*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of business, both globalization and increasing emphasis on sustainability factors force many companies to reconsider their strategy (Kotter, 2008). In order to stay profitable and survive in the competitive market, companies constantly need to reposition their products and/or services, bring down costs and increase their sales.

The ultimate goal of any organization is to survive. Since the environmental turbulence increases (due to globalization) constant change seems to be the only constant factor in business (Drori, Meyer and Hwang, 2006)

But, change is often feared by employees (Bower and Walton, 1973).

A very important theme for managers in organizations therefore is how to implement organizational change without suffering from employees' resistance. Managers can do this by applying different leadership styles. These leadership styles vary from creating empathy towards change, thereby reducing resistance, on one end of the spectrum to forcing change, fuelling resistance, on the other end.

This paper explores the influence of different leadership styles on employees within an organization. In an organization, leaders are expected to set direction for their employees when organizational change occurs.

The focus in this paper is on organizational change on a social level, which means that employees will be influenced by the change.

The goal of this paper is to elaborate on the topic of organizational change by studying how employees accept the organizational change as influenced by different leadership styles applied by their managers. This elaboration will be done around a central research question, namely:

### *How can leadership styles influence employees on their acceptance of organizational change?*

This is a conceptual paper. The theoretical insights will be obtained from other scholars, drawing upon their already conducted research regarding certain concepts used in this paper, such as the different leadership styles and their impact on implementing organizational change.

#### Outline:

This paper outlines the concepts connected to organizational change, the acceptance of this organizational change by employees, the personality of employees and leadership styles to establish the context of the problem. Using these concepts we construct a conceptual framework explaining the relationship between the personality of employees and the acceptance of change as influenced by different leadership styles. After that, using the concepts, a set of propositions will be developed that would explain the conceptual framework and the relationship in that framework.

## ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

As mentioned in the introduction, organizations have to change their strategy more often than before, due to an increasing number of demands, such as globalization (Kotter, 2008). There has been a lot of research about leadership styles that managers

can apply; acceptance of organizational change, and research on the relationship between those two.

The focus of research that studies the relationship of leadership styles and the acceptance of organizational change, is always on the effective implementation or creating the least resistance among employees regarding organizational change and which leadership styles prove most effective. The feelings of employees are often disregarded in existing research that studies the influence of leadership styles or other variables on the acceptance or resistance of organizational change among employees (e.g., Aktouf, 1992; Bray, 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Judge et al., 1999; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Lau & Woodman, 1995). For example, Aktouf (1992) asks for more humanism in the organizations and wants the centre of attention to be on the person. Wanberg & Banas (2000) predict that 'openness toward an organizational change' from employees is important for performance in a firm.

This paper will contribute to the gap in the literature that fails to connect leadership styles with the feelings of employees while accepting organizational change. Having the knowledge of how individuals react to different leadership styles, might give way to the development of new leadership styles, alternation of existing leadership styles or open up the discussion about effectively implementing organizational change.

## PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

The gap in the literature mostly neglects the attitude towards acceptance of organizational change. However, employees make up a firm and are therefore partly responsible for the firm performance. This is why businesses would benefit from the knowledge of which leadership style to apply to implement change, so that the employees can accept organizational change better and faster and stay as positive as possible towards the firm they work in, which in turn would lead to better business performance since the firm is able to adjust to a change in the environment quicker and thus stay ahead of the competition.

The propositions produced by this conceptual paper will provide a deeper insight into the process of organizational change. More specifically, organizations can influence the acceptance of change of employees by using different leadership styles.

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Below, the concepts introduced in the research question will be explained and elaborated on to get a full understanding of what the problem entails.

### Managers

Especially during organizational change, when the status quo is shaken up and routines need to be re-established, employees have to have a clear direction of where the company is headed. The leaders that communicate this new direction and lead the organization towards it, are the managers.

Whittington and Johnson (2011) in their book 'Exploring Strategy' distinguish four levels of managers that they call 'the strategists', i.e. the ones who implement the strategy in an organization: top managers and directors, strategic planners, middle managers and strategy consultants.

Top managers and directors set the strategic directions of an organization but are not so much involved in the actual execution of this strategic direction.

Strategic planners are 'managers with a formal responsibility for coordinating the strategy process' (Whittington and Johnson, 2011).

Middle managers' involvement in strategy implementation is seen as very limited. This, because middle managers are too involved in the operations to be able to have an overview over the organization.

Strategy consultants can be internal or external and are often used in the development of a strategy.

According to these definitions, the focus in this paper will be on the strategic planners as managers responsible for implementing the organizational change. We recognize that this is a somewhat simplification of the reality, but a simplification we have to make for the sake of the feasibility of the research.

## Business

Burns and Stalker (1961) distinguish between two types of organizations; the organic and the mechanistic organization. Their definition: "The mechanistic approach, suitable for stable industries, is marked by precise definition of member function and is highly hierarchical. The organic approach is more appropriate to industries undergoing change and is characterized by fluid definitions of function and interactions that are equally lateral as they are vertical." (Burns and Stalker, 1961).

Even though this distinction between types of organizations stems from 1961, in the literature Burns and Stalker's distinction is still seen as the most fundamental dichotomy when it comes to organizations.

This study focusses on organic businesses which undergo change more often, making them more appealing for the purpose of this research.

## Organizational change

*"The only thing certain about organizational change is that nothing is certain"*

(Davy et al., 1988, p. 58 in: Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006)

Organizational change can be explained in many ways. Broadly defined, organizational change refers to any modification in organizational composition, structure, or behaviour (Bowditch & Buono, 2001).

Furthermore, organizational change can be divided in 'incremental change' and 'radical change' (Tushman and Romanelli, 1985), 'continuous versus discontinuous change' (Meyer, Goes, & Brooks, 1993) and 'first-order versus second-order change' (Meyer et al., 1993).

In the light of this research, we would like to add 'forced change versus voluntary change'.

These four aspects are seen in the literature as the four most basic characteristics of organizational change.

In her article on 'Managing radical change', Ann Todd (1999) describes radical and incremental change as follows: "Radical Change is a substantial change that is often forced on the organization by an interaction with its environment. It requires a change in the basic values of the organization."

"Incremental Change is the task of achieving changes in line with the existing culture and objectives of the organization. It will usually be generated from within the company as part of competitive improvement."

Continuous change is a type of change that occurs over time rather than at a certain point in time. This change is understood and expected by the employees of the organization.

Discontinuous change is not understood nor expected by the employees. This is because there is no initial inducement for this change.

First-order change can always be undone and is a type of change that focuses on doing more or doing less of something.

Second-order change is a change that cannot be undone once started. This change focuses on doing something totally different than before.

Forced change is change that does not come from the employees but rather is forced upon them by the higher level management.

Voluntary change occurs when employees recognize the need to change and start this change from within the company.

The main difference between these two changes found in the literature on resistance to change is that when employees are more committed to the change (hence; they initiated it), the change is more likely to succeed (eg. J. P. Kotter & L. A. Schlesinger, 1979; P. R. Lawrence, 1975; D. Kirkpatrick, 1985; D. Bryant, 1989).

In this study, the propositions are based on a type of organizational change that is radical, discontinuous, second-order and forced, because this type of change is expected to cause the most resistance when compared with its counterpart.

## Leadership styles

The literature about leadership styles is superfluous. There are many different leadership styles distinguished by many different authors. Some of these leadership style classifications are well known in the literature. We will elaborate on some of these better known leadership styles below.

A distinction that comes back in the literature quite often is one between three styles called 'transformational', 'transactional' and 'laissez faire' leadership.

"Transformational leadership: Style of leadership in which the leader identifies the required change, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group." (Business Dictionary, 2015)

"Transactional leadership: Style of leadership that is based on the setting of clear objectives and goals for the followers as well as the use of either punishments or rewards in order to encourage compliance with these goals." (Business Dictionary, 2015)

"Laissez faire leaders try to give the least possible guidance to subordinates, and try to achieve control through less obvious means. They believe that people excel when they are left alone to respond to their responsibilities and obligations in their own ways." (Business Dictionary, 2015)

The effectiveness of these leadership styles is still under debate by multiple scholars who all hold a different opinion. But, in the light of employee participation on organizational change, Burns (1978) writes in his book 'Leadership' that 'leaders who exhibit transformational behaviours appeal to followers' sense of values and are able to get them to see a higher vision and to encourage them to exert'.

Lewin in Lewin, Lippit, & White (1939) was one of the first to distinguish between three major styles of leadership: autocratic (a manager does not consult his/her team members before making a decision), democratic (a manager makes the final decision but does this with consulting the team members first) and laissez-faire (managers offer support to the team members but do not get involved).

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee (2001) elaborated on six emotional leadership styles.

The six emotional leadership styles distinguished are: the visionary leader (emphasis on empathy), the coaching leader (connect organizational goals with the goals of individuals), the affiliative leader (emotional needs over work needs), the democratic leader (commitment of employees via participation),

the pace-setting leader (challenges and sets goals for employees), the commanding leader (uses authority to give directions to employees).  
 Provided below is a scheme that elaborates on each leadership style.

Another author in the field of management is Steven Covey. He has written many books about several facets of management, mainly from a more psychological point of view. Because this psychological background is valuable in the light of this paper, we would like to introduce Covey's idea on management and leadership styles.

In 1989, management expert Steven R. Covey published a self-help book called 'The 7 habits of highly effective people', in which he explains how one can be effective in attaining goals by thinking with a long-term perspective and building oncommunicative relationships with others both at work and at home.

Covey starts by identifying that two people can see the exact same thing, but have different opinions about it. Covey states that it is important to stay true to oneself and act out of principles, he calls this 'principle-centred leadership'. He continues by identifying eight characteristics of principle-centred leaders:

1. They are continually learning.
2. They are service-oriented.
3. They radiate positive energy.
4. They believe in other people.
5. They lead balanced lives.
6. They see life as an adventure.
7. They are synergistic.
8. They exercise for self-renewal.

Principle-centred leadership uses four principles (security, wisdom, guidance and power) along four different levels, according to Covey:

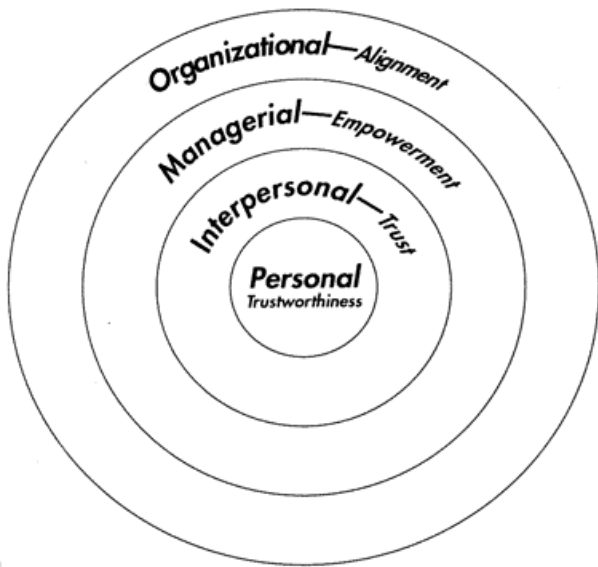
**Fig. 1:** Goleman, Daniel, "Leadership that Gets Results" Harvard Business Review. March-April 2000 p. 82-83.

### The Six Leadership Styles at a Glance

Daniel Goleman's research found that leaders use six styles. Each springs from different components of emotional intelligence. Below is a summary of the styles, their origin, when they work best and their impact on the organization's climate and its performance.	Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions in ourselves and in our relationships.  -- Daniel Goleman, Working with Emotional Intelligence																																										
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**Fig. 2:** Four levels in which to practice the Four Principles, by Covey, S.



*Organizational—my need to organize people*

*Managerial—my responsibility to get a job done with others*

*Interpersonal—my relationships and interactions with others*

*Personal—my relationship with myself*

Summarizing, Covey enunciates that a manager should try to provide the four principles (security; wisdom; guidance and power) in all four levels (persona; interpersonal; managerial and organizational), using the 8 characteristics of principle-centred leadership.

The six emotional leadership styles by Goleman et al. (2001) is omnipresent in the literature, because it is seen as the fundamental distinction of leadership styles. This paper will therefore use these six emotional leadership styles to study which one is most effective when it comes to employees' acceptance of organizational change.

### Perception of employees

“Reorganization is usually feared, because it means disturbance of the status quo, a threat to people’s vested interests in their jobs, and an upset to established ways of doing things.”(Bower and Walton, 1973)

One can derive from this that there will, generally speaking, always be resistance to change. But, this resistance takes on many forms. Employees can be willing to change to a more or a lesser extent. The perception of employees regarding change depends on their readiness to change. Armenakis and colleagues (1993, p. 683) used the term readiness for change to indicate “organizational members’ beliefs, attitudes, and intentions

regarding the extent to which changes were needed and the organization’s capacity to make those changes.”

There has been lots of research done on the topic of organizational change and the influence of different leadership styles on the acceptance of this change. Tsoukas (2002), talks about change as a normal condition in organizational life. He states that change happens constantly.

Shaul Oreg (2001) elaborates on the multiple styles of leadership that managers can use to implement the change. Oreg therefore draws upon a 60 year review of quantitative studies of change recipients’ reactions to organizational change. The researchers did this by examining the leadership that managers applied and the intentions of employees to resist the organizational change. They found that when the manager applied a leadership style that is open to change values, the employees are least likely to resist the organizational change.

Ann Todd (1999) and Kotter (2008) also recognize the difficulty of implementing change. Executing organizational change requires certain skills from the managers, who should diagnose the types of resistance they will encounter (Kotter, 2008). The authors suggest three steps for managing the implementation of change: 1. Analysing situational factors such as the amount of resistance that is to be expected from employees; 2. Determine the optimal speed of change, quick or slow; 3. Consider methods for managing resistance, a part in which multiple methods are discussed, such as coercion or education.

People in general do not want to change. (Bower and Walton, 1973). But sometimes, organizational change is necessary to keep a business competitive in the market.

Around 1980, researchers started to elaborate on the relationship between organizational change implementation and the effect on employees, and have found “motivational states to influence employees’ adaptation to change (Caldwell et al, 2004) and personality dimensions (i.e., the Big Five) to be related to people’s strategies for coping with change (Judge et al., 1999).”, as reported by Herold and Fedor in their Beyond change management: A multilevel investigation of contextual and personal influences on employees’ commitment to change (2007).

This suggests that employees’ acceptance of change can be influenced. Leadership styles are a factor that can influence this acceptance of change. We will study this relationship in the conceptual framework.

### Acceptance of change as an employee

Adjusting to change and ultimately the acceptance of change are two different concepts leading towards the same. Adjusting to change describes the process of getting used to new norms and procedures, whilst acceptance of change focuses on the final outcome, i.e. the new status quo. In this thesis, we elaborate on the adjusting to change while using the concept of acceptance of change as the final outcome. I.e., this research takes an interest in the process of adjusting to change, whereas we assume employees need to complete the process and accept change in order for us to make propositions.

Managers can influence the employee perception of change with the leadership style they use. The managers have to implement the change and thereby overcome the resistance where present among employees. “Several authors, including J. P. Kotter and L. A. Schlesinger (1979), P. R. Lawrence (1975), D. Kirkpatrick (1985) and D. Bryant (1989) have suggested participation as a solution when dealing with resistance to change” (R. Allas, 2008). That suggests that managers should

empower employees and motivate them, but above all, let the employees participate in the change process.

The ability of an individual to adjust to organizational change depends on a couple of factors, which can be divided in the physical and psychological ability to adjust to the organizational change. A factor that affects the physical ability to adjust to change could be the knowledge of the employee. He or she might wonder if this knowledge will be enough to perform well enough after the organizational change. A factor that affects the psychological ability to adjust to change could have to do with stress. The employee might fear that the organizational change will lead to an increased workload which causes him/her more stress.

The question whether and how managers could assist employees to cope with the physical factors of change, is a very interesting one but will not be answered in this study. The focus in this study will be on the psychological factors, which yields an interesting and not often explored overlap of the realms of psychology and change management.

Where other studies regard the factor 'performance' as an indicator of a successful organizational change (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003; Robertson, Roberts, & Porras, 1993), we take the more psychological approach of hypothesizing that for an individual to perform his or her best, he or she needs to be in an emotionally healthy state. Organizational change can disrupt this emotionally healthy state and cause an individual to perform worse than usual (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Strebel, 1996).

Former research shows that even though the outcome of any organizational change is positive and employees view this outcome as positive, still the disruption of implementing the change can cause a lot of stress and can "negatively affect the their attitudes towards the change" (Ashford, 1988; Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). Even though the outcome of the organizational change is positive and is seen and experienced as positive by the employees, the fact that this change is still disruptive and stressful for employees can be understood by the Kübler-Ross model.

The **Kübler-Ross** model, originally developed by a Swiss psychiatrist for patients who heard they were going to die, is now widely accepted among psychologists as a ground rule for change among people. The field of change management has come up with several models that are heavily based on the model of Kübler-Ross, but more focused towards organizational change.

For example, James Prochaska has developed a model called the 'transtheoretical model' which describes the stages an individual is going through when adjusting to change (Prochaska, JM; Prochaska, JO; Levesque, DA, 2001). Here, the focus will be on the Kübler-Ross model since this model served as the basis for the other models describing the stages of change.

The Kübler-Ross model describes five stages that someone is going through when something in his or her life is changing (like an organizational change that affects the individual). The first stage is denial, where the person imagines a preferred reality. The second stage is anger, where that person becomes angry that this is happening to him/her. Depression is the third stage in which the individual gives up on the situation and becomes very passive. The fourth stage is bargaining; in this stage, the person is trying to make a deal to avoid the change.

The fifth and final stage is acceptance, where the individual accepts the inevitable future of events. (Kübler-Ross, 1969) As we can see on the graph, the model describes a U-shape. This means that people have to go through the U entirely for a change to be successfully implemented.

Hypothesizing, we could expect that certain managers do not realize this or do not have the patience to wait for employees to go all the way through the dip of the curve, and instead encourage them to skip the dip and expect the employees to accept the change straight away. This hypothesis would answer the research question by stating that the best leadership style should be one that allows employees to go through all the five stages of the Kübler Ross model at their own pace.

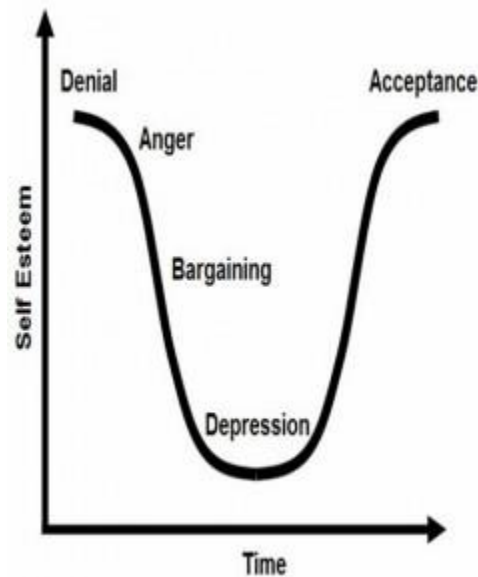


Fig. 3: The five stages of grief, by Kübler-Ross.

Lazarus (1993) points out that it is key for employees to find out how they react to organizational change. Only when employees understand how they react to change can they develop the ability to cope with the change appropriately.

In other words, it is important that employees are aware of the change and of their own personality. It requires some amount of self-reflection for employees to be able to recognize their own behaviour during a process of change. Getting to know one's personality can be done following the Big Five personality traits drawn from the field of psychology. The Big Five will be explained in the next section.

### The Big Five personality traits

In the psychology, one of the biggest names of all times is Raymond B. Cattell (Lewis R. Goldberg, 1990). Based on the work of Allport and Odbert (1936), Cattell developed a set of 35 clusters of related terms when it comes to psychology. But, when these 35 clusters were examined, only 5 turned out to be replicable (e.g. Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981; Fiske, 1949; Norman, 1963; Tupes & Christal, 1961). Later, other scholars came up with the same 5 factor model that is known as The Big Five personality traits today (Borgatta, 1964; Digman and Inouye, 1986; McCrae and Costa, 1985, 1987).

The Big Five personality traits are domains that are distinguished in the psychology. These 5 domains are used to give a description of the personality of an individual. For the sake of the understanding of these domains, we will give a short description of each one, using the article of Kumar (2009), because he also gives a short description of each of the 5

domains and does this in a very orderly manner. Cited from Kumar (2009):

*“Openness to Experience*

Openness to experience is marked empirically by such adjectives as imaginative, cultured, curious, original, broad minded, intelligent (Digman, 1990), and having a need for variety, aesthetic sensitivity, and unconventional values (McCrae & John, 1992). Importantly, individuals high on openness to experience display a preference for variety, they enjoy grasping new ideas, and they have an intrinsic interest in and appreciation for novelty.

*Conscientiousness*

Conscientiousness refers to the number of goals on which one is focused. It is related to dependability and volition and the typical behaviors associated with it include being hard working, achievement- oriented, persevering, careful, and responsible. People who are high in conscientiousness generally perform better at work than those who are low in conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Conscientious individuals can perform their part of the work with a minimum of oversight (Morgeson, Reider & Campion, 2005). Moreover, conscientious individuals are dependable, efficient, and hardworking. They are predisposed to take initiative in solving problems and are more methodical and thorough in their work (Witt, Burke, Barrick & Mount, 2002).

*Extraversion*

Extraversion refers to the level of sensory stimulation with which one is comfortable. The behavioural tendencies used to measure this factor include being sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barrick, et al. (2005) has described extraversion as key dispositional determinant of social behavior.

*Agreeableness*

Agreeableness refers to the number of sources from which one takes one's norms for right behavior. The behavioural tendencies typically associated with this factor include being courteous, flexible, trusting, good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, soft-hearted, and tolerant (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In work contexts, agreeable employees show higher levels of interpersonal competence (Witt et al., 2002) and collaborate effectively when joint action is needed (Mount et al., 1998).

*Neuroticism*

Neuroticism refers to the number and strength of stimuli required to elicit negative emotions in a person. Persons who are high on this dimension are usually anxious, depressed, angry, embarrassed, emotional, worried, and insecure (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barrick, et al. (2005) has described neuroticism as key dispositional determinant of social behavior.”

The Big Five personality traits count in the psychology as (the best) empirically based model to describe one’s personality.

The simplicity of the model allows us to bring the aspect of psychology in this mainly business focused research. This model grants us the possibility to select a personality trait that we can quantify to fit in our conceptual framework.

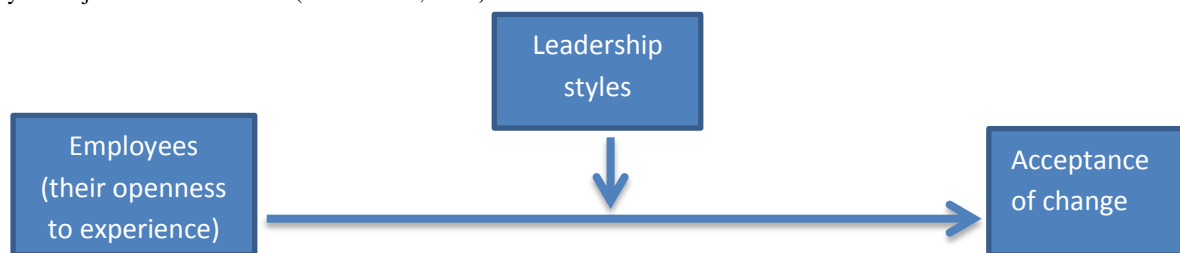
The Big Five model is not new in the area of organizational change and has been empirically tested by Vakola et al. (2004), who conducted research on the correlations between acceptance of change and extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness, which all turned out to be positive. However, he found a negative relationship between acceptance of change and neuroticism (Smollan et al., 2010). However, this does not mean that acceptance of change is only dependant on the personality traits of the employees involved. On the contrary, personality traits of an employee can give direction towards acceptance or rejection of change, but are not all determining. For example, as cited from Smollan et al. (2010), “those who show significant levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience will probably resist a change that is clearly unfavourable and unjust (Chawla & Kelloway, 2004; Bareil et al., 2007)”

In this thesis, the focus will be on one personality trait for feasibility purposes. We have chosen the trait of ‘openness to experience’, since this trait represents the desire of employees to change and undergo new experiences or want to stay the same and be conservative. Also, according to Watson & Clark (1997) and Vakola et al. (2004) “the most important Big Five characteristic in dealing with change is openness to experience, which produces cognitive reactions that in turn lead to emotions of varying levels of intensity”.

**CONSTRUCTING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this paper, the goal is to compare different leadership styles with respect to their effect on the acceptance of organizational change of employees. We will do this by constructing a conceptual framework for which we can develop propositions.

The concepts and the corresponding literature as previously explored grant more insight into the concepts of the research question. Based on this, we propose a conceptual framework of the relationship between the concepts:



**Fig 4:** Conceptual framework

In the literature, there is a magnitude of leadership styles that managers can apply to achieve organizational change. These different leadership styles all have their specific influence on the employees’ acceptance of the change. Therefore, leadership styles act as a moderating variable in this relationship.



The hypothesis for this relationship is the following:  
*The more a leadership style is adjusted to the personality of an individual employee, the easier an employee will accept the organizational change.*

For this theoretical research, we take the six emotional leadership styles as defined by Goleman et al. (2001), because these leadership styles count as the most used leadership styles in the literature.

For the employees, we distinguish them by their personality trait 'openness to experience' after The Big Five personality traits as described by Digman (1990). These five personality traits are seen in the psychology as making up the character of an individual.

Acceptance of change is gauged by the Kübler-Ross model. This model describes an U-curve, which is the process of adjusting to change. At the end of this curve, the process is completed and the change is accepted by the employees.

Since the goal of this thesis is to produce theoretical concepts, no empirical data is used.

Using the models and concepts from each of the three variables in the theoretical framework, the outcome of this thesis will be a 2x6 matrix, plotting the employees and their openness to change against the six leadership styles to see what the effect of the leadership styles are.

The openness of employees to experience will be quantified in two categories: 'low' openness to experience and 'high' openness to experience. We decided upon two categories for the sake of feasibility and clarity. Three categories would have yielded vague borders.

To distinguish between the amounts of the openness to experience, we use a test for employees to take to determine their openness to experience.

This test is created by the same authors who refined The Big Five personality traits, Paul Costa, Jr. and Robert McCrae.

This test is called NEO PI-R (the Revised NEO Personality Inventory) and consist of 240 questions to measure the five traits. To measure 'openness to experience', the authors used six facets, namely: Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas and Values (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

The NEO PI-R test has a score ranged between 0 when someone scores very low on a trait, to 100, when someone scores very high. We will classify everything below 50 as 'low', and every score above 50 as 'high', with 50 being 'high'.

The acceptance of change for employees is reached when the U-curve of the Kübler-Ross model is completed by employees, which is the process of adjusting to change.

The six emotional leadership styles are scrutinized to extract the traits that distinguish these leadership styles from each other. These leadership styles are then compared to the personality trait 'openness to experience', which is distinguished in low openness to experience and high openness to experience.

Based on the traits of the leadership styles and the traits of the openness to experience we are able to create propositions about whether or not a certain combination will succeed or fail.

## PROPOSITIONS

The conceptual framework has been introduced, explored and quantified in terms of measurement. Using these concepts and the theory behind it as explained above, we are able to make

propositions about the relationships in the proposed conceptual framework.

### *The visionary leadership style & low openness to experience*

The visionary leader focuses on empathy and sets a vision towards which the leader attempts to move the employees in a positive environment.

An individual employee with low openness to experience is reluctant to change and undergo new experiences.

The empathy used by the visionary leader would have a mostly positive effect on the acceptance of change by the employee who is not very open to experience. Hence,

**Proposition 1:** *A visionary leadership style has a positive effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.*

### *The visionary leadership style & high openness to experience*

With a high openness to experience, the individual employee wants to discover new things and move forward. Following a leader with a vision, then, is beneficial for a quick acceptance of change. Compared to employees with a low openness to experience, though, the positive effect for employees with a high openness to experience is even stronger. Thus,

**Proposition 2:** *A visionary leadership style has a positive effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a high openness to experience.*

### *The coaching leadership style & low openness to experience*

A coaching leader tries to shape an individual employee to fit the future environment by creating mutual goals for the company and the employee. An individual employee with low openness to experience does not like to be shaped. Therefore,

**Proposition 3:** *A coaching leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.*

### *The coaching leadership style & high openness to experience*

Employees who are open to experience are eager to try out new things. The condition is, though, that the decision to try out new things comes from within and is not forced upon them by an outsider, which is the case with the coaching leader. Consequently,

**Proposition 4:** *A coaching leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a high openness to experience.*

### *The affiliative leadership style & low openness to experience*

The affiliative leadership styles is all about prioritizing the feelings of the employees. For a leader using this style, it is important that an employee runs through the whole U-curve of Kübler-Ross and makes sure that this happens. Only when an employee is emotionally well, can they perform their best, is the thought of an affiliative leader. Hence,

**Proposition 5:** *A affiliative leadership style has a positive effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.*

### *The affiliative leadership style & high openness to experience*

Applying an affiliative leadership style on employees who are open to experience, can be tricky. What might happen is that an employee open to experience moves through the U-cure way faster than the affiliative leader thinks. In this way, the leader is holding back the employee from performing its best, since the leader is only busy with the emotional state of the employee. Thus,



**Proposition 6:** A affiliative leadership style may have a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a high openness to experience.

*The democratic leadership style & low openness to experience*

Using collaboration and communication, a democratic leader tries to reach consensus among the employees regarding the direction of the organization. For an individual employee who is not open to experience, this means that this employee will resist the change together with the other employees who are not open to experience. If the employees who are not open to experience outnumber the employees who are open to experience, achieving organizational change will become a very difficult task. Therefore,

**Proposition 7:** A democratic leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.

*The democratic leadership style & high openness to experience*

The same situation as described above applies here. Yet here we assume that most of the employees are open to experience and will foster the prospect of organizational change. Consequently,

**Proposition 8:** A democratic leadership style has a positive effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a high openness to experience.

*The pace-setting leadership style & low openness to experience*

Pace-setting leaders challenge the employees to reach ambitious goals. The expectation is that these leaders are not patient enough to let employees complete the U-curve necessary to accept the change. Instead, these leaders already focus on the new goals, rather than on helping the employees go through the U-curve and finally accept the change. Hence,

**Proposition 9:** A pace-setting leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.

*The pace-setting leadership style & high openness to experience*

Employees with high openness to experience move quicker through the U-curve of acceptance of change than employees with a low openness to experience, but they still need some time to accept the change. The question that arises here is: do pace-setting leaders grant employees who are open to experience enough time to accept, or do they move on too quickly? Thus,

No proposition is proposed for this combination, because doing so with respect to the literature would yield too many uncertain factors.

*The commanding leadership style & low openness to experience*

This combination is bound to fail. Employees with low openness to experience need time and empathy from the leader, but with this leadership style, all they get are targets to achieve in a negative working atmosphere. Therefore,

**Proposition 10:** A commanding leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a low openness to experience.

*The commanding leadership style & high openness to experience*

As stated above, even employees who are open to experience need time to adjust to and accept the change. A commanding leadership style will not be beneficial for this process. Consequently,

**Proposition 11:** A commanding leadership style has a negative effect on the acceptance of change of individual employees who have a high openness to experience.

These 11 propositions are summarized in a 2x6 matrix as follows:

Fig. 5: The effect on the acceptance of organizational change by employees of the six emotional leadership styles by Goleman (2001) plotted against the openness to experience of individual employees.

	Visionary leadership style	Coaching leadership style	Affiliative leadership style	Democratic leadership style	Pace-setting leadership style	Commanding leadership style
Low openness to experience	Positive	Negative	Positive	Possibly negative	Negative	Negative
High openness to experience	Positive	Negative	Possibly negative	Positive	No proposition proposed	Negative

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The research question for this paper is: How can leadership styles influence employees on their acceptance of organizational change? We answered this question by proposing a set of propositions drawn from the literature about whether a certain leadership style would have a positive or a negative influence on employees in their acceptance of organizational change. Some leadership styles are thought to have a positive influence on employees' acceptance of change, no matter how open they are to experience, whereas other leadership styles would have a negative influence on the acceptance of change of employees. Three leadership styles are hypothesized to have a different influence on employees with a low amount of openness to experience than on employees with a high amount of openness to experience.

Studying the effect of the six emotional leadership styles on the openness to experience of employees yielded twelve combinations. Scrutinizing the literature on the concepts in play, we developed eleven propositions. One combination was prone to too many other factors to develop a proposition for.

The eleven propositions proposed in this thesis are drawn from theoretical concepts and will need to be studied further.

Next to a possible elaboration of the theoretical research as done in this thesis, empirical data are required to form sound conclusions on the relationship between employees and the acceptance of change.

We will propose four ways for conducting further empirical research.

The first is 'post hoc analysis', in which organizations that recently underwent change will be studied to determine which leadership styles were used and what the effect was on employees. There are some disadvantages attached to this type of study: finding two or more organizations that recently underwent a type of change as explored in this thesis, is a difficult task since this might not happen very frequently. Also, examining the leadership styles used to implement this change might be hard to determine after the change is implemented. Last but not least, the influence of this leadership style on the employees' acceptance of change is practically become untraceable. All in all, this type of research is possible but very difficult to conduct.

A second proposal for further study is conducting a field experiment. Here, researchers will have to ask organizations to participate in the study by implementing a radical change while using a (by the researchers given) type of leadership style to do so. This type of study requires at least six organizations to be able to monitor the effect of all six different leadership styles on the acceptance of change by the employees.

This study is in our perspective unfeasible. No organization would want to participate in an experiment like this, since this would harm their business by purposely applying a different leadership style as they are used to, to implement change that might not even be necessary.

The third way further empirical research could be conducted is by doing a laboratory experiment. This would mean a controlled setting in which researchers would give the participants roles such as employee or manager and let them perform a task. After that, the managers will have to implement a certain change using a certain type of leadership style.

The disadvantage of this study is that it is very difficult to reenact an organization that implements a major organizational change. This would cost a lot of time and money since this

experiment will have to last for a sufficient amount of time to grant the participants the time to adjust and finally accept the organizational change.

The fourth and last type of research we propose is probably the most feasible one. Using observational study, researchers can observe organizations that are going through an organizational change. Since this type of study does not require researchers to influence or participate in the process in any way, organizations are more likely to grant researchers to observe their change implementation than for example in a field experiment.

The disadvantage here is, next to the fact that one would have to find multiple organizations that are about to implement a major organizational change, that it will be difficult to extract a specific leadership style out of the managers in charge. Managers usually use a mixture of different leadership styles and so determining how employees react to different styles is hard to identify in practice.

Then a methodological remark: in this theoretical study, leadership style acted as the most important variable influencing the relationship between employees and their acceptance of change. However, further research could reveal that there are other variables that could be at least as or even more important than leadership style regarding influencing the relationship.

In the field of business studies, lots of concepts are used to describe and explain phenomena. Many of these concepts, after being introduced by an author, are often cited by other authors, and therefore again cited by even more authors after that. But this does not mean that these concepts are all empirically validated. The validity of these concepts are based on the amount of citations they have, but they might not be an adequate representation of the reality. Further empirical research should bring clarification in this matter.

All in all is the question how leadership styles influence the acceptance of organizational change by employees a very interesting one, theoretically spoken. But whether or not it is feasible to conduct empirical research to explore the relationship between employees and acceptance of organizational change as influenced by leadership styles, is questionable. As proposed above, further research will be difficult to conduct given the restraints in terms of practicality and resources.

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