

Change Management for Small Business in Practice

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ABSTRACT

To explore the effectiveness of change management, I tested a sample of 20 employees' resistance to change (RTC) from a small business in practice. The small business is family-owned, local to Colorado, and was established in 2008. Throughout the organization, employees are in a range of roles, with a total of 8 being a part of administrative functions and 12 in manufacturing. This study analyzes how change is managed and identifies key factors influencing small businesses' willingness to adopt new practices.

INTRODUCTION

Today's business landscape is quickly evolving as organizations are pressured to adapt to changes in consumer markets, technology, and cultural expectations. This evolution has been significant in transforming various procedures and processes to remain competitive while promoting continuous improvement. However, organizations still may face RTC on the employee level. This RTC can create barriers to implementation strategies that drive successful transformations.

Theoretical change management models, including ADKAR by Prosci, Lewin's Change Management, McKinsey 7S, and John Kotter's 8-Steps, have been researched regarding the applicability of minimizing resistance. Research has focused on applying the models to several industries and their effects on reducing organizational resistance. For instance, the McKinsey 7S model has been utilized to examine employees' perspectives on management practices and their relationship in contributing to employees' attitudes and RTC (Keček et al., 2023). This study highlights the role of leadership in organizational change and the impact that can be driven through actively engaging in sustaining change. Similar research has been conducted on leadership utilizing change management practices, specifically during Coronavirus, as working

environments rapidly adapted to unforeseen change (Kasana et al., 2023, pg 10). The study concluded the role of senior leadership actively communicating change, engaging in setting goals and being involved in constructing time frames (2023). However, little research explores employees' level of RTC, or if any at all, when initiating change within a small business in practice. As a result, my research serves to understand whether and to what extent RTC can occur in the context of undergoing changes as a small business. The following report will investigate employees' resistance level and explore how perceived organizational support influences support or resistance to change for a small business in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will construct a review of resistance to change and its relationship to organizational shifts. Change management is the concept of preparing, managing, and reinforcing shifts that help support the successful implementation of personal and organizational strategy (Hiatt and Creasey, 2012). In doing so, this systematic approach aims to address the internal and external conditions that may delay procedural changes.

Resistance to change on the individual level is a driving component in determining how successful shifts can be on the organizational level. It is important to acknowledge the effect of the individualistic piece and how it guides our approach to handling organizational change. Several journals have explored individual change management and ways it can be effective through a focus on readiness for change (RFC) while working through embedded resistance and fears (Madsen et al., 2006, p. 94). These fears and resistance have been studied closely regarding how they are to come about, finding that perception of personal and organizational capabilities in handling change is a contributing factor (Madsen et al. 2006, p. 94, as cited in Backer, 1995). Research has taken a step further in understanding individual resistance by identifying "six

common manifestations of dispositional resistance to change” (Hon et al., 2011, 921). These include a fear of change in control, close-minded thinking, low resilience of carrying on through change, low tolerance of adjusting to new situations, prefer well-defined framework, and a tendency to become frustrated over not keeping old habits (Hon et al., 2011, as cited in Oreg, 2003). These manifestations can be found in the automated guided vehicle industry (AGV). Kopp (2023) explores this AGV industry resistance, discussing the challenges of introducing new technology to operational staff. This study later finds a linkage between resistance from employees and concerns that changes will cause displacement of position or disrupt personal routines (2023). Through this research, each provides insight into barriers that drive organizational change stemming from individual resistance.

With RTC being a leading driver in delaying transformation for organizations, it is worth understanding how this affects small businesses. Gray (2002) has conducted an extensive study on small firms and their RTC to evaluate the relationship between growth and introducing change. This study surveyed small businesses that consisted of employing 10 to 50 people. Further exploration finds that small businesses tend to be resistant to change due to resource constraints and values that reflect lifestyle goals (2002). Similar research examines small, family-owned businesses in Southeast Asia when adapting to growing markets, finding that resistance to change is prominent due to structural values and avoidance of modern management styles (Menkhoff and Kay, 1999). With RTC being a relevant topic in small business, it is important to have a rich understanding of its role in leading successful change.

By assessing potential causations to individual RTC, leadership can then strategically determine how to integrate change that minimizes impact for an organization. Models have framed how leaders can go about bringing change for individuals, including employees. The ADKAR model

by Prosci is a prominent tool used for individual change management, as it focuses on managing transitions, removing barriers in dialogue, and identifying gaps that can lead to observations that improve the introduction of shifts (Hiatt and Creasey, 2012, p. 58). Once achieving a foundation that accurately addresses individual concerns to resistance, organizations can then introduce a long-term change management plan that targets leadership engagement. Models such as Kotter's 8-step acknowledge the role of leadership in implementing organizational transformation. This model has shown success in implementing a new framework for the recruitment of Graduate Medical Education (GME) post-pandemic, resulting in sustainable website engagement and fill rates (Miles et al., 2023). In seeing models being utilized, it should be understood that this material can help further understand how to minimize resistance and promote employee support.

RESEARCH GAP

Past research has focused on understanding resistance to change from the perspective of large corporations. However, little research has explored the perspective on individual employee resistance and the factors that influence this behavior when change is to occur. Having little research on the individual perspectives of employees within a small business context is why I have chosen to conduct this study. Deepening the understanding of what drives employees' resistance can help leaders of organizations effectively address and focus on minimizing the lack of adopting new practices. The impact of integrating change into an organization can greatly differ because of involvement. Thus, this study will contribute to recognizing the area of an organization in which leaders can evaluate how to tailor their involvement and identify practices that accommodate a smooth transition of change that does not bring negative connotations.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Formulating Research Question

To proceed with surveying participants, constructing a question that accurately depicted what was being measured was first completed. Having found that little research has been conducted on the level of RTC for employees within a small business, I formulated the following research question: How does perceived organizational support impact employee's resistance to systematic shifts? To measure this, I decided to proceed with constructing a survey that collects first-hand results from employees.

Establish Key Success Factors (KSF) and Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Several KSFs and KPI's were constructed to formulate the goals of this research and what was needed to have an effective survey. The following describes the overarching goal of the project and survey, being KSF's. Following this are KPIs that describe quantitative indications that help measure progress on KSFs.

Table 1

Key Success Factors (KSF)	Key Performance Indicators (KPI)
Obtain adequate sample number of participants for survey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ninety percent or more of employees fill out the constructed survey. - Allow for 2 weeks of survey being open. - Send no less than two survey reminders.
Develop survey that does not strain participants attention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey estimated completion time should fall in between 5 to 10 minutes.
Survey should be constructed to measure degree of RTC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pull no less than 10 questions that relate to perception of change.

Prior to the construction of the survey, research was conducted to find approved questions that measure RTC. The material was expected to be easily comprehensible by users who participated and not enable biased results. Bias restrictions include questions that frame respondents to answer in a specific way, such as “Why are you so resistant to change?”. Additionally, leading language found in (Yes/No) and double-barreled questions were avoided because this can lead to confusion for participants. These should be avoided to not skew results and encourage honesty for accurate results.

Development of Survey

After preliminary research was complete, the finalized set of questions was chosen. The following table depicts the RTC instrument, composed of Likert Scale questions.

Table 2: Facets Measuring Resistance

<p>12. Describe your feelings about the likelihood of any change happening.</p> <p>Apprehensive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Confident</p>
<p>2. How do you think it will affect your workflow?</p> <p>Disruptions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 No Interruption</p>
<p>3. How will change affect any material benefits, e.g. money, work conditions?</p> <p>Loss 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Gain</p>
<p>4. How do you feel about your job when change is suggested?</p> <p>Insecure 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Secure</p>
<p>5. What effect do you think change will have on any intangible benefits, e.g. influence, power, and authority?</p> <p>Less 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 More</p>
<p>6. How much workload comes with change?</p> <p>More 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Less</p>
<p>7. How do other employees respond to the possibility of change?</p> <p>Reject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Accept</p>
<p>8. Do you think that change is inevitable?</p> <p>Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always</p>

<p>9. What type of personal response does the thought of change bring?</p> <p>Anger 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Fulfillment</p>
<p>10. Generally, what is change?</p> <p>Bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Good</p>
<p>11. Will it be possible to get further information about the change if you need it?</p> <p>Difficult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Easy</p>
<p>12. Are you apathetic about all types of change?</p> <p>Always 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Never</p>

Note. From “Measuring Resistance to Change: An Instrument and Its Application,” by Dianne Waddell and Amrik S. Sohal, 1998, <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijbpm.1999.004468>

Demographic questions were also integrated into the survey. These included asking questions that relate to sharing years of employment at a specific organization and age. However, the available options did not ask for the precise number of years, but rather respondents could select a range of which one would fall into. The purpose of using ranges was to protect the anonymity of participants while still having comparable data that could reveal possible relationships between variables. The questions below were placed last due to the perceived sensitivity of the information that could deter participants from completing the survey.

Table 3: Demographic Questions

Questions	Range Selections
What is your age in years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18-24 years - 25-34 years - 35-44 years - 45-54 years - 55-64 years - 65 or older
How many years have you been employed at (xxx)? *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than 1 year - 1-3 years - 4-6 years - 7-10 years - More than 10 years

Note. Questions with * may be portrayed differently due to the privacy of the organization.

Once reliable survey questions were chosen, the focus switched to logistical pieces that could affect participation. This includes length, structure, platform, and duration for completion of the survey. The following considerations when developing the survey are expanded on below.

- **Survey Time:** Estimated time of completion would be between 5 to 10 minutes.
- **Structure:** The survey would utilize Likert Scale-based and demographic questions from preliminary research.
- **Platform:** The survey was developed on Qualtrics and a PDF version for print to accommodate various organizational positions.
- **Survey Duration:** The survey was open for approximately two weeks, and a reminder to complete it after the first week.

Each of these logistical pieces contributes to user accessibility, considering factors of position held within the company and technological access. Making efforts to prioritize accessibility and structure design for this survey encourages a strong level of engagement. By creating a clear and logical flow of information, this approach fosters a comfortable environment that encourages honesty.

Key Assumptions

During the survey's construction, it was considered that a sizable portion of responses could be outliers due to the sample size. The causation of these outliers was also considered, which includes the length of employment and current position. The second assumption is that employees have encountered a form of systematic change during their duration of employment.

Sample Selection

This sample was selected due to its diversity in roles, composed of both manufacturing and administrative. Though the sample size is relatively small, it serves to identify the immediate impacts of initiating change. By focusing this study on a smaller sample size, results tended to be more relevant in representing the honesty of employees' perspectives on change. While having multiple samples of small businesses may provide more generalizable results for all leaders, this study targeted results that are meaningful to the tested organization.

RESULTS

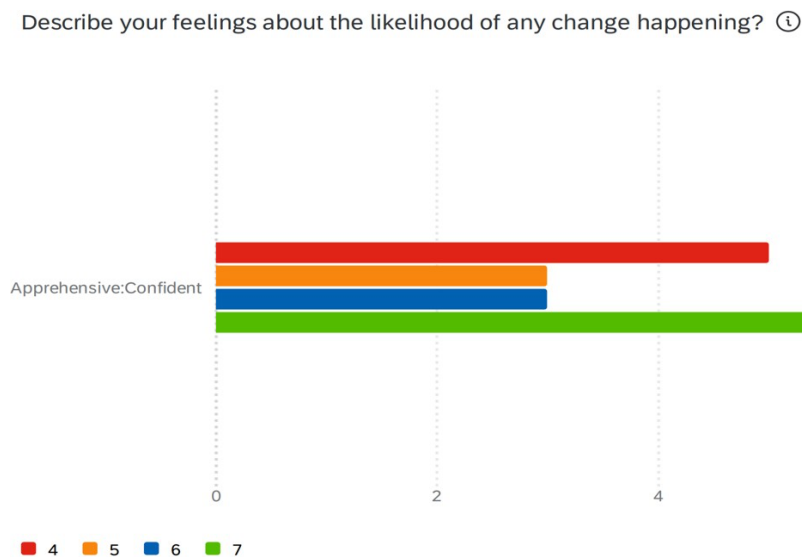
This section presents aggregate results pulled from the survey that was conducted on 20 participants. However, two responses were removed due to not being complete. These results will identify employees' RTC levels through graphs, tables, and statistical analysis. Through

these results, you will see variations in responses and facets that are widely agreed upon by employees.

Question One

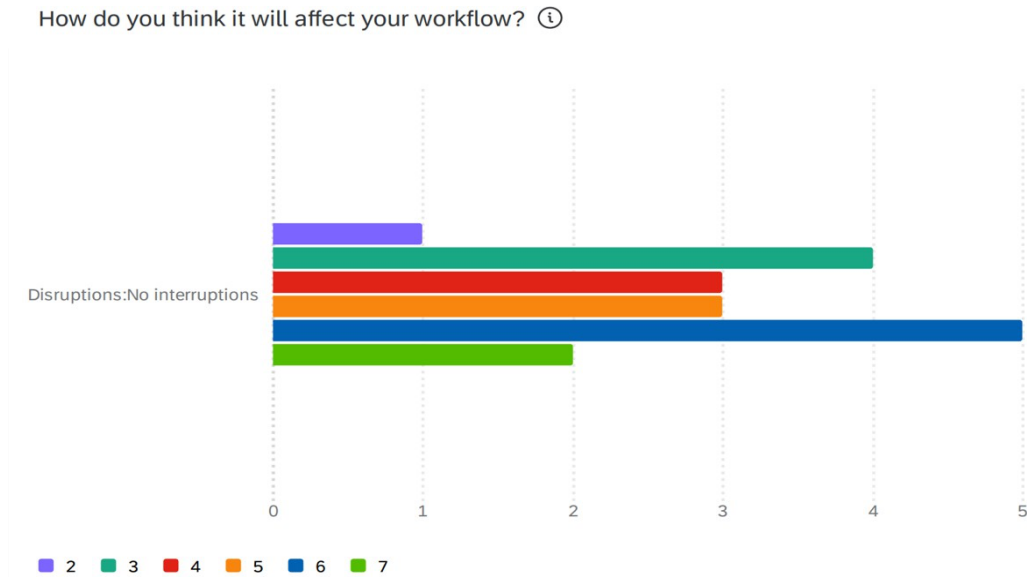
Participants were asked to choose a point on a scale of 1 to 7 that described their perception of change happening, measuring the facet of fear. The results included a distribution of answers that ranged from 4 to 7 (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1



Question Two

Disruptions can be one of the largest hindrances in engaging in productivity throughout an organization. Small businesses cannot simply afford to allow continuous disruption, given there is limited time and resources to accomplish their strategic goals. The facet of disruption was then tested through follow-up questions asking participants how the change would affect personal workflow. Results included a wider span of answers, ranging on a scale from 2 to 7 (**Figure 2**).

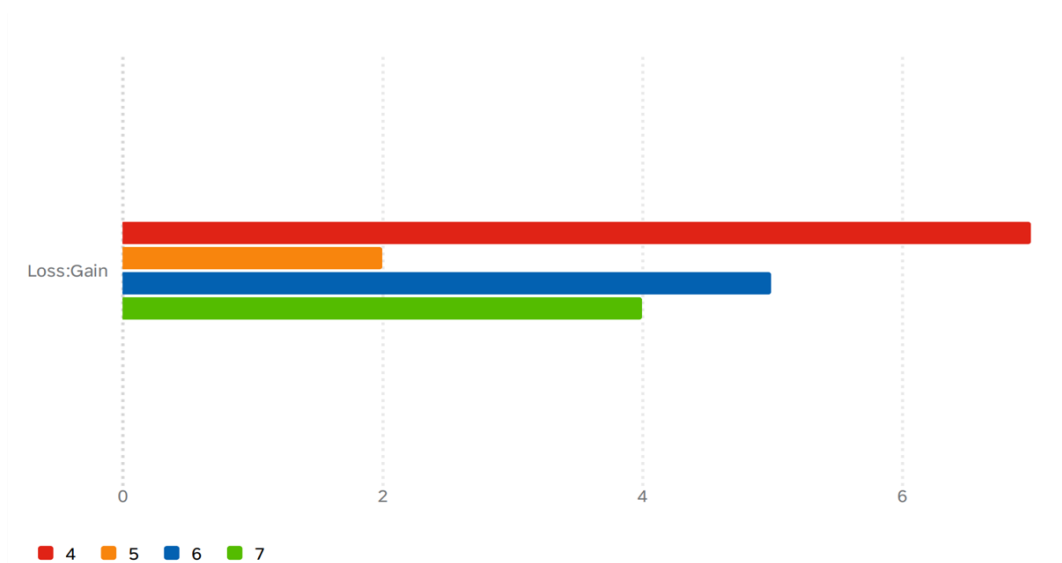
Figure 2

Question Three

To evaluate RTC regarding its relation to the facet of tangibles, a question was asked to determine how the change would affect goods and environments that are typically found within occupations. The following distribution narrowed, leaning towards ranges of 4 to 7 (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3

How will change affect any material benefits, e.g. money, work conditions? ⓘ

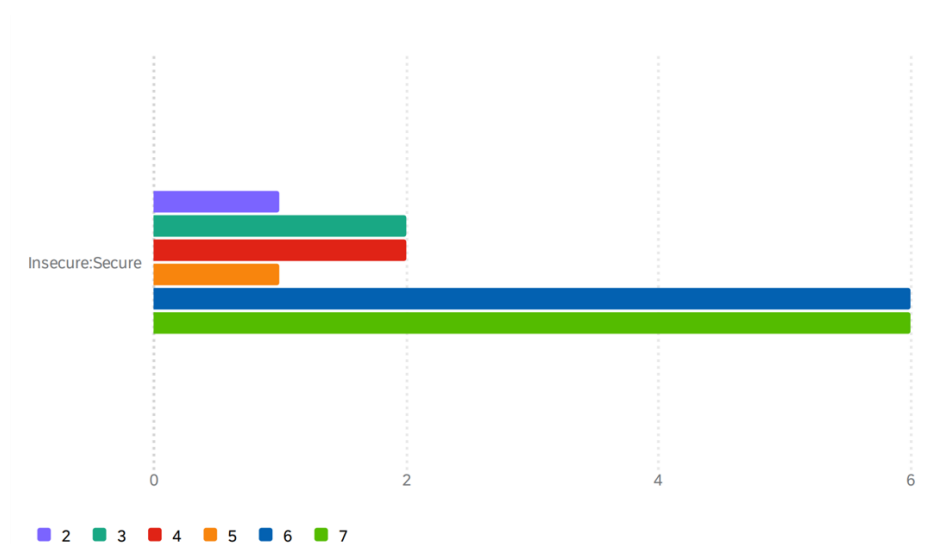


Question Four

To identify the degree of perceived threat, participants were to evaluate their feelings regarding job security when change is introduced. Although the results from this question range from 2 to 7, the majority fall under the category of 6 and 7 (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4

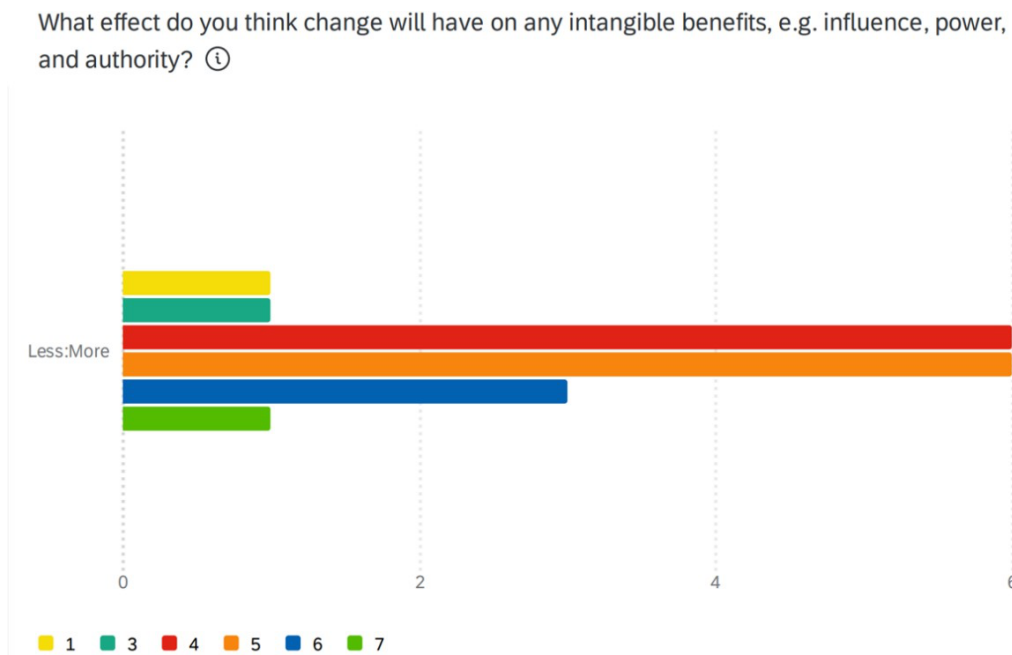
How do you feel about your job when change is suggested? ⓘ



Question Five

Intangible benefits were also explored by understanding participants' perceptions of whether they felt they received more or less when a change was to occur. The collected answers have displayed several outliers (**Figure 5**), however, most fall between categories 4 and 5.

Figure 5

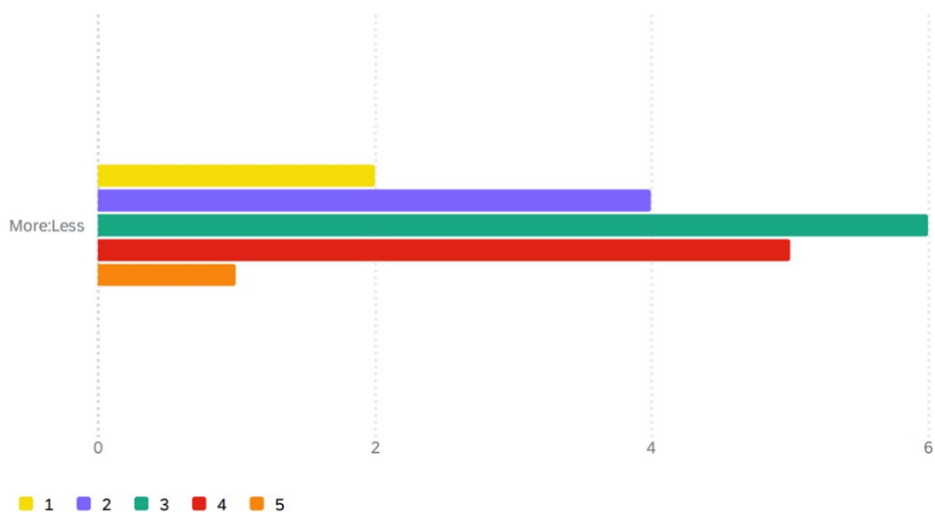


Question Six

A portion of this survey goes on to examine the perception of increased or decreased workload as a cause of change occurring. Results have implied a significant difference in perceived workload, ranging across the scale of 1 to 5, predominately between 2 and 4 (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6

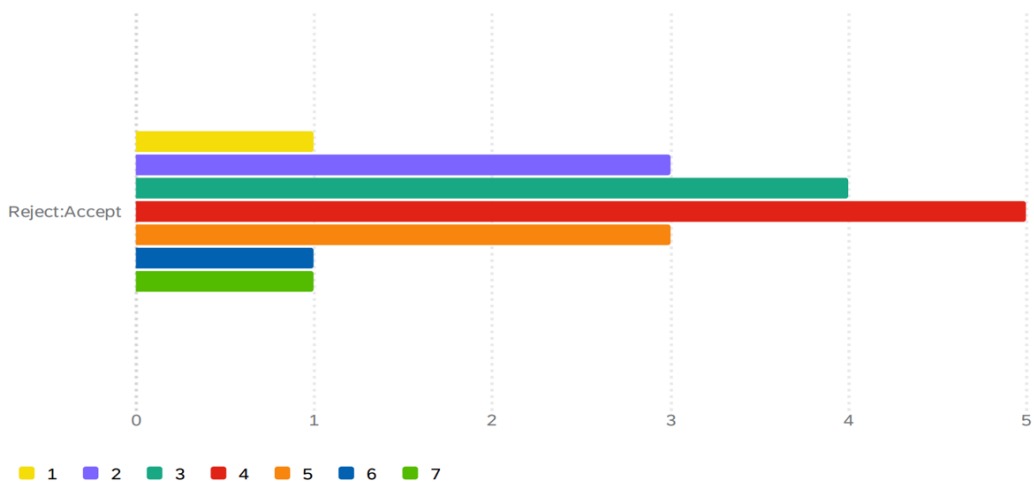
How much workload comes with change? ⓘ

*Question Seven*

Perception of culture was also explored by having participants evaluate the degree to which they believe their colleagues reject or accept change. This question explored the employees' external perception of how change is handled. Concluding the survey, results showed that several believed that colleagues were to reject change, with the scale leaning towards 2 to 4 (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7

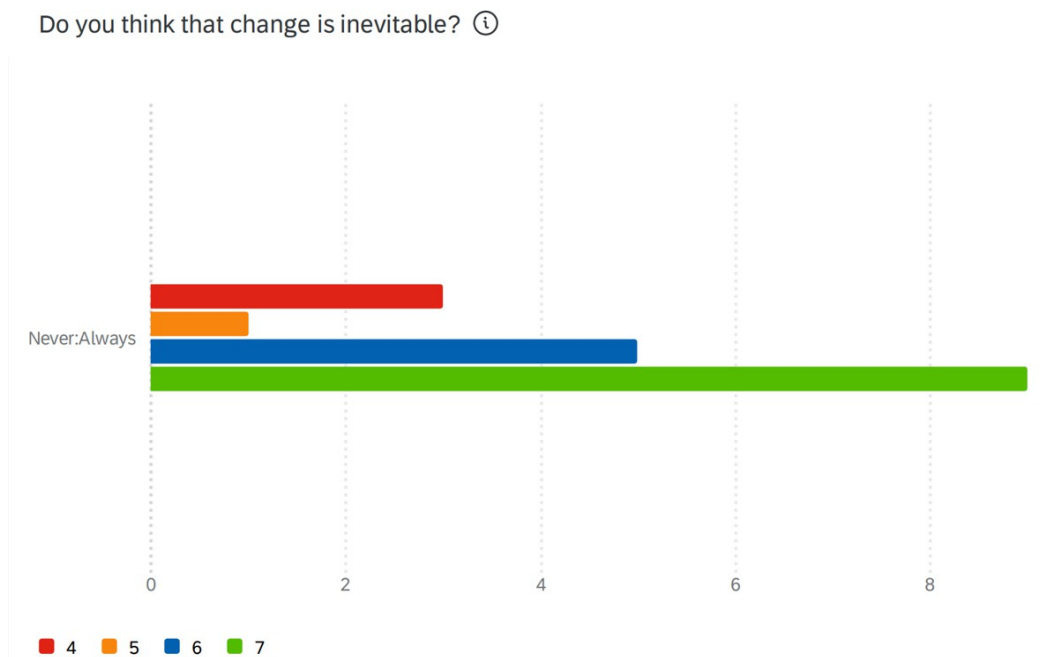
How do other employees respond to the possibility of change? ⓘ



Question Eight

The depiction of determining if change is inevitable was tested. Results displayed that most perceived that change is always likely to occur, with the majority of participants falling between categories 6 and 7 (**Figure 8**).

Figure 8

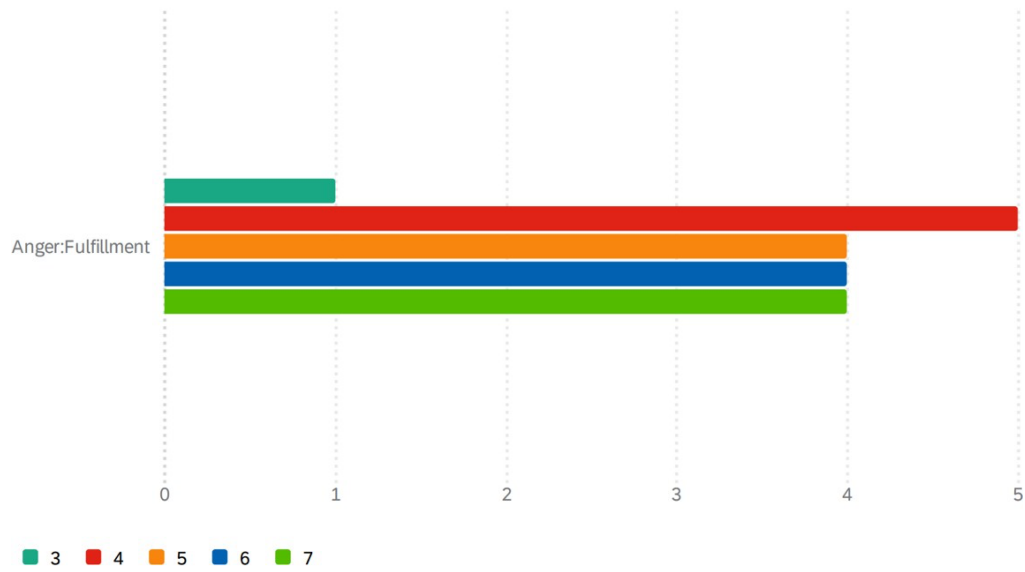


Question Nine

The survey further explored the personal feelings of participants, asking if change was more likely to bring about anger or fulfillment. The results presented a more positive outlook of change, most falling between 5 and 7 (**Figure 9**).

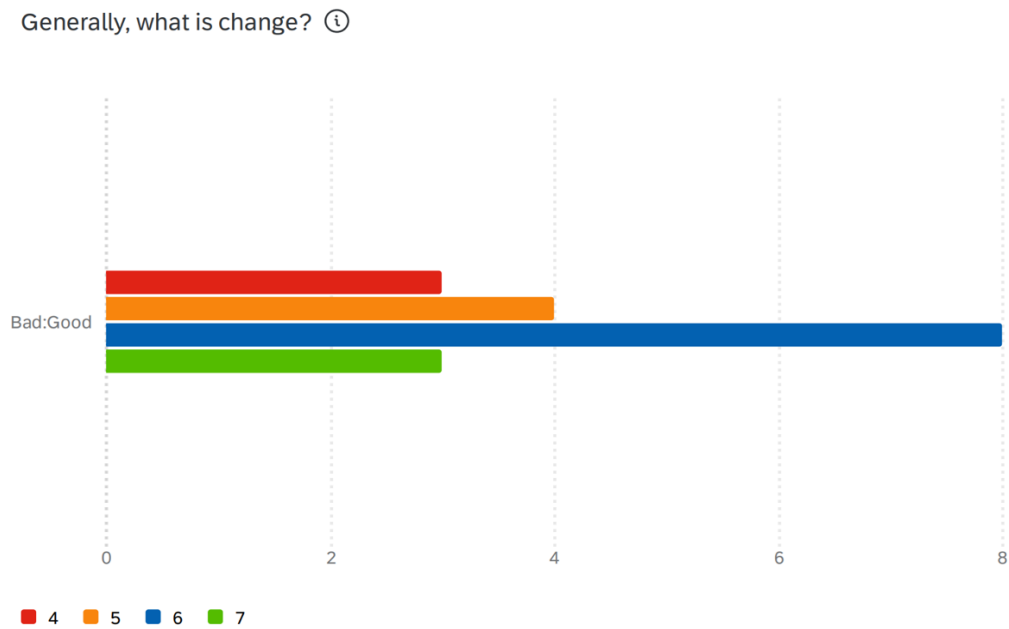
Figure 9

What type of personal response does the thought of change bring? ⓘ



Question Ten

Following the above question, employees were asked to rate how they generally view change, with a scale of bad or good. Results revealed a majority leaning towards a ranking of 6 (**Figure 10**).

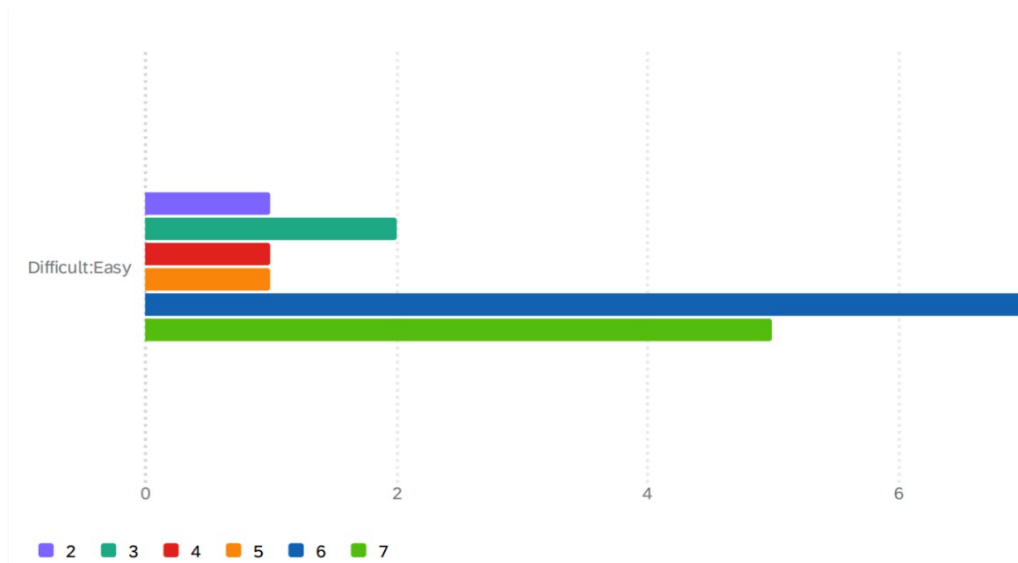
Figure 10

Question Eleven

Participants were asked to rate the accessibility of obtaining information about changes that occur. This question tested the facet of communication. Responses exhibited a high quantity of information on change being accessible, with most falling under 6 and 7 (**Figure 11**).

Figure 11

Will it be possible to get further information about the change if you need it? ⓘ

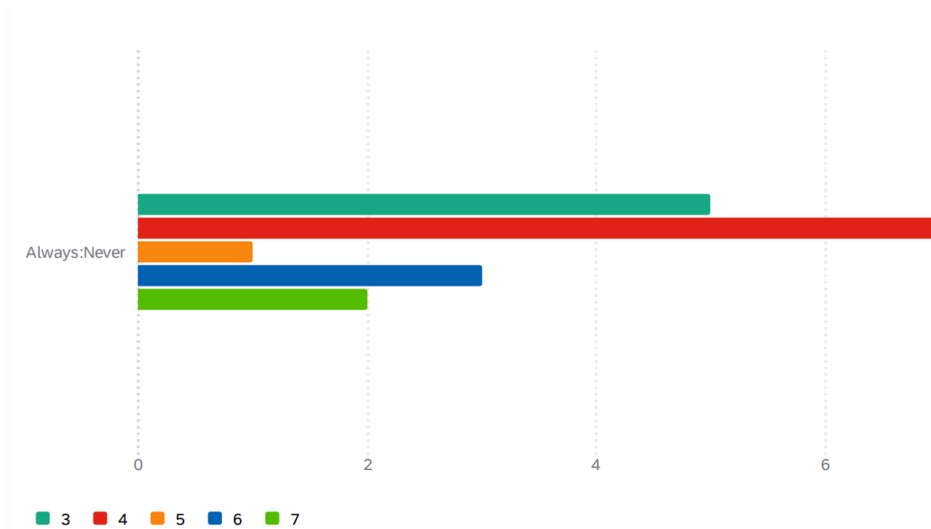


Question Twelve

The last RTC question aimed to evaluate employees’ apathy on all types of changes. These results concluded that most seemingly leaned towards an outlook of caring for change, falling mainly under categories 4 and 5 (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Are you apathetic about all types of change? ⓘ



Statistical Analysis

Out of twenty participants in the initial sample, eighteen administered surveys were completed. Due to having two surveys remaining uncompleted, these were removed from being evaluated in the aggregate results collected from this study. The eighteen completed surveys were analyzed to calculate the mean and standard deviation, shown in Table 4. Throughout the table, you will see that multiple variables are a part of the facets of resistance and are classified by either being positive or negative. This will be further discussed in later sections to evaluate this organization's motives for possible resistance.

Table 4: Statistic Summary

Facets	Negative									Positive	Std. DEV
FEAR	Uneasy	1	2	3	4	5	5.7	6	7	Confident	1.28
DISRUPTION	Hinder	1	2	3	4	4.7	5	6	7	Smooth	1.53
TANGIBLES	Loss	1	2	3	4	5	5.3	6	7	Profit	1.24
THREAT	Insecure	1	2	3	4	5	5.5	6	7	Secure	1.62
INTANGIBLES	Reduced	1	2	3	4	4.6	5	6	7	Increased	1.33
WORKLOAD	Increase	1	2	2.9	3	4	5	6	7	Decrease	1.11
CULTURE	Reject	1	2	3	3.7	4	5	6	7	Accept	1.53
CERTAINTY	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	6.1	7	Always	1.13
PERSONAL	Anger	1	2	3	4	5	5.3	6	7	Fulfillment	1.27
CHANGE	Bad	1	2	3	4	5	5.3	6	7	Good	0.98
COMMUNICATION	Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	5.5	6	7	Easy	1.59
APATHY	Non-Caring	1	2	3	4	4.4	5	6	7	Challenged	1.38

To put a value to each facet of resistance, a proxy variable technique has been utilized for calculations. The facets of resistance numeric values are listed below from highest to lowest (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Facets to Resistance Summary

Facets	Numerical Value
CERTAINTY	4.85
FEAR	4.50
COMMUNICATION	4.39
THREAT	4.37
TANGIBLES	4.23
CHANGE	4.17
PERSONAL	4.0
DISRUPTION	3.75
INTANGIBLES	3.66
APATHY	3.5
CULTURE	3.0
WORKLOAD	2.3

Demographic Questions

The last two questions entailed selecting a range of ages and years of working at small businesses. These were used to evaluate possible relationships between demographic questions and the level of RTC (**Table 6**).

Table 6: Age and Employment Summary

AGE	PERCENTAGE	EMPLOYMENT	PERCENTAGE
18-24 yrs	12%	Less than 1 yr	39%
25-34 yrs	41%	1-3 yrs	50%
35-44 yrs	24%	4-6 yrs	11%
45-54 yrs	12%	7-10 yrs	0%
55-64 yrs	6%	More than 10 years	0%
60 or older	6%		

DISCUSSION

Facets of Resistance

Amongst the sample size of 18 participants who completed the survey, the study portrays a predominately positive outlook on change and low resistance. With facets of certainty and fear being ranked as the highest (**Table 5**), we see that many employees feel confident while willingly acknowledging that change is inevitable. However, as shown in Table 4, it is apparent that

employees are not completely on board with changes, as resistant behaviors are still exhibited.

- **Cultural Disconnect-** Competing views on change from individual and organizational standpoints. This belief can stem from rooted cynicism on the individual level that leads to the reflection of cynical views on how management or colleagues handle organizational change (Reichers et al., 1997, p. 784).
- **Failure to Disclose-** Employees may conform to the perceived popular answer based on rooted organizational culture that could have potential embarrassment or threat to pro-change sentiment answers (Waddell & Sohal, 1999, p. 8).

Despite being unable to conclude the causation of these results, it is important to identify the role of organizations in facilitating and encouraging psychological safety to resolve the above concerns. By integrating a high level of psychological safety, individuals and teams can be alleviated from “excessive concern about others' reactions to actions that have the potential for embarrassment or threat” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 355). Standardizing practices that issue psychological safety can address the negative outlook on change when reverting to culture.

The facet of culture is a particularly interesting result, as it shows it is one of the lower-scoring variables. This result is interesting due to the nature of the question that was asked, being participants' perspectives on colleagues' rejection or acceptance of change (**Table 2**). With respondents having a more positive perspective on personal approach to change, it is not reflected when examining their colleagues. Although we cannot assume the causation of these results, we can identify potential reasonings.

Given that the facets of RTC display “WORKLOAD” as the most negatively perceived, organizations should consider the effects of this area on employees. Directly addressing this facet can entail a deeper understanding of how it affects positions in one organization over another.

Still, this does reveal that leadership must not leave this facet to escalate continually, as RTC can lead to organizational setbacks and conflict that can decline performance (Nasution et al., 2022, as cited in Kusworo, 2019).

Demographic Relations

Through the collected demographic data, we see that while age is quite spread, years of employment at the specific organization is the opposite, with 50 percent of employees being in the 1- or 3-years category (**Table 6**). This data has also revealed a smaller demographic of employees over the age of 45 years (**Table 6**). However, even with these percentages widely spread, it would be unreasonable to assume that older age is directly linked to RTC levels. Florian (2012) has rather found a negative linkage between RTC and age by testing a sample of 2981 employees from various companies. After the conclusion of this study, it was more apparent that younger individuals were more resistant to change, while people of older age had better strategies to handle organizational shifts (2012).

With years of employment staying below a maximum of 6, it is reasonable to see a potential relationship between this variable and RTC level. Employees with notable new entry to the organization may not have preconceived beliefs that are challenged by change. However, to confirm this relationship, it should be studied further. Organizational employee demographics can significantly differ due to cultural boundaries. Thus, it is important to understand that not all small businesses will have similar results.

Instrument Limitations

The instrument of utilizing facets to measure resistance was useful in providing key insights into the level of RTC for a small business. Nonetheless, the RTC instrument did display some key limitations that affected the result of the study. This section will explore this further and offer

strategies for how this study can be improved.

Taking a small sample size potentially affected the accuracy of results that depicted possible relationships between demographics and facets of resistance. This notion also reveals that the instrument cannot identify a distinct facet of resistance that is the sole cause of leading a perspective of negativity. The values of an organization play a key role in this limitation, as the instrument may only account for a broader context. Despite these limitations, it did provide results that can infer an organization's generalized outlook of change through variables that determine the level of RTC.

For future studies to address these limitations, constructing a longitudinal framework that collects data from this sample over an extended period would be beneficial. Additionally, integrating future research that includes employee interviews could further explore the non-surface-level reasoning behind certain resistance. This can provide a deeper understanding of how employees feel within an organization. Making these future adjustments would help improve the accuracy of generalized results.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to provide insights into change management and its relationship to levels of resistance of employees. The framework for this study entailed the usage of an instrument that tested facets of resistance to evaluate predominant influences within a small business. Through examining the results, it was found that the employees of the organization have little resistance to change. However, behaviors of resistance were still found in the facets of "CULTURE" and "WORKLOAD," in which employees perceived these as negative outcomes as a result of change. These facets of resistance explore perceptions of employees' external environment,

evaluating how they believe their colleagues would react to change and how it affects personal workload.

With culture and workload being a huge influence on employee resistance, it is key that this, and any organization, make an effort to understand the level to which change affects specific roles. Organizational roles with varying tasks can take on different challenges that could cause frustration. Thus, leadership must focus on understanding potential resistance that could stem from change and adjust accordingly to minimize the negative perceptions that impact the adoption of new practices. Change management models can support these efforts by creating a structure that values consistency in communication across the whole organization and works towards creating a culture of resilience. By equipping employees with the necessary tools to handle change successfully, negative perceptions could be reduced. This inherently starts with empowering employees by informing them of their role in initiating change (Rothermel & Lamarsh, 2012, pg 22).

Demographic questions were also utilized, specifically age and years of employment, to analyze the possible correlation between these variables and resistance. Although age proposed no obvious relation to the level of RTC, years of employment revealed a potential linkage. Despite both variables offering insights, relationships cannot be confirmed without further research. A longitudinal study and participant interviews could help the validity of potential relationships. Nevertheless, this research is going in the right direction in understanding how RTC affects small businesses in practice. By understanding what causes RTC, change management tools can go about how they must be adapted to serve the good of the business world, regardless of size.

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