



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

Mitigating Resistance to Change:
Face-to-Face versus Digital Communication Channels

by

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover the impact of face-to-face and digital communication channels on effective communication, focusing on their roles in mitigating resistance and creating readiness for change, ultimately leading to a reduction in resistance during change processes. The result is generated through a mixed method: literature research that reveals the role of communication in change processes, identifying key criteria of effectiveness of the communication that are used to analyze the effects of the channels; online surveys with 58 respondents to acquire the status quo of how individuals are communicated about changes, perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of the channels respectively, and the preference of communication channel that individuals would like to be communicated with; interviews with 10 professionals from diverse industries to acquire perceptions of communication channel effects from a managerial perspective, discovering complementary factors related to the effectiveness of communication.

The findings demonstrate that there is no significant difference between face-to-face and digital communication channels in terms of effectively conveying change information. However, the use of face-to-face communication channels substantially contributes to fostering a sense of community within organizations. These results suggest that a pragmatic and accessible approach involves employing a combination of face-to-face and digital communication channels to enhance the effectiveness of communication in change processes. Face-to-face communication channels are particularly advantageous for addressing complex issues, while digital communication channels serve as valuable reinforcements to the overall communication process.

The study contributes to an existing literature gap by using a mixed-method approach, contributing to future empirical studies on the subject of communication channels and resistance to change, and offering practical implications for managers in communication, human resources, and related fields to adapt and tailor their communication strategies for effective change management.

Keywords: Communication Channels, Face-to-Face Communication Channel, Digital Communication Channel, Resistance to Change, Readiness for Change, Change Management

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the MiM program for the incredible journey we have embarked on over the past eight months. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the program director, Ola Mattisson, for his commitment to taking care of each and every one of us throughout this transformative experience. We extend our deepest thanks to the professors for their invaluable knowledge-sharing and wise guidance. Their expertise has not only enriched our understanding but also broadened our vision for the future. Special thanks are due to our supervisor, Rikard Larsson, for his guidance, support, and invaluable insights throughout the research process. His expertise and dedication have been instrumental in shaping the outcome of this study.

We are immensely grateful to all the participants who took part in the survey and interviews, as well as those who facilitated our access to the interviewees. Their willingness to share their valuable perspectives and experiences has been pivotal to the success of this research. We would also like to express our gratitude to our peers for their constant feedback, and for checking in on our well-being during challenging times. Your presence and encouragement have been instrumental in keeping us motivated and focused. Lastly, we owe a thank you to each other for being there every step of the way, and offering unwavering support through the ups and downs of this journey. Your friendship and companionship have made this experience truly memorable.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In a world of uncertainty, the ever-changing external environment makes adaptability an essential survival requirement for companies. Till today, the underlying question of organizational changes regards a prolonged dispute - change management. Statistically, 70% of change programs fail to achieve the initiatives due to employee resistance and insufficient management support (McKinsey, 2015). While this popular narrative of the inherent failure rates lacks valid and reliable empirical evidence (Hughes, 2011), it is well acknowledged that understanding resistance is key to change successes. Resistance during the change process is not equivalent to a general negative concept since not all change is beneficial for organizations (Pardo-del-Val & Martinez-Martinez-Fuentes, 2003) and resistance can yield utility for managers to consider certain aspects that have been neglected in the process (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Nevertheless, when the legitimacy of change is guaranteed, it is rather important to mitigate resistance throughout the project lifecycle so that the transitions of individuals can contribute to the future state of the organization with desired levels of adoption and usage (Prosci, nd).

Distinguished from resistance, the readiness for change concept has been examined to be a notably significant factor in mitigating resistance according to multiple studies (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993; Oreg, Michel & By, 2013; Slack & Singh, 2014) since it helps employees prepare for the upcoming change and address potential obstacles that may arise during the process. Whilst a negative correlation is suggested to exist between resistance to change and change readiness, a stronger positive correlation between change communication and change readiness (Slack & Singh, 2014) has been noticed, indicating a direct opposite movement that resistance to change descends while communication becomes highly dialogic (Simoes & Esposito, 2012). Change communication, readiness for change, and resistance to change therefore form an interesting triangle relation that the change leaders could take into consideration for achieving an ideal change implementation.

Regardless of the abundant research on the three topics respectively, the discussion on how communication mitigates resistance has a primary emphasis on the components of effective communication (Akan & Ülker, 2016; Husain, 2013; Thakur & Srivastava, 2017; Kupritz &

Cowell, 2011). In other words, the research in this area focuses on the aspects that communication strategy should cover, as well as various outcomes that decision-makers intend to reach through communication. In the field of communication, different channels such as emailing, and in-person conversations and their impacts on the contemporary working environment are explored (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011), but the influence on resistance to change is rarely mentioned. Given the increasing tendency of including remote work in the modern working norm, communicating online by video conferencing and in other digital forms is becoming more predominant than before. Although the hybrid way of working is widely integrated by organizations, there are certain effects in face-to-face interaction that digital communication cannot replace. Furthermore, the discrepancy between the impact of the two channels on dealing with resistance to change is yet to be discovered.

1.1 RESEARCH GAP

The literature regarding change management and resistance to change extensively recognizes the critical role of communication in facilitating the change process (Klein, 1996; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013; Simoes & Esposito, 2014). However, limited attention has been given to the influence of communication channels in reducing resistance to change. Although studies have compared the effectiveness of different communication medium in shaping messages (Flaherty, Pearce & Robin, 1998; Berger & Lyengar, 2013; Yigitbasioglu, 2015; Madsen, 2018), they have yet specifically focused on the impact of these channels in mitigating resistance to change.

Furthermore, from the methodological dimension, the existing body of literature reveals a substantial number of qualitative research studies, as well as numerous quantitative research studies on the related topics (Coch & French, 1948; Lehman, Greener & Simpson, 2002; Jones, Jimmieson & Griffins, 2005; Men, 2014). However, there is a noticeable gap in empirical evidence on the specific topic of face-to-face versus digital communication channels in mitigating resistance to change. Limited studies have directly investigated the effects of these communication channels on resistance reduction in an empirical manner. Moreover, the integration of mixed-method

approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative research, remains scarce or absent in the current literature.

As shown in the illustration below, a Venn diagram presents a straightforward visual display (Moktefi & Lemanski, 2022) of the explored areas, including communication and resistance to change (Coch & French, 1948; Lawrence, 1969; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1989; Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008; Harvey & Broyles, 2010; Timofeeva, Bulganina, Fomenko, Khachaturova, Nekrasova & Zakharova, 2016), communication and readiness to change (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993; Lehman, Greener & Simpson, 2002; Jones, Jimmieson & Griffins, 2005; Elving, 2005; Holt, Armenakis, Field & Harris, 2007; Weiner, 2009; Haqq & Natsir, 2019). However, the specific area that remains unexplored is the relationship between communication channels and resistance to change.

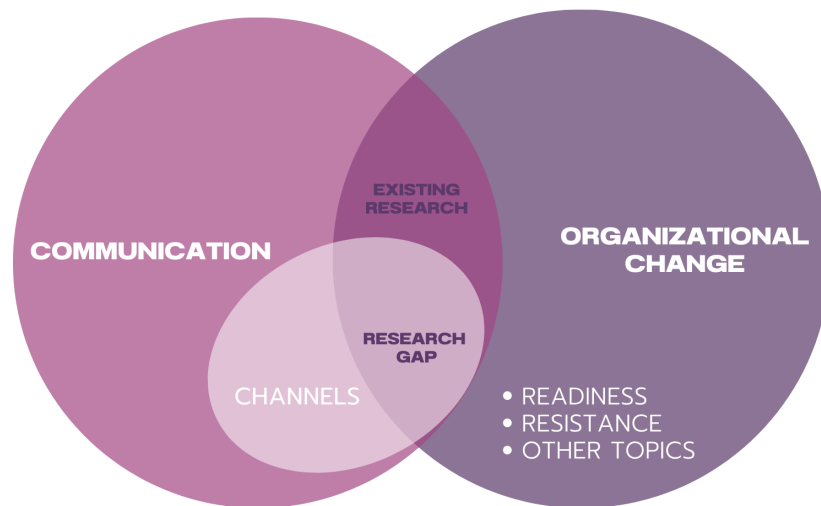


Figure 1. Research Gap between Communication and Organizational Change

To fill this gap, this research aims to investigate the communication mechanisms that contribute to the reduction of resistance to change, focusing on the specific impact of different communication channels. By exploring variables such as message content, communication competence, and the effectiveness of using social media in internal communication (Men, 2014), this study seeks to expand the understanding of communication in the context of change

management. Additionally, considering the context characteristics studied in relation to communication and change (Van Dam, Oreg & Schyns, 2007), this research aims to bridge the existing gap and provide insights into how specific communication channels can effectively mitigate resistance to change.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to contribute to the empirical research on communication within organizational contexts. Specifically, this research aims to expand the dimensions of understanding by examining the comparison between face-to-face and digital communication channels. By exploring the differences and similarities in utilizing these two channels, particularly in relation to communication content across various situations, this study seeks to shed light on their respective impacts.

Furthermore, this research will focus on investigating the actual effects of employing digital and face-to-face communication channels in reducing resistance to change. This aspect of the study addresses an existing research gap in the field. By delving into the specific influence of these communication channels, the research aims to uncover valuable insights that can contribute to mitigating resistance to change.

In addition to examining the effects of different communication channels, this research will also investigate the correlation between communication and readiness for change. By adopting an integrated approach, the overall objective is to identify key factors of communication channels that leverage communication to enhance change readiness and further mitigate resistance to change.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the existing research gap and the purpose, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the similarities and differences between digital and face-to-face communication channels in mitigating resistance to change?

RQ2: To what extent does communication mitigate resistance to change through face-to-face and/or digital communication channels?

1.4 DEMARCATATIONS

To maintain focus and relevance, this research will not delve into the broader scope of communication across various domains, as the concept of communication is pervasive and applicable in multiple contexts. Instead, the study will specifically concentrate on communication within the realm of change management, emphasizing its effectiveness in facilitating successful change initiatives. By examining effective change communication, the research aims to gain valuable insights into how communication strategies can effectively minimize resistance to change and accomplish the desired objectives. Understanding the role of communication in this specific context allows for the identification of ideal goals and outcomes that can be achieved by utilizing communication channels. However, it is important to note that the exclusion of a discussion on the general role of communication may have implications for the comprehensive understanding of communication as a whole. By not exploring communication in a broader context, certain factors that influence communication choices, such as psychological aspects and social influences, may not be fully examined. These factors can impact individuals' preferences for using different communication channels, potentially affecting the effectiveness of change communication strategies.

In line with the research questions and objectives, the concept of readiness for change will be discussed, as it is closely associated with mitigating resistance to change based on existing

literature, from which readiness for change primarily relates to the initial phase of implementing change. The present research will therefore touch upon relative analysis on different stages of change or types of organizational change to provide a more comprehensive theoretical background for the primary focus within this research. Additionally, while the authors shed light on the reasons for resistance to change, the exploration will not be exhaustive. Instead, the aim is to strike a balance by providing insights into resistance factors without diverting the primary objective. The omission of an exhaustive analysis allows the researchers to consider resistance without losing sight of the core research goal.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 - This chapter presents the theoretical framework and in-depth analysis of the literature review. Such concepts as resistance to change, readiness for change, change communication, communication media, and channels are defined and analyzed. This chapter addresses a research question and includes an analytic model of the study.

Chapter 3 - This chapter presents the chosen methodology of the study to explain to the reader how the research was conducted, and what the research design and research approach were chosen. The choice of empirical data, data collection methods, data analysis, data quality, and data limitations are justified as follows.

Chapter 4 - This chapter presents the findings of empirical data collected from the open-ended survey and semi-structured interviews and presents preliminary analysis and findings.

Chapter 5 - This chapter analyzes the findings from the empirical data collection, summarizes the findings of the research, and discusses insights on theoretical and empirical findings.

Chapter 6 - This chapter is to conclude the key viewpoints of the research. The analysis and findings are discussed, following the discussion of the practical implication of the research, its contribution, as well as the ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the realm of organizational change, effective communication plays a pivotal role in navigating the challenges posed by resistance to change. Starting off with the introduction to organizational change, the theoretical framework section delves into the existing literature that provides a relatively comprehensive understanding of the relationship between communication, readiness, and resistance, as well as the corresponding influence on the change process.

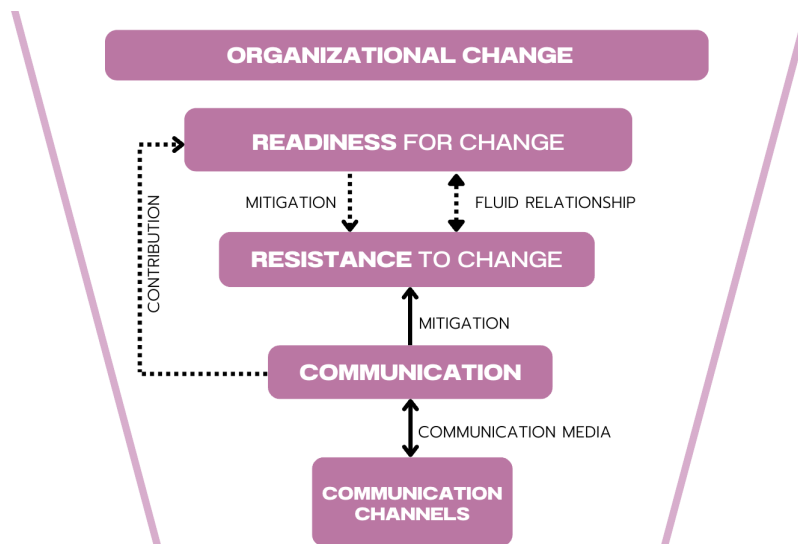


Figure 2. Outline of the Theoretical Framework

Based on the existing literature, the influence of communication on resistance to change is generally approached through two distinct pathways: the impact on readiness and the direct influence on resistance. Previous research has recognized that increasing readiness leads to a reduction in resistance to change. Furthermore, direct targeting of resistance through effective communication strategies also contributes to successful change implementation.

To lay the foundation for this exploration, it is essential to review the definitions of readiness and resistance within the organizational change context. By understanding these concepts and their interplay, valuable insights are gained into how readiness influences resistance and the role communication plays in shaping this dynamic. Additionally, examining the role of communication in organizational change provides essential background knowledge for studying communication

channels. Drawing from existing literature allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which communication contributes to reducing resistance to change. This understanding serves as a crucial prerequisite for comprehending the effectiveness of different communication channels and their potential in facilitating change processes. By categorizing the factors that contribute to effective communication and comparing the utilization of digital and face-to-face communication channels, discussions are then initiated on the strategies that leverage these channels to mitigate resistance to change.

2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Organizational change is the process of transforming an organization from its current state to a desired future state primarily in response to external pressure (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). It leads to an intentionally generated “planned organizational change” once a relevant environmental shift is sensed by the organization (Porras & Silvers, 1991), involving altering organizational structures, processes, culture, and strategy to improve performance (Boeker, 1997; Keck and Tushman, 1993) and adapt to the ever-changing business environment (Child and Smith, 1987; Leana and Barry, 2000; Cameron & Green, 2015). The scope of change is one of the most used variables to define organizational changes (Levy & Merry, 1986; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Goodstein & Burke, 1991; Brynjolfsson & Hitt, 2000).

Rooted in the aspect of the scale of the change, two groups show a broad distinction: (1) incremental changes that seek to improve the current situation while maintaining the basic structure (Goodstein and Burke, 1991; Greiner, 1972; Levy, 1986; Mezias and Glynn, 1993; Nadler and Tushman, 1989), and (2) strategic and transformational changes which alter the fundamental framework of organizations (Goodstein and Burke, 1991; Marshak, 1993; Nadler and Tushman, 1989; Porras & Silvers, 1991). Identifying the scale of change helps organizations tailor their change management strategies and interventions accordingly (Goodstein & Burke, 1991). It enables them to anticipate and address potential challenges, engage stakeholders effectively, and allocate appropriate resources to support the change process. By aligning the scale of change with

the readiness of employees, communication approaches, and strategies to manage resistance, the change of successful organizational change is likely to be facilitated.

Further, there are two schools of change management according to Stein Kleppestø (2023): (1) the process of change seen as orderly and controllable and (2) the process of change seen as disorderly and uncontrollable (Kleppestø, 2023). The first school considers that change could happen by following a set of formulas or models such as Kotter's eight-step framework (Kotter, 1995) and Lewin's three phases (Lewin, 1947). Various researchers in this field, such as John Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, have emphasized that change occurs when people feel differently rather than think differently (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Jeff Hiatt, the founder of Prosci, developed the ADKAR Model to guide individual change based on the understanding that organizational change can only take place when individuals change (Hiatt, 2006). Other practical models that have been applied in real life include but are not limited to "Ten Principles of Leading Change Management" (PwC, 2004) and "Change Leadership Framework" (Kleppestø, 2023). In comparison, there is little published literature in the field of the process of change seen as disorderly and uncontrollable, which could be a result of viewing changes as "wicked problems" (Kleppestø, 2023) since wicked problems are too complex and multifaceted to be defined, let alone solve (Conklin & Weil, 2006). A catalytic approach to leadership may provide a method of adapting to the characteristics of complex and intractable problems crossing organizational and jurisdictional boundaries (Luke, 1998), although the research on catalytic leadership is not explicitly suggested to be associated with change management.

According to *Learning to Think Strategically* (Sloan, 2020), past experiences help people develop intuition and assist strategic thinking. This research perceives that learning from existing knowledge is necessary, despite the fact that volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, aggravate wicked problems and decrease the predictability of future outcomes of changes in the environment in which the authors operate. Therefore, the study will follow the first type of school in change management, and be based on the assumption that existing and established frameworks or models are of value for better change implementations.

2.2 READINESS FOR CHANGE

Traditionally, readiness for change is recognized as a critical factor in successful change implementation, as overlooking its importance can hinder the intended organizational changes (Pasmore & Fagans, 1992). Schein (1999) emphasizes the failure of change efforts when organizations fail to effectively unfreeze and create readiness for change prior to initiating change induction (Lewin, 1947). Additionally, Coch and French (1948), as highlighted by Bartlem and Locke (1981), emphasize the significance of readiness-creating procedures as a factor that influences the outcomes of change initiatives. However, Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) argue that the creation of readiness for organizational change extends beyond individual cognitions to include factors such as the message, interpersonal and social dynamics, and influence strategies. The credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity, and expertise of change agents are also identified as important factors influencing the effectiveness of influence strategies (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Furthermore, organizational readiness for change (ORC) is considered a set of general factors, such as motivation, personality characteristics of program leaders and staff, institutional resources, and organizational climate, which are necessary but not always sufficient for change to occur (Lehman, Greener, & Simpson, 2002). Nevertheless, Jones, Jimmieson, and Griffins (2005) suggest that employees' readiness for change positively influences a company's culture, change implementation success, and capabilities for reshaping. Among the various factors that influence employee readiness for change, a significant one is effective communication, as it can provide clarity, and information, and create a sense of shared understanding among the employees about the change (Elving, 2005).

On the other hand, readiness at the organizational level has been addressed. Weiner (2009) describes organizational readiness as a team property. This is a psychological state in which organizational members feel committed to implementing organizational change and have confidence in their abilities to do so. For increased readiness, Weiner (2009) recommends raising change valence, identifying task demands, assessing resource availability, and assessing situations. The organizational-level construct of readiness to change reflects that this topic is a multifaceted

matter, as echoed in other studies that emphasize its multidimensional nature, incorporating the tripartite concept of attitude (Bouckenoghe et al., 2009; Choi, 2011; Holt et al., 2007; Holt & Vardaman, 2013), while some studies view the concept of readiness for change as a unidimensional construct (Armenakis et al., 1993; Jones et al., 2005). The multidimensional nature recognizes the three components of attitudes held by individuals: cognition, affection, and intention (Haqq & Nasir, 2019). Encouraging each component of readiness to change attitude becomes important for organizations to effectively facilitate planned changes (Piderit, 2000).

To conclude, it is crucial to emphasize that readiness for change is influenced by a number of factors, such as organizational and individual characteristics, factors related to changes, and contextual factors. Through a number of approaches, including effective communication, change efficacy, and multidimensional elements of attitude, it is more likely that organizations will increase readiness along with successfully implementing change initiatives within their organizations.

2.3 RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Resistance to change has been long recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon (Ansoff, 1988). It arises as a response or reaction to change (Block, 1989), driving conduct that serves to maintain the current situation in the face of altering the status quo (Duncan, 1977). Although many authors argue that resistance is considered to be a useful tool to increase change successes (Lawrence, 1954; Beer & Eisenstaedt, 1996), the overall impression of resistance is often associated with negative employee attitudes or with counterproductive behaviors (Lewin, 1954; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). In contrast, Dent and Goldberg (1999) believe that resistance to change is a mental model that got more popular than it should have been. Their analysis argues that the acceptance of resistance to change confuses an understanding of change dynamics because people may resist loss of factors such as status, pay, and comfort, but rarely change per se. Instead, they call for a shift of perception on resistance to change, which represents specific and targeted action for different situations resulting from change rather than labeling difficult problems as resistance to change. Meanwhile, resistance as a resource is not necessarily a dysfunctional obstacle or liability to

successful change (Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008). Rather, recipient reactions are valuable for the existence, engagement, and strength of a change, serving as a resource in its implementation and successful completion (Knowles & Linn, 2004).

Nevertheless, this research will rely on the predominant term of resistance to change that is widely accepted in many studies. The authors acknowledge that the concept of resistance is not a catch-all term that can explain all change-related difficulties, but altering the notion is likely to trigger confusion and a lack of coherence in discussing related topics. Therefore, the term "resistance to change" remained in this research with the recognition of the importance of specifying the different types of resistance that can occur during the change process.

A manifestation of resistance is contingent upon various factors, such as an individual's personality, the characteristics of the change, attitudes towards it, the group and organizational dynamics, and the contextual environment (Judson, 1991). It stems from a range of factors, including fear of the unknown, loss of control, concerns about job security, perceived lack of benefits, disruption of routines, and the inherent discomfort associated with adjusting to unfamiliar circumstances (Oreg, 2003). The causes and influential factors contributing to resistance to change are diverse and interrelated. Individual factors, such as personality traits, prior experiences with change, and resistance to authority, make an impact on one's propensity to resist (Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). Organizational factors, such as poor communication, inadequate support, insufficient training, and a lack of trust in management, also contribute to resistance (Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007). Furthermore, external factors, such as economic conditions, industry trends, and societal norms, can shape individuals' and organizations' perceptions and responses to change initiatives (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Additionally, resistance is considered closely linked to the various stages throughout the change process, including during the initial introduction of the change, during implementation, and even after the change has been implemented, as individuals adjust to the new realities (Kotter, 1995). When individuals or groups are ready and receptive to change, resistance may be minimal or non-existent (Carnall, 2007). However, when individuals are not adequately prepared or have not reached a state of readiness, resistance is more likely to emerge (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). This highlights the importance of

addressing readiness and creating an environment that fosters acceptance of change implementations.

2.4 CHANGE COMMUNICATION

The existing literature demonstrates a general consensus on the importance of communication during change processes (Lewis & Seribold, 1998; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991), indicating that communication process and organizational change implementation are inextricably linked processes (Lewis, 1999; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008; McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013; Simoes & Esposito, 2014). In the context of organizational change, the goals of communication are primarily distinct between the **information** and **the sense of a community** through different stages in change processes (Elving, 2005; Francis, 1989).

Regarding **information**, the goal of organizational communication is to facilitate information exchange and knowledge sharing. The information given by the organisation usually comes from management as the sender, and with employees as the receiver of information, informing the employees about their tasks and about the policy and other issues of the organization in time (Elving, 2005). Further, Armenakis et al. (1993) stressed that the **message** for change is the primary mechanism for creating readiness for change among members, in which the need for change (i.e. the discrepancy between the desired end-state and the present state) and the individual and collective efficacy (i.e., the perceived ability to change) of parties affected by the change effort shall be addressed. The purpose of having this as a goal is to enable individuals and groups to share information, ideas, and best practices, which can improve decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation within an organization since communication plays a critical role in knowledge creation and dissemination within organizations (Francis, 1989). The enabling of sharing information and feedback from employees facilitates an interactive two-way communication process, which was found to have positive associations with employee–organization relationships, and employee communication behavior (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Smidts, Pruyn & Riel, 2001). In addition, communicating the need for change is necessary for creating a sense of shared purpose and aligning individual and organizational goals (Meyer & Allen, 1997). When employees feel valued

and engaged, they are more likely to be productive and committed to achieving organizational changes.

Regarding creating a **sense of community** (Francis, 1989; De Ridder, 2004), the goal is to establish a shared identity within an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and build trust between management and employees (Elving, 2005). The shared identity is associated with the social identity approach (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel & Groot, 2001) and the observation that communication creates the conditions for commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Postmes et al., 2001). Social identity is an association with a person's cultural background and the emotional significance attached to the membership to which the person perceives that he or she belongs (Tajfel, 1978). When individuals recognize themselves as part of the organization and feel connected to their colleagues and the organization, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to achieving organizational goals. On the other hand, trust results in distinctive effects such as more positive attitudes, higher levels of cooperation, and superior levels of performance (Mayer et al., 1995; Jones & George, 1998; Elving, 2005). By building a shared identity and trust, strong interpersonal relationships are facilitated in the organization, which fosters a positive work environment or organizational dynamics (Armenakis et al., 1993).

2.5 RELATIONS: READINESS, RESISTANCE, AND COMMUNICATION

2.5.1 THE FLUIDITY OF READINESS-RESISTANCE RELATION

In the context of organizational change, the relationship between readiness for change and resistance to change reveals entanglements. Four types of distinctions are discovered between the two topics after reviewing the existing literature.

Firstly, **readiness is not distinguished from resistance** (Coch & French, 1948; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Lawrence, 1954), despite the fact that the importance of readiness is stressed (Beer & Walton, 1987). Strategies such as education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, and negotiation and agreement are dimensions to be

considered in dealing with resistance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). The prerequisite for effective prescriptions for resistance is, however, that readiness is first created, since "readiness is the cognitive precursor to either resistance to or support for a change effort" (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Secondly, **readiness and resistance differ from one another and are opposing forces.** Echoing Lewin's concept of unfreezing (Lewin, 1951), readiness is reflected in organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions in terms of how much change is required, and the organization's capacity to accomplish that change (Armenakis et al., 1993). It has been suggested that being prepared for change may be able to reduce the likelihood of resistance to change, thus increasing the effectiveness of change efforts (Riehl, Beckert & Koch, 2019). Managing resistance as part of the change process is essential to achieving readiness as a goal since many change efforts encounter resistance or failure directly linked to insufficient provision of an effective unfreezing process prior to initiating a change induction (Weiner, 2009). Accordingly, readiness for change plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between contextual antecedents and resistance to change (McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013).

Thirdly, **resistance may occur regardless of whether a company is ready as an organization, but research is attempting to identify the factors that may contribute to resistance and include them in the readiness process.** This is due to the manifestation of resistance behaviors in both overt and covert forms (Peccei, Giangreco, & Sebastiano, 2005; Recardo, 1995). Typical overt resistance behaviors observed toward change include boycotting change discussions and sabotage (Lines, 2005), while covert negative behaviors are less likely to be recognised by change drivers (McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013). Hence it is more difficult to discern and is only identified through its detrimental impact on employee attitudes, behaviors and organizational outcomes (Recardo, 1995). Nevertheless, studies sought to investigate factors in this field, in particular emotional attachment, that is considered to be a potential antecedent of negative attitudes toward a change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei, Giangreco, & Sebastiano, 2011). Consequently, resistance and relevant readiness topics are linked due to the investigation, regardless of the degree to which they are relevant.

Lastly, **the concept of readiness for change consists of both resistance to change and support for change as a continuum with on one end resistance to change and on the other end**

readiness for change (Elving, 2005). The dynamic nature of readiness for change implies that individuals and organizations can occupy different positions along this continuum at different times (Pardo-del-Val & Martinez-Fuentes, 2003). Depending on various factors and circumstances, employees may feel ambivalent about the change, holding conflicting emotions and cognitions (Piderit, 2000). On the other end of the spectrum, readiness for change reflects an individual or organization's openness, willingness, and enthusiasm to embrace and support the proposed changes. A successful change will result in successful employee adoption (Robertson, Roberts & Porras, 1993). Depending on the level of readiness for change, individuals or organizations may display varying degrees of ambivalence or neutrality, such as mixed emotions (Piderit, 2000), uncertainty, or uncertainty about the direction in which their organization is going. Additionally, readiness for change is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the effectiveness of change communication, the presence of supportive leadership, the availability of resources and training (Kitchen & Daly, 2002), and the overall organizational climate and culture.

In conclusion, the relationship between readiness for change and resistance to change is complex and intertwined. While the literature reveals four distinct perspectives on this relationship, readiness and resistance are often treated as interconnected rather than separate constructs. Strategies that address resistance to change (such as communication and participation) have been reported as literally generating readiness (Armenakis et al., 1993). As such, for the purpose of this study, there will be an elaboration on how communication may affect resistance as well as how communication facilitates readiness, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.5.2 THE RELATIONS OF COMMUNICATION, READINESS FOR CHANGE, AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Despite the extensive research on communication in organizational change, change communication is often practiced inadequately (D'Aprix, 1996, p. 3). Poorly managed organizational change communication results in rumors, resistance to change, and a lack of change readiness (DiFonzo, Bordia & Rosnow, 1994), negatively affecting the change effort (Llenza, 2008). Alternatively, change communication is considered to be an effective method of restraining

resistance to change (Elving, 2005; Ford et al., 2008; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Jimmieson et al., 2008). Several studies have shown that change communication negatively correlates with resistance to change and that effective change communication results in employees being less inclined to resist change (McKay et al., 2013; Miller, Johnson & Grau, 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). If change-related communication is perceived to be adequate, this adequacy is associated with a participant's level of readiness for change and a lower likelihood of reacting negatively to it (Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Elving, 2005). Nevertheless, regardless of the strong recognition of the role of communication in change processes, the statistical correlations between change communication and the other two variables show different patterns.

According to empirical research verified by Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, there is a **strong positive correlation between change communication and change readiness, and a weak link between change communication and resistance to change** (Slack & Singh, 2018).

While the analysis conducted confirms a strong role of communication in change readiness, a mediation analysis also suggests that communication may not directly influence intent to engage in change-resistant behavior (McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013). Despite the result of a weak correlation between communication and resistance to change, **the strength of communication's impact on resistance to change does not lessen because of the weak extent of the correlation.** On the contrary, communication facilitates the avoidance of negative consequences of change processes, among which aspects such as feeling insecure about hierarchical structures, poor control of information flow, or insufficient time devoted to explaining information to participants contribute to resistance to change in later processes (Kovaitė, Šūmakaris & Stankevičienė, 2020). The findings of the correlations between the three variables provide insights into the impact of communication on readiness and resistance.

Communication and Readiness

Regarding the correlation between communication and readiness, both literature and empirical research indicate a high degree of linkage. The statistical results (Slack & Singh, 2018; McKay,

Kuntz & Näswall, 2013) prove that change communication is significantly associated with readiness for change (Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Haqq & Natsir, 2019). In the context of a change, employees are more likely to assess it positively when given practical and timely information (Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Additionally, the adequacy of change-related communication is the primary predictor across readiness for change dimensions and, in some segments of the workforce (i.e., those who are not leaders), adequate and timely communication may compensate for the absence of participation in the decision-making process at the beginning of an organizational transformation process (McKay, Kuntz & Näswall, 2013).

In order to achieve the goals of change communication - information and a sense of community - to facilitate readiness for change, another key factor to consider is **change agents**, as the credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity, and expertise of change agents are identified as important factors influencing the effectiveness of influence strategies (Armenakis et al., 1993). A change agent is defined as an individual or group that undertakes the task of initiating and managing change in an organization (Lunenburg, 2010). Change agents, such as organizational leaders across different departments and hierarchical levels, have an impact on empathy and commitment that are influential to resistance to change (Simoes & Esposito, 2014; Men 2014), which makes it important in dealing with the fluidity of the readiness-resistance relation through communication.

Communication and Resistance

Regarding the relationship between communication and resistance, although there appears to be little statistical evidence of a correlation between change communication and resistance to change, findings suggest that there are other factors that may affect the correlation (Slack & Singh, 2018) and resistance is overcome more easily if the communication strategy is designed to address it from the outset (Klein, 1996). According to the communication and resistance to change comparative analysis by Simoes and Esposito (2014), a direct opposite movement between the two is noticed from a generalizable sample. In spite of the fact that the results were not based on statistical analysis, and therefore they cannot be concluded as a cause-effect relationship, the qualitative approach of expressing how the two constructs are related is of great importance.

First of all, while the resistance to change was descending, communication was becoming highly **dialogic** (Simoes & Esposito, 2014). In dialogic communication, the organization and its employees engage in **two-way communication**. In contrast, one-way communication relies on top-down approaches aimed at controlling employee behavior according to management instructions (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). According to the literature (Grunig et al., 2002; Smidts et al., 2001), the dialogic style of communication was positively associated with employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, identification, loyalty, employee-organization relations, and employee communication behavior, which contribute to “trust, credibility, openness, relationships, reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered style, tolerance for disagreement, and negotiation” in organizations (Grunig, 1992, p. 558). The literature review of the readiness-resistance relationship indicates that readiness for change refers to an individual's willingness, enthusiasm, and openness to embrace and support the proposed changes. Dialogic communication, therefore, contributes to achieving a more ideal state of readiness for change.

A further insight derived from the correlations for practitioners is the concept of **affective commitment**, defined as a kind of bond between an employee and the organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), or the emotional connection an employee has with, identification with, and involvement with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The literature on resistance indicates that emotional attachment is considered to be a potential antecedent of negative attitudes toward a change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei, Giangreco, & Sebastiano, 2011). Furthermore, existing literature suggests that employee resistance to change may be related to inadequate communication and management failed to recognize the importance of employee involvement (George & Jones, 2001; Lau & Woodman, 1995). Affective commitment functions as an antecedent of resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei et al., 2011), indicating that it is an important predictor of resistance to change, above and beyond the influence of adequate change communication. When employees feel emotionally attached to and identified with the organization, they are more likely to engage in positive and change-oriented behaviors and trust that transformations endorsed by the organisation will entail benefits to all stakeholders (McKay, Kuntz, Näswall, 2013).

2.6 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Until now, companies and managers have employed a variety of communication channels to interact with employees. According to Rogers (1995), a communication channel is defined as "the means through which messages are transmitted from one individual to another".

These channels span from traditional ones like newsletters, magazines, and posters, to phone calls, voicemails, face-to-face communication, and modern digital tools such as intranets, blogs, instant messengers, and internal social networking sites (Hampton, Goulet & Purcell, 2011). Each channel engages the target audience in a different way affecting the speed and scale of communication, as well as communication outcome (McLuhan, 1964).

In the change literature, multiple authors draw clear distinctions between interpersonal channels and mediated channels (Dewhirst, 1971; Fidler & Johnson, 1984; Rogers, 1995). Interpersonal channels predominantly involve direct, face-to-face communication, while mediated channels rely on various forms of mass media or technology.

Several authors (Fidler and Johnson, 1984; Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Rogers, 1995) suggest different utilization of these channel types during the implementation of planned change. They mention that interpersonal channels are better suited to address the specific needs of organizational members when facing the risks and complexities associated with change. However, when high levels of risk or complexity are not significant factors, they propose that mediated channels are more effective in disseminating general information.

2.6.1 FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

Face-to-face communication (including team meetings, one-to-one meetings, group problem-solving sessions, briefings, etc.) is to facilitate rapid and concise exchanges, enabling immediate feedback between teammates (Battiston, Vidal & Kirchmaier, 2017). This channel is considered to have a stronger impact on the target audience than any other communication channel as it

encourages involvement in the communication process (Sandin & Akaslompolo, 2005). Dennis and Valacich (1999) argue that labeling face-to-face communication as the unequivocally richest channel is not necessarily accurate. Instead, they suggest that the choice of the most suitable communication channel depends on the specific circumstances in which it is employed. Unlike this point of view, the majority of researchers have defined face-to-face as the richest communication channel that offers a lot of pros in terms of conveying information (Lengel and Daft, 1988; Grunig, 1992; Cameron and McCollum, 1993; Winger, 2005; Wagner, 2006; White, Vanc & Stafford, 2010).

Face-to-face communication implies various reasons to be considered the richest channel. First of all, it is due to its ability to facilitate the **direct experience and better engagement, provide immediate feedback, maintain a personal focus, and the opportunity to build stronger relationships**, which can be especially important during times of change when individuals may feel uncertain or anxious (Grunig, 1992; Wagner, 2006).

Secondly, messages can be conveyed verbally, wherein the content reflects rational thinking. Verbal expression also allows for the communication of **emotions, both through the words chosen and the manner in which they are spoken which consequently allows to influence a recipient's emotions** (Klein, 1996; Winger, 2005). Interacting and communicating face-to-face brings in a **robust set of non-verbal cues** which can convey additional meaning and emotions and foster a deep emotional understanding of the message (Trevino, Daft, & Lengel, 1992; Sandin & Akaslompolo, 2005; Winger, 2005; Wagner, 2006; Men, 2014;). Among those are body language, tone of voice, eye contact, gaze, blush, head nods, posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other forms of body language. Face-to-face communication is more likely to evoke a sense of importance as recipients perceive that managers are dedicating their time specifically to them and foster familiarity between implementers and recipients, which in turn leads to positive relationships and the development of trust (Quirke, 1996; Bernecker & Reiss, 2003).

Thirdly, face-to-face communication is also considered to have much **higher productivity** compared to digital channels due to the **immediate feedback** and allows reflection upon a manager's willingness to listen to an employee (Grunig, 1992; Winger, 2005; Men, 2014). When

employees are provided with opportunities to express their opinions and feel valued and supported, it can lead to increased satisfaction in their relationship with the organization. Providing feedback also **facilitates dialogue**, as it allows for immediate addressing of recipients' questions and concerns. This prompt response is likely to reduce uncertainty (Lewis, 1999; Mast, 2002; Mikeleit, 2000; Quirke, 1999; Smeltzer, 1991). Informal and personalized face-to-face communication nurtures communication symmetry and fosters a sense of community and belonging among employees (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010).

Another advantage of face-to-face communication is the **instantaneous speed of conveying and receiving information**. In the organizational change context, speed is believed to play a crucial role, particularly in situations where problems can be effectively addressed by leveraging the tacit knowledge held by individuals working toward finding solutions (Winger, 2015).

Moreover, face-to-face communication is a powerful channel in communicating change because it provides the communicator with **different perspectives and interpretations** that are likely to be derived from a complex message and the ability to give explanation and clarification upon a deviated understanding of the message (Klein, 1996).

Overall, previous research has demonstrated a preference for face-to-face communication with management over mediated (digital) communication (Wagner, 2006) and has provided some evidence of face-to-face communication prevailing in other communication channels. Therefore, face-to-face channels should be used for communication especially big changes (Smeltzer, 1991; Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Klein, 1996; Larkin and Larkin, 1996; Lewis, 1999; Quirke, 1999; Men, 2014).

2.6.2 DIGITAL COMMUNICATION CHANNEL

Over the past decades, the Internet and digitalization have revolutionized communication across all domains, leading to a significant shift in how employees interact at work. According to Deloitte (2012), digitalization has brought more collaboration, crowdsourcing, connectivity, mobility, and continuous communication in the workplace. There has been a lot of research on digital communication (Cho, Furey, & Mohr, 2017; Verčič & Vokić, 2017; Madsen, 2018) mentioning

that communication has become more decentralized due to digital communication channels. Digital communication has shaped people's behavior and habits in terms of communicating anytime, from anywhere, participating in two-way discussions, providing feedback which lets companies reach employees in a much more efficient way. The use of digital communication innovations, such as email, video-conferencing, instant messaging, and mobile phones, has transformed the way daily work tasks are performed.

While the significance of face-to-face communication is acknowledged, it does not deny the necessity for other communication channels (Larkin and Larkin, 1994; Lukas, 1996). Digital communication is deemed to be more limited in terms of carrying information in comparison to the face-to-face channel, but there are digital media channels full of rich-information features that are used for communicating changes and building trustworthy relationships in organizations (Sheer, 2011). By referring to rich features, the authors mean two-way interactive, inclusive, and fast communication that facilitates employees' participation and engagement in the change process, encourages employees to provide feedback, and maintains conversation between employees and managers. According to Kovaitè, et al. (2020), digital channels can be grouped into six main categories: instant messaging, enterprise social media, electronic media, intranet-based knowledge and performance management, streaming, and online profiles, etc.

One of the big advantages of digital communication channels in the era of globalization is the **ability to convey information to many employees at different locations simultaneously** (Buchholz, 2002; Mast, 2002). Besides that, co-workers are able to **share experiences, knowledge, and learnings, get involved in discussions** to improve inner processes, and make themselves more involved in a change process (Kovaitè et al. 2020).

Digital communication offers an added advantage in terms of **disseminating information to large audiences very fast**. Clampitt et al. (2000) claim that in times of uncertainty, speed can take precedence over comprehensive two-way communication. Therefore these channels provide fast speed, flexibility, convenience, and efficiency. Digital channels are especially useful in two-way communication that requires inputs from different stakeholders, employees' participation, and

engagement in the change process including understanding, acceptance of the planned change, and input of new ideas.

Another advantage is the **availability of information at any time**. According to Quirke (1996), employees have a preference for receiving information on demand rather than waiting for it to be delivered at the convenience of the sender. Additionally, employees value knowing that they can access specific information even if they do not currently require it.

Byrne and LeMay (2006) discovered that employees prefer emails for receiving urgent corporate news. The advancement of technology has made email an essential component of employees' daily routines, suggesting a shift in employees' preferred communication medium over time (Men, 2014).

At the same time, digital communication channels consist of various limitations and are not considered to exclude face-to-face channels to reach the highest efficiency in communicating goals on the change process. One notable drawback of digital communication is that it often **lacks the opportunity to facilitate feedback and constructive debate**, which are crucial for enhancing understanding and fostering acceptance (Quirke, 1996). Moreover, digitally written messages (e.g. memos, notes, reports, online messages, etc.) can be personalized in their approach, but they have **limitations in terms of conveying cues and providing prompt feedback**. Some researchers found that digital communication activities were perceived to be of lesser significance compared to other activities, and Bernecker and Reiss (2003) contend that the use of electronic media is primarily **limited to a supportive role** (Wagner, 2006).

The use of digital technologies also presents challenges in terms of **information overload, misinterpretation**, and reduced opportunities for face-to-face interaction. It is important for organizations to carefully consider the appropriate use of digital communication channels to ensure effective communication and minimize potential drawbacks. The effectiveness of digital communication channels undergoes a transformation throughout the entire change process, where no single channel holds greater significance than others. Therefore, it is advisable to employ a combination of digital communication channels (Kovaitè et al., 2020). Besides the combination of digital channels, it is deemed necessary to keep a greater focus on the digital channels' role in

general while maintaining physical interaction and communicating through face-to-face meetings and conversations (Kovaité et al. 2020).

2.6.3 SELECTION OF COMPARATIVE CRITERIA

Reaching the goals of change communication provokes another question: “How to achieve these goals?” It is crucial to consider what are the most efficient channels to convey a certain piece of information. What are the main criteria for selecting the most appropriate channel to reach the communication goals?

There has been plenty of research stating that communicating through a variety of communication channels is important before and during the change implementation (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Goodman & Truss, 2004; Elving, 2005). The selection of suitable communication media holds significance according to various authors (Lengel and Daft, 1988; Smeltzer, 1991; Axley, 2000) as different channels possess varying capacities to effectively transmit information. Consequently, the chosen channels can either enhance or distort the intended information (Lengel and Daft, 1988; Axley, 2000; Mast, 2002). Therefore, effective communication relies on selecting the appropriate channel or a set of channels to convey the intended message in a clear manner.

There is extensive research on various criteria for selecting and comparing different communication channels (Rogers and Rogers, 1976; Daft and Lengel, 1983; Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987; Lengel and Daft, 1988; Axley, 2000; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Wagner, 2006; Holmin & Safarova, 2015, etc.). For example, Axley (2000) suggests that various criteria, including technology, customer and employee characteristics, diversity and expectations, globalization of labor and customer markets, and information frequently determine the selection of communication channels utilized by an organization. Armenakis and Harris (2002) emphasize the importance of the content to be conveyed should be the key to selecting the channel to convey information. There is no defined framework to follow in order to define an extensive set of criteria to compare different communication channels. For this study, the authors decided to have a mixed approach to defining a comprehensive list of criteria for empirical research, among which the goals of communication and other validated criteria from existing literature are considered.

2.6.4 MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

One key criterion that affects an organization's choice of communication channels is the **message's complexity and richness**. Studies have shown that more complex and rich messages, such as those requiring nonverbal cues, are better conveyed through face-to-face communication (Daft & Lengel, 1984). According to Woodall (2006), employees have varying preferences for different types of information media. This aligns with the concept of media richness theory (Lengel & Daft, 1988). Media richness theory provides insights into how communication channels should be effectively utilized to transmit different types of information. According to the theory, more complex information is best conveyed through richer communication channels, while less complex information can be successfully transmitted through leaner channels, ensuring an accurate interpretation of the message. The concept of richness is defined as the potential capacity of data to carry information (Lengel & Daft, 1983). Essentially, it signifies that the more ways a message can convey a specific meaning and enhance understanding, the richer the channel is considered to be.

According to Daft & Lengel (1983), four key aspects (which will be further explained in chapter 2.6.5) determine the information-carrying capacity of a channel:

- 1) **Instant feedback capability**
- 2) **Usage of multiple cues**
- 3) **Personal focus**
- 4) **Language variety**

Considering that these four constructs vary in their prominence across different communication channels, it is crucial to evaluate the channels based on these factors. This assessment is essential for comprehending how the channels align with diverse circumstances and determining their appropriateness accordingly. When these four aspects are high, a channel is deemed rich as it possesses greater means to effectively convey a message (Daft and Lengel, 1983). Lengel and Daft (1988) proposed that richer, personal communication channels such as face-to-face

communication, video conferencing, and phone calls, are more effective for communicating equivocal issues, compared to leaner, less rich media such as email.

The use of rich media provides more cues and information to the receiver, enabling them to make sense of the message and to evaluate their trust in senior management. However, in certain situations, it may be appropriate to utilize lean communication channels to avoid information overload (Myers et al., 2012). Ultimately, the choice of communication channel is dependent on the specific context and the message being communicated.

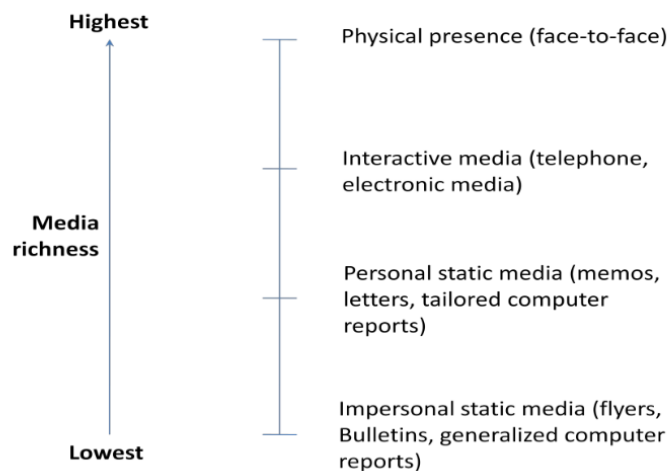


Figure 3 Media Richness Hierarchy (Myers et al., 2012)

2.6.5 CRITERIA FOR CHANNELS COMPARISON

Relying solely on the complexity of the topic and richness of the channel as the determining factors for channel choice, as proposed by Daft and Lengel, may be considered overly simplistic (Holmin & Safarova, 2015). Given the previous literature review in the present study, the criteria selected for the further comparative analysis of face-to-face and digital communication channels are listed as follows:

- Instant feedback capability
- Usage of multiple cues

- Personal focus
- Speed of delivery
- Purpose of the message
- Urgency of the message
- Accessibility and usability of the message
- Affective commitment

Instant Feedback Capability

According to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1983), rich media allows for quick and immediate feedback, enabling a back-and-forth exchange of information between communicators. As a result of this aspect, a two-way communication mechanism is enabled. Echoing the goals of change communication, the two-way communication mechanism or dialogical communication is highly correlated with the community-building process (Stein, 2006). Moreover, interpersonal communication channels, such as team meetings, group problem-solving sessions, and supervisory briefings, that possess such features contribute better to management-employee relationships than publications (Cameron & McCollum, 1993).

Usage of Multiple Cues

Based on media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1983), rich media provide the ability to convey nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, which are important for understanding and interpreting messages. The importance of a change message (Armenakis et al., 1993) underscores that the interpretation of the message content is a prerequisite for understanding the need for change. As stated above, the right interpretation of the necessity for change has an impact on the attitudes of employees towards the change, which in turn affects group dynamics, organizational dynamics, and the contextual environment (Judson, 1991).

Personal Focus

Media with higher richness offers the opportunity for personalization and customization of messages, allowing for a more individualized and tailored communication experience (Daft & Lengel, 1983). Using this aspect is beneficial for addressing specific individuals with resistant attitudes because of their personalities (Judson, 1991), as well as communicating with change

agents who are important factors influencing the effectiveness of influence strategies (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Speed of Delivery

Axley (2000) introduces additional criteria, such as speed to complement those identified by Lengel and Daft (1988) in the Media Richness Theory. For instance, email and video conferencing are considerably faster in conveying messages compared to traditional physical bulletin boards, and face-to-face communication has a more restricted potential reach compared to email messages (Wagner, 2006). Therefore, considering one of the goals of effective communication, information should be delivered timely.

Purpose of the Message

Armenakis (1993) mentions that one of the essential actions for establishing organizational readiness for change involves effectively communicating the disparity between the current state and the desired end state of the change. Employees who are ready for change possess a solid comprehension of the change itself and its significance to the organization (Madsen, Miller, & John, 2005). Therefore, it is deemed suitable to consider that the message should aim to explain the need for change and the goal of the change, addressing concerns, providing the necessary information, and outlining the expected outcomes and benefits of the change. Given creating a sense of community is one main goal of achieving effective communication, the purpose of the message also includes creating awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the change, as well as motivating and inspiring individuals to support and actively participate in the change process.

Urgency of the Message

The urgency of the message is another crucial factor to consider. In time-sensitive situations, synchronous communication channels, such as phone calls and instant messaging, are often favored over asynchronous channels, like email (Dennis, Kinney, & Hung, 1999). In cases where the transmitted message is urgent, it may be more suitable to utilize a different communication channel rather than the one that aligns best in terms of richness (Holmin & Safarova, 2015). While a telephone concurs to be the preferred channel when a message needs to reach the recipient quickly, face-to-face communication could also be an alternative, although locating the recipient

might pose challenges. For less time-sensitive matters, other channels may be more appropriate. Given the importance of this aspect, the urgency of the message is deemed suitable to be one criterion for comparing the effects of communication channels.

The Accessibility and Usability of the Message

Ensuring the accessibility of the selected communication channel to all participants is widely recognized as a crucial consideration in the workplace, as usability plays a significant role in employees' perception of a channel's convenience and effectiveness (Welch, 2014). The usability of a communication channel encompasses features that enhance ease of use for recipients, thus contributing to effective communication (Hallahan, 2001). Accordingly, factors such as language barriers, disabilities, and technical limitations must be carefully taken into account. Channels that demonstrate the ability to accommodate diverse needs and provide necessary accommodations when required should be given priority in selection.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment functions as an antecedent of resistance to change (Oreg, 2006; Peccei et al., 2011), indicating that it is an important predictor of resistance to change, above and beyond the influence of adequate change communication. When employees feel emotionally attached to and identified with the organization, they are more likely to engage in positive and change-oriented behaviors and trust that transformations endorsed by the organization will entail benefits to all stakeholders (McKay, Kuntz, Näswall, 2013). The level of affective commitment reflects interpersonal relationships between employees, as well as trust and motivation to be involved in the change process. These prerequisites contribute to the decision on using the most efficient communication channel.

2.6.6 OTHER CRITERIA CONSIDERED

Since there are different perspectives on the criteria of communication channels comparison and selection, the authors discovered other criteria mentioned in the existing literature that was deemed less important in this thesis framework: individual and collective efficacy, the stage of change, the consistency of the message, and language variety.

Individual and Collective Efficacy

Individual and collective efficacy represent the perceived ability of employees to go through change. According to Armenakis (1993), one of the necessary courses to create readiness for change is to build confidence in employees regarding their knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively handle the demands associated with this discrepancy. Employees are more receptive to change when they perceive their skills and abilities to align with the requirements for success in new roles (Chreim, 2006), thereby enhancing their willingness to embrace and actively engage in change planning (Cunningham et al., 2002).

The Stage of Change

Adapting communication activities to the stages of change is a fundamental principle of effective change communication (Buchholz, 2002; Doppler and Lauterburg, 2002; Klein, 1996; Pfannenbergl, 2001; Quirke, 1996). For example, the implementation phase of change is widely recognized as a critical stage (Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Russ, 2008), and effective communication plays a crucial role in navigating the challenges that arise during this phase. Facilitating workforce participation and utilizing diverse communication channels are recognized as crucial elements in the planning and implementation stages, as suggested by Armenakis and Harris (2002), Elving (2005), and Goodman and Truss (2004). Although, the selection of appropriate channels during each stage of change should be carefully considered because different communication channels provide different efficiency at different stages as proved in the paper of Kovaitè et al. (2020).

Consistency of the Message

Multiple authors propose the importance of avoiding dissonance and ensuring consistency to enhance the accuracy of recipients' understanding of the change (Armenakis and Harris, 2001; Mast, 2002). When messages from different senior managers contradict each other, it signifies discord at higher levels and fuels speculation about the potential failure of the change (Mohr, 1997). Additionally, messages should maintain consistency over time to prevent recipient confusion (Mast, 2002). Since everything has the potential to influence message perception, both verbal and non-verbal messages should align (Richardson and Denton, 1996). Lippitt (1997) further emphasizes that inconsistency between words and actions not only diminishes current

understanding but also impacts the interpretation of future messages as it undermines the credibility of managers.

Language variety

Rich media support the use of a wide range of languages and vocabularies, facilitating more nuanced and complex communication. Lean language, such as short text messages or memos, provides limited information and lacks contextual cues, while rich language, found in face-to-face conversations or video conferencing, enables extensive information exchange with immediate feedback and nonverbal cues. The choice of language variety depends on the complexity and ambiguity of the message, as well as the richness of the communication channel. Selecting the appropriate language variety enhances the effectiveness of communication and facilitates better understanding and interpretation of the message by the recipients.

While the mentioned criteria may appear pertinent, their exclusion from the primary list of criteria is intentional. This decision stems from the recognition that individual and collective efficacy focuses on the perception of the message rather than the delivery method employed. Furthermore, the stage of change, beyond the initial stage of creating readiness, holds no relevance within the scope of the thesis framework under investigation. Lastly, the consistency of the message and language variety pertain primarily to the content itself, rather than the manner in which it is conveyed. Therefore, these criteria have been purposefully omitted to maintain a clear and focused analysis of the key factors at play.

2.7 CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The literature pertaining to organizational change, readiness for change, resistance, and communication often exhibits overlapping content within the framework of change management, resulting in a lack of a well-defined and standardized approach. The complexity of the topic further complicates the development of a fixed framework, necessitating more rigorous investigation. Furthermore, a noteworthy concern lies in the timeliness of authoritative works within the field. Many of these works are outdated, potentially rendering their concepts and theories less applicable

to the current landscape of organizational change. As the dynamics of business environments continually evolve, it is imperative for researchers to explore and integrate contemporary perspectives into their studies to ensure their relevance and validity.

From a methodological perspective, quantitative studies have provided valuable insights into the correlation between resistance and readiness, and the role of communication (Elving, 2005). However, these studies often narrow their focus, concentrating on specific elements, which may limit the comprehensive understanding of resistance and communication dynamics. Conversely, qualitative studies offer detailed explanations and insights into resistance factors (Pardo de Val & Martinez-Fuentes, 2003); nevertheless, they frequently lack the robustness of empirical input, potentially undermining the validity of their findings. Taken together, these critical observations highlight the pressing need for further exploration that embraces interdisciplinary perspectives and employs a mixed-method approach, as it contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of communication in change management and its pivotal role in addressing resistance to change in organizational contexts.

2.8 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 4 serves as a visual representation of the approach adopted in this study to address the research questions. The empirical research component aimed to investigate the similarities and differences between digital and face-to-face communication channels. To achieve this, individuals' perceptions of these channels were collected, focusing on how they receive change information, their perceived effectiveness in achieving communication goals during change processes, and their preferences regarding communication methods for greater engagement and commitment. Simultaneously, a set of criteria was selected from the literature review, aligning with the goals of change communication and related aspects such as media richness, to aid in a detailed comparison of the two communication channels.

By combining insights from both empirical data and the literature review, the ensuing comparative analysis provides insights into how communication channels mitigate resistance to change, whether through face-to-face interactions, digital communication channels, or a combination of

both. Moreover, the analysis underscores the importance of considering channel-related and other factors that contribute to effective communication when assessing the actual impact of communication channels. Regarding the relationship between effective communication, readiness for change, and resistance to change, the literature review first suggested that the readiness-resistance relationship was fluid; hence the **double-sided arrow** suggests the complexity of the relationship. In addition, effective communication contributes to reducing resistance to change for both entities, which is why both entities have one-sided arrows. The incorporation of these multifaceted aspects enhances the potential for achieving desired change outcomes. By considering empirical research, literature review, and comprehensive comparative analysis, the analytical framework facilitates a deeper understanding of the role of communication channels in effectively managing change processes and mitigating resistance.

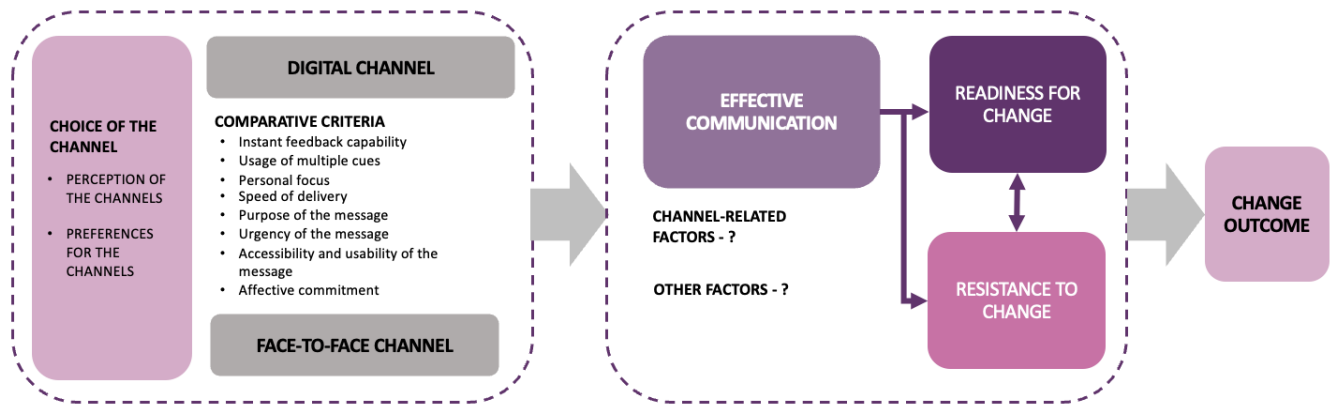


Figure 4. Analytical Model

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological framework adopted for this thesis. Firstly, the research approach is explained, which follows a deductive-inductive nature (Thagard & Shelley, 1997). Additionally, a mixed-method approach is employed, utilizing a survey research design in accordance with the research strategy elements outlined by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research. Moreover, the research design encompasses a **mixed-method approach**, with a quantitative phase analyzing a survey using selected criteria to address the research questions, followed by a qualitative phase involving interviews for further analysis. Moving on to the Sampling section, it describes the criteria and procedures for participant selection. Subsequently, the data collection methods, including the survey and semi-structured interviews, are presented. Furthermore, an explanation of the data analysis methods follows. Lastly, considerations regarding data quality and limitations of the study are addressed, acknowledging potential constraints and discussing measures taken to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

Forming a funnel where the impact of digital and face-to-face communication channels is focalized, the research question indicates a comparative nature of this study as the thesis aims to explore the difference between using the two channels and their actual effects on mitigating resistance to change. Based on its nature, this research utilized an abductive approach, which combines inductive and deductive methods, because it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem and yields the best information at hand (Thagard & Shelley, 1997). By starting with a theoretical framework and using deductive reasoning, the study can test existing theories to generate an analytical model that covers the research question. Additionally, the literature review provides key concepts, theories, and empirical evidence related to the topic. This helps to ensure that the research is grounded in a solid theoretical foundation. However, as the topic of resistance to change and the effectiveness of communication channels is complex and multifaceted, an inductive approach is also necessary to uncover new insights that may not have

been previously considered and elucidate how processes operate based on empirical evidence (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).

The survey research strategy is selected because the research requires information about the perception of communication channels from the employees' perspective, as well as feedback from the managerial staff, to describe and compare the findings based on people's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Fink, 2003). The choice of data collection methods (interviews and surveys) was made based on the research questions and objectives for collecting qualitative and quantitative data that provide valuable primary insights for in-depth exploration of the topic.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this thesis incorporates both deductive and inductive approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis. Starting with a deductive approach, the study establishes a theoretical foundation. Subsequently, an inductive approach is employed, comprising a mixed-method design involving a quantitative measure in the form of a survey and a qualitative measure through semi-structured interviews.

To begin, the survey is conducted to gather quantitative data, offering an overview of factors that contribute to the comparison of two communication channels in reducing resistance to change. By examining individuals' reactions to change and their specific utilization of communication channels, a relationship between the two subjects is discovered between the use of different communication channels and variations in resistance to change. Following the quantitative phase, the study progresses to collect qualitative data through individual semi-structured interviews. This approach allows researchers to explore relevant factors perceived as important by the interviewees, drawing from their own experiences. The interviews provide firsthand insights into how the utilization of different communication channels facilitates effective communication, ultimately mitigating resistance to change.

The purpose of adopting a **mixed-method approach** in this thesis is to capitalize on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, thereby enhancing the depth and richness of the

findings. By incorporating a survey as a quantitative measure, the study obtains valuable numerical data that provide an overall perspective on the factors influencing the comparison of communication channels in reducing resistance to change. This quantitative data enables the identification of patterns, trends, and statistical relationships, adding a quantitative dimension to the analysis. Complementing the quantitative findings, the use of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative measure adds qualitative depth to the research. Through open-ended questions, the interviews capture the unique experiences, perspectives, and insights of the participants. These qualitative data shed light on the underlying reasons, motivations, and nuances related to the use of different communication channels in facilitating effective communication and mitigating resistance to change. The qualitative data also allow for a deeper exploration of the subjective experiences and the complexities of communication dynamics in the context of change management.

In the survey and interviews, no explicit reference is made to the **criteria for comparing channels** (see Chapter 2.2.5). However, these criteria were used to analyze the qualitative data findings (referred to in Chapter 3.5). This is due to the fact that, given the study's purpose, there is no well-established framework for evaluating the effectiveness of communication channels in reducing resistance to change. Thus, the survey and interview aim to collect practical experience from participants as the primary objective. Due to the complexity of the topic, data collected can, however, be interpreted according to the criteria (see chapter 2.2.5) and the analytical framework, taking into account the topic's complexity. Due to this, the criteria for channel comparison will not be discussed in this chapter, but will be utilized for data analysis in Chapter 4.

3.3 SAMPLING SELECTION

The sampling section of this thesis focuses on selecting employees who have experienced or are currently experiencing organizational changes, as well as individuals at a managerial level with expertise in communication, human resources, or other areas related to change management.

For the survey, the online approach is chosen for its convenience and reach. Conducting the survey online allows for broader access to potential respondents who have relevant working experiences related to organizational changes. The use of the authors' contacts provides an initial pool of

participants with firsthand knowledge of the subject matter. Additionally, employing a snowball sampling method helps to expand the respondent pool by leveraging the network of these initial participants. This approach increases the likelihood of capturing a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, enhancing the overall richness of the data.

In the case of interviews, the selection of managers working in the communications field within corporate companies is deliberate and purposeful. Corporate companies are often exposed to a higher frequency of organizational changes and are required to respond swiftly to external environments. By targeting managers with experience in change management within these corporate settings, the study taps into a group of individuals who possess valuable insights and practical knowledge. Their experiences can provide an in-depth understanding of how different communication channels facilitate effective communication and mitigate resistance to change. The decision to include various industries in the study further broadens the perspectives and allows for the identification of general patterns across different sectors, enhancing the applicability and relevance of the findings.

While the sampling methods have certain limitations, such as the potential lack of representativeness due to the authors' personal connections, these approaches were selected based on the practical considerations of data accessibility and the ability to capture relevant insights from individuals with direct experience in organizational changes and communication practices. Therefore, while the sample may not be fully representative, the chosen approach was considered reasonable and aligned with the study's objectives.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data for this thesis was collected using a mixed-method approach, consisting of a survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey provided an overview of factors related to participants' reactions to organizational change and their communication channel preferences. It captured quantitative data, including demographic information and experience levels. Conducted online, the survey capitalized on internet accessibility and participant convenience. The semi-structured interviews

delved deeper, offering qualitative insights into participants' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. Open-ended questions allowed for flexibility, while structured questions provided specific information. Overall, the use of both survey and semi-structured aims to utilize the strengths of both methods, enabling a comprehensive understanding of effective communication in organizational change contexts.

3.4.1 SURVEY DESIGN

In this study, a survey was developed to collect quantitative data, incorporating insights from the existing literature (see Appendix 1). The survey included open-ended questions, allowing participants to mention additional factors that had not been included initially (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The survey consisted of three parts and a total of 31 questions. The first part comprised six socio-demographic and background questions, such as gender, age, position, type of companies, and working format. The second part focused on participants' reactions to organizational changes, aiming to assess the characteristics, extent, and reasons behind their reactions. This section was designed to identify respondents who expressed negative feelings or attitudes toward the change, as these individuals might exhibit resistance to change. The insights gained from participants' feelings and reasons provided valuable guidance for developing strategies to address resistance and explore the role of communication channels in mitigating resistance.

It is important to note that resistance to change can stem from various sources, and it may not be possible to anticipate all forms of resistance. However, being proactive and prepared to manage resistance is crucial. By recognizing behaviors that indicate potential resistance and understanding the common reasons people object to change, organizations can plan change strategies that effectively address these factors. To facilitate this understanding, the second section of the survey was based on the top 12 reasons for resistance to change (Rick, 2011). Each item in this section was carefully phrased and accompanied by clear explanations in the description. It is worth mentioning that during the modification process, the authors observed some degree of overlap among the items, and the interpretation of responses could intersect. The original top 12 reasons

for resistance to change, along with their explanations, can be found in Appendix 4. The final modification and the according items from the original 12 reasons are presented as follows:

1. I will participate in the change only when I know the risk of standing still is greater than moving forward: Misunderstanding about the need for change/when the reason for the change is unclear; Fear of unknown
2. I'm afraid that I don't have the skills to transit well: Lack of competence, Low trust
3. I don't believe the company can make the change: Low trust
4. I think the change is only a temporary fad: Temporary fad; Low trust
5. I have limited information about the change: Misunderstanding about the need for change/when the reason for the change is unclear; Not being consulted; Poor communication
6. I have low motivation because I feel overwhelmed by the continuous change: Exhaustion/Saturation
7. I'd rather keep the status quo because I feel that I will be worse off at the end of the change: Misunderstanding about the need for change/when the reason for the change is unclear; Fear of the unknown; Change in the status quo
8. I'm concerned about job security: Benefits and rewards; Fear of the unknown
9. There are not adequate benefits and rewards for me: Benefits and rewards
10. I don't want to leave my team and my colleagues: Connected to the old way; Change in the status quo

In designing the survey, consideration was given to the comprehensiveness of the listed reasons for resistance to change. While there may be some overlap between the 10 listed items and the top 12 reasons identified in the literature, it is believed that the 10 listed items sufficiently capture the key aspects of resistance to change and align with the goals of change communications. The survey primarily targets employees rather than managerial positions, thus the questions are tailored to their specific experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the inclusion of open-ended questions provides participants with the opportunity to contribute additional reasons based on their own experiences, enhancing the richness and depth of the data collected.

The third section of the survey delves into participants' perceptions of communication channels, encompassing a total of 21 questions. It begins by inquiring about the channels through which individuals receive information about the change based on their practical experiences, thereby establishing the relevance of communication channels to actual reactions to change. Subsequently, participants are asked about their preferences regarding the receipt of change messages through various channels. The section further encompasses 16 questions that address the perceptions of the two communication channels from different perspectives. These perspectives include the effectiveness of facilitating two-way communication, understanding the need for change, enhancing the sense of community, and the process of expressing needs and receiving support from the organization. Additionally, participants are prompted to provide insights into the advantages and disadvantages associated with each channel, offer suggestions for improving organizational communication, and indicate which channel they would prefer to engage with more actively. By exploring these aspects across the three sections of the survey, a pattern emerges, highlighting similarities, differences, and the impact of face-to-face and digital communication channels. These findings serve as a foundation for further analysis and investigation within the study.

5-Point Likert Scale

The survey in this study utilizes a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward communication channels within the context of resistance to change. Research suggests that 5- or 7-point formats are commonly used for scale formats (Dawes, 2008). While a scale with seven or more points can offer a broader range of options and increased participant autonomy in selecting the "exact" option rather than settling for a nearby alternative (Joshi, Kale, Chandel & Pal, 2015), it was determined that a 7-point Likert scale would be unnecessary and could potentially yield excessively nuanced responses for the purposes of this study. In contrast, a 5-point Likert scale was considered more appropriate as it provides simplicity and clarity, enabling respondents to easily comprehend and express their views with options ranging from positive to negative, including a neutral standpoint. Furthermore, the 5-point scale is better suited for mobile device screens compared to higher-point scales (Worktango). Therefore, despite its potential limitations in capturing all viewpoints and restricting precise responses, the 5-point Likert scale was chosen considering the online nature of the survey and the predominant use of mobile phones

by respondents, aiming to foster engagement and facilitate clear data collection on individuals' perceptions of communication channels.

3.4.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS DESIGN

A semi-structured interview was developed with a primary focus to collect qualitative data from managers. The interview was conducted parallel to the survey, as the survey data is considered independent of the interview data. Also, it was recommended that the participants be interviewed online since it is the most convenient method regardless of their geographical location. Consequently, all interviews were conducted online with each participant and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. By conducting semi-structured interviews, the authors were able to ask in-depth questions based on the responses provided by the interviewees. This approach aligns with the utilization of in-depth interviews to gather information about individual or personal experiences or events related to a specific topic (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). In advance of the interviews, participants were instructed that their answers should reflect their own experiences with communication and change management. The interview questions could be found in Appendix 2. The wording of the questions was selected carefully so that no bias could be introduced during the interview. In addition, there were no specific aspects mentioned during the conversation regarding how communication mitigates resistance to change, as the purpose of this interview is to discover how communication has influenced resistance to change and explore perceptions of this topic among the participants.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

In this study, qualitative data analysis was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, qualitative analysis permits a comprehensive exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward communication channels. By delving into the complexity and nuances involved, qualitative analysis allows for a contextual understanding, enabling the research to examine the social and organizational contexts in which communication channels are utilized. Moreover, qualitative analysis prioritizes participant perspectives and subjective experiences, capturing the

richness and diversity of their experiences that may not be captured by quantitative measures alone. Additionally, in light of the research gap, there is no well-established theoretical framework or predefined variables for the topic of mitigating resistance to change using communication channels, which makes a qualitative analysis well-suited for exploring and generating new insights. Furthermore, qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective and interpretive nature of participants' experiences, acknowledging the complexity and context-dependent nature of resistance to change. Hence, a qualitative analysis approach is considered appropriate for this study. In this process, data is reduced, displayed, and conclusions are drawn from the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Below is a description of the analysis process used for both the survey and the interview.

3.5.1 SURVEY ANALYSIS

To analyze the survey data, some preliminary steps have been completed in order to ensure that the data is accurate and suitable for analysis. The first step in preparation was data entry from Google Forms into the Excel sheet. Further, the data had to be cleaned, reduced, and outliers had to be removed. By outliers the authors meant empty or unclear form responses that did not bring valuable insights and had to be deleted from the pool of responses). After cleaning the data, all appropriate responses were taken into the further step of data coding. “Data coding involves assigning a number to the participants’ responses so they can be entered into a database” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The authors assigned numeric values to all the open-ended responses in order to define the pattern of the most frequent answer and compare it. For example, answers to the question “How face-to-face/digital communication has affected you in other aspects during change processes?” was optional and open-ended, so the answers were analyzed and grouped into bigger categories following similar patterns. Among measures of central tendencies and dispersions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), the authors measured the mode of the responses on the Likert scales in order to understand the effectiveness of each of the communication channels. To compare the responses from the Likert-scale questions, the authors had to define the average meaning on each scale for both channels. To acquire a feel for the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), the authors both

used Google Forms analytical visuals and created their own visualization (pie charts and diagrams) to better compare the patterns between the two communication channels.

Based on the survey questions about how effective two channels are in achieving communication goals, the authors received two sets of data regarding each question: respondents' perception of face-to-face channels versus digital channels. In order to apply statistical analysis of the data sets, a descriptive statistical test Mann-Whitney U-Test was deemed to be appropriate to use. A Mann-Whitney U-Test is used to compare the differences between two sets of data if data is not normally distributed (Statology, 2020). All the tests were conducted in Microsoft Excel. Four statistical tests were conducted where the goals of communication (understanding the change, addressing employees' needs, building relationships with colleagues, and empowering employees) were used as dependent variables and two communication channels (face-to-face and digital) were independent variables. An acceptable significance level was set as $p < 0.05$. These tests provided the authors with an understanding of the significant differences in terms of the effectiveness of the two channels in achieving communication goals. The results of the tests can be found in Appendix E. The only significant p-value (0.0155) was defined for the "building relationship" goal, meaning that there is a big difference between the means of digital and face-to-face channels.

3.5.2 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

To analyze the content of the conducted interviews, qualitative data analysis methods including **categorization and thematic approach** were used (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In order to analyze the content, some preparation steps were completed. Firstly, the script from online interviews was transcribed into the text which was observed and sorted out in order to closely examine the data and identify broader themes and patterns of similarities and differences between interviewees. This process is called thematic coding. Weathington et al. (2010) suggest that thematic coding aims to identify recurring patterns that arise in participants' responses. The results of summarized patterns helped to identify some themes that emerged from the data analysis which was aligned with the inductive part of the research approach. After defining some themes among interviews, responses from further transcripts were categorized according to the groups. The categorization process was followed by discussing the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. For example, all interviewees mentioned some factors that make face-to-face and/or digital channels an important

way to convey change communication. Some factors were the same which was easier to group. Some factors sounded similar (change agents, employees, and teams were grouped into a category of a target audience that receives the message).

As per Miles and Huberman's (1994) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, the second crucial step is **data display**. This step involves organizing and condensing reduced data and presenting it in a clear and structured manner. For this matter, categorized data about face-to-face and digital channels were listed in tables of comparison in order to get the feel of data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) to compare similarities and differences between the two channels.

3.5.3 COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

Both quantitative and qualitative data provide valuable insights into individuals' perceptions of the effects of communication channels. The quantitative data offers a comprehensive understanding of employees' current usage of communication channels for receiving change information, their reactions to the change, reasons behind resistance or negative feelings, and their preferences for effective communication that fosters commitment and engagement. While there is some overlap between face-to-face and digital communication channels regarding the types of messages they are suitable to transmit, as well as their respective advantages and disadvantages, the Mann-Whitney U-Test results highlight the significant role of face-to-face communication in building interpersonal relationships.

The qualitative data serves as a complementary source, reinforcing the importance of digital communication channels as a supplement to face-to-face interactions, as acknowledged by managers. Furthermore, insights gained from interviews shed light on the desired outcome of effective communication for facilitating change implementation, which directly influences the selection of communication channels when delivering change information.

By utilizing a mixed-method approach, this research benefits from the complementary nature of both data sets. The qualitative data acts as a validation mechanism, supporting the significance of face-to-face communication channel as highlighted by the quantitative findings. The integration

of qualitative and quantitative studies contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this topic, capturing its inherent complexity and offering a holistic view of the subject matter.

3.6 QUALITY OF DATA

Validity and reliability of the data are two very important factors to evaluate the quality of the research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) define validity as the degree to which research findings accurately describe or explain the phenomenon under investigation. To ensure validity, this study utilized several commonly employed methods, including analytic induction, triangulation, and member check (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). According to Katz (2001), analytical induction involves seeking out encounters with new types of data to revise the analysis, which ensures that it remains valid when applied to a broader range of cases. Therefore, the goal was 1) to talk to the managers from different fields and companies to reach diversity; 2) to gather data from 2 perspectives (interview with managers and survey from employees). The second aspect could be referred to as triangulation which also helped to prove **reliability and validity**. “Triangulation is a process of using multiple perspectives to refine and clarify the findings of your research” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The authors were also able to “enhance the **validity** of the research by providing an in-depth description of the research project” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Although the study had a relatively small number of participants and was conducted in a limited number of companies and generalizing the findings might be difficult, it may still provide valuable insights for researchers in other domains. Kirk and Miller (1986) state that a study can be considered valid if its observations align with those generated by other reliable sources. The findings of this study are consistent with several aspects of the pre-existing theoretical framework (i.e. proving the correlation of resistance to change and communication, definition of the effectiveness of face-to-face and digital communication channels, etc.). In addition, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, which involves combining survey results with conducting interviews. This approach is considered to enhance the validity of the data (Zohrabi, 2013).

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this thesis, ethical considerations were taken into account at every stage of the research process. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Code of Ethics of the American Psychological Association (APA). One of the primary ethical considerations was informed consent. All participants in the research were provided with detailed information about the study, including the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and provide informed consent before any data was collected.

Another ethical consideration was confidentiality. All participants were assured that their personal information and responses would remain confidential and only be used for research purposes. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Additionally, the research ensured that the participants' autonomy and dignity were respected. The participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The research also made sure that the participants' responses were not manipulated or coerced in any way. Lastly, the research also took into account the potential biases that may influence the findings, such as researcher bias or participant bias. Measures were taken to minimize these biases, such as using multiple data collection methods and analyzing the data using multiple perspectives. The research study was conducted with the utmost ethical considerations to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and respect of the participants.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

It is important to address potential biases and limitations associated with the qualitative methods employed. Firstly, the collection of data through semi-structured interviews is acknowledged as a key part of the research. However, it is essential to recognize that biases can arise during the planning stage, particularly in relation to the construction of interview questions. Therefore, careful consideration was given to designing interview questions that align with the research purpose, minimizing potential biases, and ensuring data validity.

Another limitation pertains to the risk of receiving irrelevant quantitative data from the survey due to time constraints in question design. Additionally, given the size of the company and the lack of extensive knowledge regarding the specific case of planned transformation, there is a concern about limited information or lack of comprehensiveness during the interviews. To mitigate this, the researchers took proactive measures by sending the key points of the interview to the managers in advance through email. This approach aimed to enhance the relevance and quality of the interview data. Furthermore, the limitation of interviewing a limited number of companies raises concerns about subjective and biased conclusions or a limited range of recommendations. To address this risk, a diverse approach was adopted by approaching companies from different industries, cultural backgrounds, and geographic locations. Research conducted by Lee et al. (2019) supports this approach, highlighting that incorporating diverse sources of evidence improves the accuracy and generalization of predictions. By conducting experiments with human participants, they demonstrated that diversity enhances learning outcomes.

To minimize bias during primary data collection, all interviews were conducted by two interviewers, ensuring that multiple perspectives and interpretations were taken into account. Moreover, interview questions were carefully crafted in advance in order to mitigate potential biases and improve data reliability. In acknowledging the limitations and addressing the potential bias that may exist in data collection, the study seeks to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, which ultimately contributes to a better understanding of the subject matter through a deeper development of its credibility and validity.

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The following chapter will present the analysis of the data collected both from the survey and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the quantitative data from the survey will be presented to give an overview of the overall perception of face-to-face and digital channels in change communication and dealing with resistance to change. The quantitative data includes questions about reactions to organizational changes, specifically resistance, effective communication, and the role of each communication channel in reaching previously defined communication goals. The quantitative data is further analyzed to compare face-to-face and digital channels and their statistical significance in reaching change communication goals. Moreover, the quantitative and qualitative data will be combined and presented from the perspectives of the criteria identified in Chapter 2.2.5, as well as additional insights that are deemed to be important in choosing a communication channel by interviewees.

4.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA

The survey was targeted at people *who have working experience and have faced organizational change at their work*. Out of 58 respondents who have filled out the survey form, 79% of them were employees, 12% worked at a managerial level, and 9% were currently unemployed. 86% of respondents belong to the age group of 20-29, and 77% of them are female. Almost half of the respondents work at a small-size company (45%), 24% work at a medium-sized company, and 31% work at a large company. The majority of the companies are established and structured rather than innovative and unstructured. To identify the role of communication it was important to know that 43% of respondents work in a hybrid format, while 29% work in the office, and 28% work remotely.

Among the four types of change, change in processes was the most common (50%), followed by strategic change (20%), structural change (14%), and cultural change (13%). 62% of the respondents said that the change represented some improvements but not a fundamental shift, followed by 22.5% who defined the change at their company as a fundamental shift. More than half of the respondents (55%) felt excited about the change, but the rest referred to different

spectrums of emotions such as nervousness (26%), confusion (19%), indifference (19%), resistance (15.5%), and others. Out of 9 respondents who defined themselves to be resistant, only 3 received information about the change in-person, as the majority received the information about the change online. Among all the respondents, 45% received the information about the change merely online. To understand where those emotions are coming from and how it is connected to the reasons for being resistant, the authors asked them to elaborate on the reasons why they felt that way. The most common reason selected by participants of the survey was “I have limited information about the change” which provides us empirical support to the assumption that the lack of information about the change may lead to negative emotions towards change including resistance to change, it in accordance with the literature review suggesting a negative correlation between resistance and communication.

Reasons for feeling “not excited” about the change	Number of respondents selected the reason
I have limited information about the change	14
I feel overwhelmed by the continuous change	9
There are not adequate benefits and rewards for me	7
I’m afraid that I don’t have the skills to transit well	6
I don’t want to leave my team and my colleagues	5
I will participate in the change only when I know the risk of standing still is greater than moving forward	5
I think the change is only a temporary fad	4
I’d rather keep the status quo because I feel that I will be worse off at the end of the change	3
I’m concerned about job security	3
I don’t believe the company can make the change	3
Lack of excitement	1

Table 1. Reasons why respondents reacted to changes a certain way

4.1.1 PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES FOR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The authors compared two communication channels using perspectives of communication goals mentioned previously: providing information (*understanding the change* and *addressing employees' needs*) and creating a sense of community (*building relationships with colleagues* and *empowering employees during change*). On the Likert scale from 0 to 5, the distribution was mostly concentrated on points 3, 4, and 5 (see Figure 11, Appendix 6) meaning the relatively strong impact of digital communication channels on reaching the above-mentioned goals during the change process. 29% of respondents strongly agree that digital communication channels help them understand the change. Similar to digital communication channels, respondents assessed face-to-face communication according to the same communication goals. 50% of respondents (21 respondents more than in the digital channels) strongly agree that face-to-face communication channels help them understand the change. It is noticeable from the survey that in terms of reaching effective communication goals, most respondents were “Strongly Agree” that a face-to-face channel is an effective way to understand the change, build relationships with colleagues, address employees’ needs, and empower employees. In comparison, digital channels were considered less effective as more respondents were “Agree” or “Somewhat Agree”. For each question, the average score on the Likert scale was calculated.

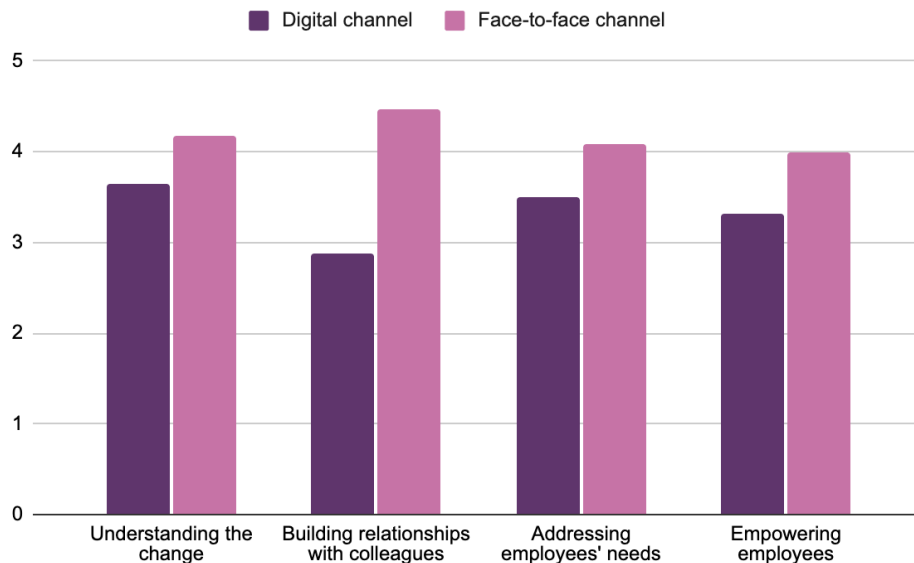


Figure 5. Comparison of the Channels and their Effectiveness (average score)

52% of respondents prefer receiving information about organizational change from both channels, while 33% prefer only face-to-face, and 15% prefer only digital. From the respondents' experience, the most common ways they communicated about the change were through **face-to-face meetings** and **digital channels** including messaging platforms, emails, and video conferences. While **asking questions or giving feedback face-to-face communication** was preferred by 43% of respondents.

According to the survey analysis, a face-to-face communication channel is the most effective in letting employees embrace the change. 43% of respondents claimed they would be more likely to engage and commit to the change if the managers communicate face-to-face. 36% stated that both channels are important for this matter. 53% would be likely more engaged in the process of change if the communication was conveyed mostly online.

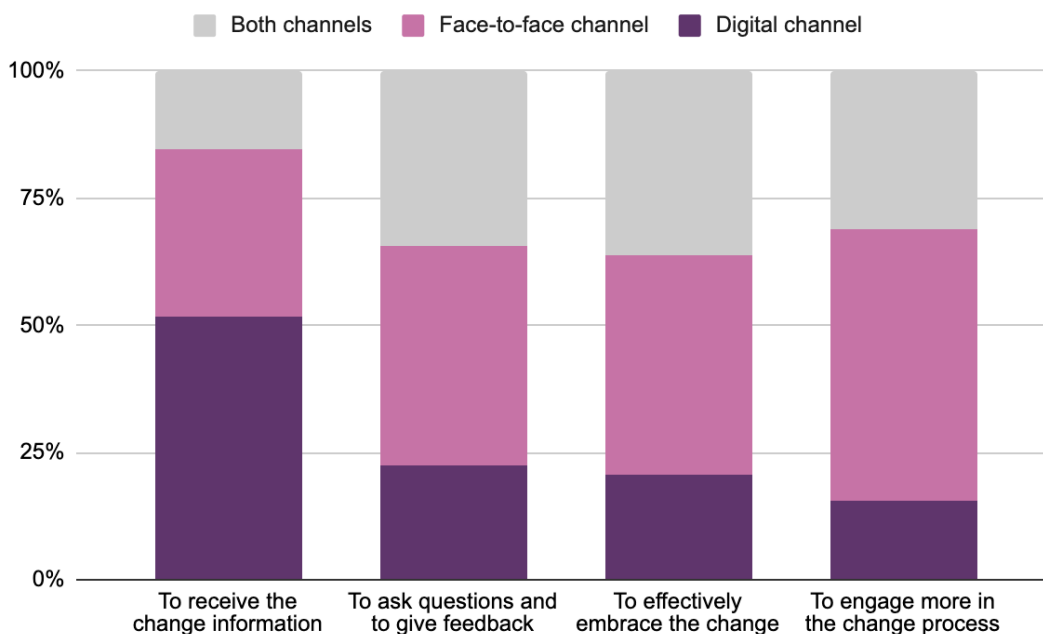


Figure 6. Respondents' Preferred Communication Channels

4.1.2 OTHER FINDINGS

The aspects of how digital communication channels affect respondents during change processes can be grouped into the following categories. First, in terms of information management, digital channels facilitate quick updates, provide a comprehensive overview of the change process, and ensure constant access to digital messages. These aspects enable individuals to stay informed and up-to-date with the ongoing changes. Additionally, the availability of digital information allows for convenient review and a better understanding of the communicated messages.

Second, digital communication channels play a crucial role in trust building. Respondents identified regular collaboration, allowing time for feedback, and maintaining a record of communication as important factors in building trust among team members. By establishing credibility and fostering trust, digital channels reduce the stress associated with face-to-face communication and enable employees to focus more effectively on their tasks.

Third, digital communication channels contribute to the simplification of processes. This category encompasses aspects such as streamlining the initiation of communication, facilitating the sharing of supporting materials, and positively impacting the speed of the change process. By simplifying communication procedures, digital channels help ensure a smooth and efficient progression of the change process.

In contrast, the majority of respondents emphasized the strong impact of face-to-face communication channels on achieving the above-mentioned objectives during the change process. They reported mostly positive effects of face-to-face communication, including the improvement of relationships with colleagues, the addition of a personal touch to conversations, increased motivation, the suitability for communicating deep and complex ideas, and the ability to address and resolve misunderstandings.

These findings suggest that while digital communication channels offer advantages in terms of information management, trust building, and process simplification, face-to-face communication

remains highly valued by respondents for its ability to foster personal connections, enhance motivation, and effectively address complex topics and misunderstandings.

Comparative Findings across Communication Channels

The respondents in this study offered their perspectives on the types of messages they considered most suitable for communication through different channels. Additionally, the open-ended questions prompted them to share the advantages and disadvantages they associated with both face-to-face and digital communication channels. Based on the analysis of their responses, a summary of the aforementioned aspects is presented below.

	Face-to-Face Channel	Digital Channel
Type of Message	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal decisions on employees: termination, salary discussion, promotion, feedback, performance review. 2. Safety issues, reporting incidents. 3. Asking for advice, clarifying job tasks, and coaching. 4. Onboarding of new employees. 5. Explanation of deep and complex ideas, and major changes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Updates on the change process 2. Reports and instructions on complex changes 3. Supporting visuals and follow-ups 4. Promotions and team restructuring 5. General systematic information 6. Meetings schedules and agendas
Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal touch and connection 2. Better understanding and feedback 3. Efficiency and immediacy 4. Delivering complex and personal messages 5. Lower miscommunication and higher engagement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speed and efficiency 2. Accessibility and convenience 3. Accuracy and record-keeping 4. Big audience reach from anywhere 5. Variety of digital channels 6. Constant information flow

	6. Creating a sense of unity and involvement	
Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inconvenience and inefficiency (reaching more people) 2. Lack of flexibility and structure 3. Limited access and lack of records 4. Time-consuming 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of personal touch and human connection 2. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations 3. Lack of feedback and interaction 4. Technical difficulties

Table 2. Comparison of face-to-face and digital communication channels

The analysis of the comparative table reveals both similarities and differences in the types of messages considered suitable for communication through different channels during organizational change. Both face-to-face and digital channels demonstrate effectiveness in conveying messages related to change. However, a closer examination uncovers distinct characteristics that set them apart.

Face-to-face communication emerges as the preferred choice for matters involving direct human interactions, particularly when addressing changes in individuals' working conditions. The presence of physical interaction enables nuances such as body language, tone, and facial expressions to convey meaning effectively. This aspect fosters better understanding, facilitates feedback loops, and creates opportunities for immediate clarification and resolution of concerns. The "human touch" inherent in face-to-face communication establishes a sense of connection and trust, resulting in higher employee engagement and involvement in the change process.

On the other hand, the digital channel assumes a prominent role in transmitting and documenting essential information during organizational change. Its advantages lie in its capacity to reach a larger audience simultaneously, ensuring broad dissemination of messages. The convenience and accessibility offered by digital channels enable timely communication, especially in situations

where face-to-face interaction may be challenging due to geographical constraints or time limitations. Additionally, the ability to document conversations and share information through digital platforms facilitates the overall flow of communication, providing a valuable resource for future reference and tracking.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of both channels, it becomes evident that face-to-face communication excels in building understanding, fostering immediate feedback, and promoting engagement. Conversely, the digital channel's strengths lie in its ability to reach a wider audience, provide convenience, and support information documentation. Understanding the unique attributes of each channel allows organizations to strategically leverage both, recognizing that a combination of face-to-face and digital communication channels can enhance the effectiveness of their communication strategies during change processes.

4.2 QUALITATIVE DATA

The interviews involved 10 participants representing a range of industries, including consultancy, FinTech, banking, automotive, e-commerce, hospitality, film, manufacturing, and education (refer to Appendix 3 for participant profiles). Significantly, each interviewee had firsthand experience with various change processes, whether driven by external forces such as the COVID-19 pandemic or strategic initiatives like mergers, acquisitions, and expansion. Invariably, resistance or reluctance was reported by all participants during these change endeavors, except for one participant working in the hospitality industry. The participant stated that their organization did not encounter resistance to change during their recent transition. This can be attributed to the nature of the change itself, which involved complying with governmental regulations. As this change affected the entire industry, all stakeholders were mandated to align with the new regulations, leaving little room for resistance. This exceptional case highlights the influence of external factors and the importance of understanding the specific context in which organizational change occurs. Nevertheless, noteworthy reasons for resistance included apprehension about the unknown, lack of trust in the management team, inherent human nature, and a dearth of information regarding the need for change and the change process itself. Consequently, the role of communication emerges as a pivotal factor in mitigating resistance to change, effectively preparing

for the change process, and achieving successful outcomes. Moreover, the insights provided by the interviewees offer valuable guidance on identifying appropriate messaging strategies, including the factors influencing message delivery, the suitability of face-to-face and digital communication channels, and the key individuals responsible for disseminating messages to foster acceptance and understanding among the target recipients.

4.2.1 PERCEIVED CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPARISONS

Throughout the interviews, the respondents consistently emphasized the significance of utilizing various communication channels for an effective communication strategy. Among these channels, face-to-face communication emerged as the most crucial approach when dealing with resistant employees and effectively conveying information. Particularly during major, sensitive, or negative changes, the use of face-to-face communication was deemed indispensable. According to the interviewed managers, face-to-face communication proved to be the most efficient method for achieving several key objectives. Firstly, it served as a means to educate teams regarding the reasons behind the changes, the specific alterations taking place, and the strategies employed by the company to ensure success. Additionally, it played a vital role in providing support to the team, offering guidance on how to effectively utilize available resources during the transitional process. Moreover, face-to-face communication was identified as a fundamental element in building trust among employees toward their managers and the organization as a whole. By fostering transparency at all levels of engagement, from leaders to middle managers and lower-level employees, it promoted a sense of cohesion and alignment toward company goals. Furthermore, face-to-face communication facilitated detailed discussions and elaboration of the change strategy, enabling better awareness and understanding of the transformation.

While the face-to-face channel has been identified as the most significant communication channel and key success factor in communicating the change, it is important to acknowledge the indispensable role of the digital channel in supporting organizational change processes. The digital channel serves as a complement to face-to-face communication, providing daily information in various formats and reinforcing the overall communication strategy. Daily reminders and updates are efficiently conveyed through digital means, such as emails, ensuring that important information

reaches employees in a timely manner. Additionally, digital channels are instrumental in providing general education about changes within the organization, offering informal support and motivation through group chats, and facilitating communication with a large number of individuals simultaneously through town halls and newsletters. They are particularly useful for communicating significant changes such as shifts in mission, vision, or company culture. Digital channels also serve to support and enhance face-to-face communication by providing supplementary materials, such as PowerPoint presentations during meetings. Furthermore, they enable continuous communication with colleagues, facilitating prompt problem-solving and task management. However, it is important to acknowledge that digital communication cannot fully replace face-to-face channels in terms of efficiency and overcoming barriers that may hinder message delivery. For instance, not all emails are read meticulously, potentially leading to information gaps. Nevertheless, digital channels have become an integral part of contemporary communication strategies employed by organizations during change processes, leveraging their unique advantages and contributing to successful change implementation.

The following table presents the detailed findings of the interviews:

	Face-to-Face	Digital
Purpose if utilizing the communication channel	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Educate teams on why changes are happening, what is changing, and how the company is going to succeed 2) Support the team: help them how to use all the available the resources to work smart during the transition process 3) Build trust towards the managers and the company in general 4) Keep transparency on all the levels of engagement (leaders, middle managers, lower-levels employees) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Send daily reminders and updates (i.e. through emails) 2) Educate people on changes in a very general manner 3) Support and motivate people informally (i.e. through group chats) 4) Reach many people simultaneously (i.e. through town halls, newsletters) 5) Communicate on big changes such as change of mission, vision, company culture, etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5) Align all the company goals and elaborate of the strategy in details 6) Create better awareness and understanding of the change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Support or reinforce face-to-face communication (i.e. PowerPoint presentation during face-to-face meetings) 7) Maintain daily communication with colleagues and solve ad-hoc tasks
<p>Key aspects that make the communication channel important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fast speed of delivering the message 1. Ability to deliver a clear and quick message 2. Presence of “human touch” which includes non-verbal language and body cues. 3. Effective way to loosen the tension between people 4. Ability to bond people closer through informal communication face-to-face (i.e. teambuilding, increasing the feeling of belonging, developing a team spirit, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintaining the established way of communicating through online platforms 2. Company’s culture 3. Speed of delivering information 4. Ability to cover a broader audience 5. Reinforce the message delivered face-to-face 6. Accessibility to the recorder information

Table 3. Key Insights from the Interviews

Eight out of eleven interviewees mentioned having the procedures of prioritizing face-to-face communication over digital. While communicating the changes, the face-to-face channel usually is deemed to be more important (i.e. meetings with team leaders, townhall meetings, brainstorming sessions, etc.), while communication through digital channels usually serves as a reinforcement.

4.2.2 CHANNEL-RELATED FACTORS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

From the perspective of effective communication, such factors as adjustment of the message and the sequence of using multiple channels were discovered from the interview insights. These factors were deemed to be channel-related as they are closely connected to the channel that is chosen to convey information about the change.

Adjustment of the Message

Another aspect of effective communication mentioned during interviews is the ability to tailor the communication to a certain recipient of the information. One message can be conveyed in various forms and styles, as well as through different channels. Some messages are always communicated through digital channels (i.e. weekly company updates, weekly podcasts, board news, info packages for leaders, communication with international teams from abroad, etc.). Some messages are usually communicated mostly face-to-face: big strategic changes, questions of personal matters of employees (i.e. promotion, termination, responsibilities shift, etc.), or communication to employees who cannot be online during the work shift (i.e. factory workers). To communicate efficiently, a manager has to *define a target group* and understand what type of messages they need and what channels would be the most suitable for those messages. Some interviewees mentioned that the form of the message communicated through a certain channel also plays a big role. For example, information about changes can be communicated as mere facts or as storytelling which increases the chance of accepting the process of change by employees.

The Sequence of Using Multiple Channels

Respondents claimed that to communicate the reasons for change, frame the change process and explain the goals, it is important to use different channels for the same message. Managers should decide what strategy to follow in terms of choosing the right communication channels and the order of using those channels. As interviewees mentioned, for some messages, it is best to notify employees about the change through emails in advance to let them prepare for the face-to-face meetings afterward. Other interviewees claimed that all big changes should be communicated face-to-face or through video calls (i.e. townhalls), after which a follow-up email with all the information should be sent to employees. Supporting offline meetings with online materials such as the PowerPoint deck, key points discussed, or Q&As will only increase the effectiveness of the change communication.

4.2.3 OTHER FACTORS DISCOVERED

Moreover, other factors that contribute to effective communication, were defined through the process of interviewing managers. Among these are Aligning the Message, Change Agents, and Two-way Communication.

Aligning the Message

Explaining the reasons for the change and aligning the message with all the managers was mentioned by several interviewees as an important step to take. In order to mitigate resistance, both managers and employees need to understand the “Why” and “What” parts. As long as these parts are aligned, the “How” (How the communication should be done) could differ and is up to managers to decide. Moreover, all the managers should start communicating about the change at the same time which takes some serious preparation in advance. In the process of communication, resistance could appear with fluctuating patterns: it may decrease after the communication has happened, but increase again once some reflections on the received information have been done. At this point, aligning the message with other managers, adjusting it to the current situation, and communicating, even more, is crucial.

Change Agent

Another big idea that came across in the interviews was about leaders as change agents. The majority of interviewees mentioned that in big companies it is almost impossible to talk to every employee. Therefore, to make sure that important information gets to all levels, a manager has to communicate to team leaders who will transmit the message further. Leadership plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty and alleviating anxiety during change by effectively delivering formal and high-quality information (Armenakis et al., 1993; Lewis & Seribold, 1996). Since team leaders are key figures in companies’ communication chains, a lot of executives conduct face-to-face meetings with team leaders to create awareness and understanding of changes and discuss further actions and communication strategies with their teams. To identify potential change agents, a manager has to know an organizational chart and understand the formal and informal influence of

every manager and employee. When a change agent is identified, he or she needs to be convinced to communicate a certain issue to others.

Two-way Communication

Effective communication with the employees could be achieved by taking into consideration two-way communication. To create readiness for change and ensure employees are less resistant to change, it is crucial to listen to their feedback and engage them in the process of change. As a manager, it is necessary to encourage employees to speak up, listen to their ideas, and try to find solutions. As mentioned in one of the interviews, “to turn employees from consumers to producers of change” is the way to reduce resistance to change. Most interviewees did not mention to what extent employees’ ideas and suggestions are actually considered and implemented in the change process, but almost all interviewees agreed upon the idea of listening to employees’ feedback and ideas on how to improve certain processes during organizational change. They claimed that by asking for employees’ feedback and increasing the level of employees’ engagement, companies are more likely to reduce employees’ resistance to change.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings based on the literature review and empirical research. By incorporating the criteria identified previously, alongside other factors identified during the data collection process, the findings are discussed in an objective and inclusive manner.

5.1 COMPARISONS OF THE CHANNELS

To address research question one, this study employs a comparative analysis based on specific criteria (see Chapter 2.2.5) to examine the effectiveness of different communication channels in reducing resistance to change. By collecting empirical data and analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of digital and face-to-face communication, a comprehensive analysis is conducted. The selected criteria, chosen in alignment with the communication goals, offer a robust perspective for examining the key aspects of communication in change management.

Instant Feedback Capability

Both Face-to-face and digital channels facilitate instant feedback, resulting in a more two-way communication environment in the organization. In the communication process, face-to-face channels such as team meetings and town-hall meetings are commonly employed to convey the message of change, which enables the awareness of the necessity of change to be implanted. In the meantime, digital channels, such as video conferencing, compensate for the disadvantage of having teams that are geographically dispersed. Utilizing technology provides managers and change leaders with the opportunity to communicate while maintaining their individual leadership styles.

In line with previous studies, the findings of the present study indicate that face-to-face communication channels have an obvious advantage due to their media richness and their ability to receive feedback promptly. However, it is evident that face-to-face channels have a higher priority than digital channels since they are usually included in the communication procedure as one of the first steps in communicating the changes. As an example, town-hall meetings in which organizational representatives attend are regarded as one of the most important steps to answer employee questions and demonstrate the authority of the organization so that employees understand the need for change more clearly. Organizational representatives have the potential to

maximize the influence of management levels in organizations, as “personal communication with peers and direct superiors predicts lower levels of commitment than communication with more senior management.” Additionally, communication with socio-emotional content was less predictive of commitment than formal communication (Postmes et al., 2001). In this context, face-to-face communication typically serves as a channel for communicating messages in a top-down manner. The key decision-making processes rarely involve employees. In contrast, the digital channel serves as an enhancement after face-to-face meetings. Hence, digital communication channels serve as a means of documenting important information or monitoring the implementation of changes.

Usage of Multiple Cues

Generally, the use of multiple cues represents the primary difference between face-to-face and digital communication since direct physical contact conveys non-verbal cues, which are among the most valuable aspects of face-to-face communication (Wagner, 2006). Video conferencing, however, can also transmit non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and tone through audio and visual presentations. Therefore, both channels convey non-verbal cues in a similar manner.

The findings of the research have revealed that, based on the analysis of the data, the major difference between the two channels can be summed up as follows: when participants engage in face-to-face communication, they are able to receive a direct, obvious signal of their non-verbal reflections, which can provide nuanced signals about how they feel about a certain topic. This could be particularly useful in situations where decision-makers need to gain the support of stakeholders because the change leader has the opportunity to adjust his or her communication strategy in response to the participants' reactions in real-time. The modification of communication strategy may help address the concerns of the target audience, as well as increase trust, which in turn will facilitate the understanding of the need for change. Additionally, this difference is considered natural for face-to-face communication, which makes it most appropriate for situations that involve sensitive topics, or when a humane tone is required in a conversation.

Personal Focus

Change leaders have the ability to reach out to specific audiences or change agents through both channels. As with the targeting of the audience, the goal is to gain more support or alliances for the change implementation, as well as to utilize the influence of change agents to mobilize more employees by communicating the change message. Change agents are highlighted here as important factors influencing the effectiveness of influence strategies since their credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity, and expertise are identified (Armenakis et al., 1993).

Findings indicate that face-to-face interaction continues to be the preferred method of encouraging change agents to participate. In light of the practical conditions and the accessibility of reaching out, when the number of employees is greater, there is a greater potential for transmitting the message via digital channels. A digital channel may, however, be the first choice due to organizational culture and communication traditions.

Speed of Delivery

The two channels are both able to deliver messages quickly, but they each do so in their own way. It is nevertheless evident that the specific method differs from one to the other, and therefore the differences are more apparent in this particular aspect.

Differences arise between face-to-face interactions and digital channels in terms of the speed of information delivery. Face-to-face communication enables instant transmission of information, facilitating real-time conversations and immediate responses. The velocity of delivery is contingent upon participants' cognitive processing and articulation abilities, as well as factors like physical proximity and the absence of technological hindrances. Conversely, digital channels encompass modes such as emails, instant messaging, and social media, introducing a time delay in the communication process. Messages necessitate typing, sending, and receiving, potentially causing delays influenced by variables such as internet connectivity, recipient availability, and message volume. While digital channels offer the convenience of asynchronous communication, allowing individuals to engage at their preferred pace, they may not rival face-to-face interactions in terms of immediacy and spontaneity. Nonetheless, empirical evidence highlights the advantages of digital channels, particularly in emergency situations where change leaders need to connect with multiple involved employees swiftly. An example from the hotel industry illustrates this point:

when confronted with a change in governmental regulations, it becomes a critical "do or die" scenario. In such circumstances, the selection of a communication channel prioritizes the fastest possible means of contacting the appropriate individual. Consequently, digital channels like instant messaging or social media prove the most effective due to their time efficiency.

Purpose of the Message

Both channels could be deemed effective in conveying the initial message about the change and providing updates on the change process status. Information such as team restructuring or general systematic updates can be effectively communicated through both channels. In situations where companies have limitations related to remote work formats, both face-to-face and digital channels can be utilized to deliver the first message about the change, ensuring that employees receive the necessary information.

However, face-to-face communication is typically used to convey messages of a more personal nature, such as decisions regarding employees (e.g., termination, salary discussions, promotion, feedback, performance reviews), conducting onboarding sessions, coaching, or teaching. The direct, personal interaction afforded by face-to-face communication enables managers and leaders to effectively address sensitive matters and provide personalized feedback. Face-to-face communication is also commonly used to introduce or educate employees about the change, leveraging the power of personal connection and immediate feedback. On the other hand, digital communication channels primarily serve as a reinforcement or follow-up to the initial message. They are often used to document key points, provide additional resources or training materials, and ensure that the information shared during face-to-face interactions remains accessible for future reuse. Digital channels are particularly effective in disseminating information to a wide audience, reinforcing key messages, and allowing employees to revisit the content at their convenience. It is common practice for the first message about the change to be conveyed to change agents in a face-to-face or video-call format. These change agents then have the responsibility of transmitting the information further to their teams, either through face-to-face communication or digital channels. This approach enhances trust, credibility, engagement, and positive social dynamics within teams by leveraging personal interactions and allowing for open

discussions. Digital channels can complement this process by providing additional resources and supporting ongoing communication.

Urgency of the Message

Face-to-face and digital communication channels share similarities in terms of delivering urgent messages effectively in certain settings. In situations where the entire team is working in one office or physical proximity is maintained, face-to-face urgent meetings can be considered highly effective. Face-to-face communication allows for immediate and direct interaction, enabling the manager to convey urgent messages quickly. The availability of non-verbal cues further enhances the effectiveness of face-to-face communication in conveying the urgency of the message.

However, digital channels are generally considered more efficient in delivering important information promptly. While face-to-face communication relies on the physical presence of the recipients next to the manager, digital channels overcome this limitation by allowing instantaneous transmission of messages to a wider audience regardless of their physical location. This becomes particularly advantageous in situations where time is of the essence and the message needs to reach a large number of individuals urgently. Furthermore, relying solely on face-to-face communication for urgent messages carries the risk of delays or miscommunication if the recipients are not immediately available or if there are scheduling conflicts. This can pose a significant challenge, especially when the message is time-sensitive or critical in nature. On the other hand, digital channels offer the advantage of immediate delivery, ensuring that important information reaches the intended recipients in a timely manner.

Accessibility and Usability of the Message

Both face-to-face and digital communication channels share similarities in terms of accessibility and usability, especially when certain conditions limit access to devices. For instance, in situations where employees lack access to devices, such as factory workers during shifts, face-to-face communication becomes the primary and sometimes the only source of information during a limited period of time. In such cases, face-to-face communication ensures accessibility and usability by directly delivering the message to employees in real time.

However, if a company aims to reach a broad target audience with its message, digital communication is often a more effective channel. Digital channels have the capacity to cover a much larger target group and provide accessible and usable information that can be accessed and reused by employees in the future. Digital communication platforms enable easy dissemination of information, making it readily available and searchable, thus enhancing the accessibility and usability of the message for employees. In contrast, face-to-face communication has certain limitations in terms of accessibility and usability. It requires additional effort to maintain the accessibility of information for future reference and reuse. Face-to-face messages may not always be easily retrievable or searchable, and employees might have to rely on their memory or take additional notes to retain the information shared during face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, if a company has a specific culture or habit of communicating change information in a particular way, such as exclusively using offline methods, adopting a different channel like digital communication could decrease the accessibility and usability of the message. Employees may struggle to adapt to a new communication format, leading to decreased effectiveness and potential resistance to change.

Affective Commitment

Both face-to-face and digital communication channels have the potential to influence affective commitment, albeit in different ways. Regardless of the work format (hybrid, remote, or on-site), both channels can play a relevant role in developing interpersonal relations within teams. They offer opportunities to build trust and foster stronger relationships among employees, ultimately increasing their commitment to actively participate in the change process.

There are distinct differences between face-to-face and digital communication in terms of their impact on affective commitment. Face-to-face communication is often regarded as the richest channel in terms of building trust, deepening affective commitment, and encouraging employee willingness to respond to the change process. This is because face-to-face interactions allow for nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, which facilitate a more immediate and personal connection. Additionally, face-to-face communication provides a platform for employees to share their ideas on how the change process can be improved, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement. On the other hand, digital communication channels, while lacking

some of the richness of face-to-face interaction, still hold the potential to positively influence affective commitment. Through digital channels, employees can engage in collaborative platforms, virtual meetings, and online forums, which enable them to connect and contribute to the change process despite physical distance. Although digital communication may not offer the same level of personal connection as face-to-face interaction, it can still foster affective commitment by providing employees with a platform to voice their opinions, share their experiences, and participate in virtual team-building activities.

5.2 ENHANCEMENT OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

This section aims to address research question two, which focuses on discovering to what extent communication mitigates resistance to change by utilizing digital and/or face-to-face communication channels. By conducting the Mann-Whitney U-Test, the results reveal that both channels are perceived as equally important for the majority of effective communication goals. However, when considering all the criteria and various settings in which communication and change processes occur, no definitive conclusion can be drawn regarding the most efficient channel. Nevertheless, the analysis of the survey data highlights the significance of face-to-face communication in fostering relationships with colleagues and cultivating a sense of community. These findings provide valuable insights into the role of different channels in facilitating effective communication and reducing resistance to change.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U-Test underscore the significant role of face-to-face communication channels in creating a sense of community (Francis, 1989; De Ridder, 2004). These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of community within organizations. Developing such a community promotes trust-building between managers and employees, facilitates transparency across all levels of engagement (including leaders, middle managers, and lower-level employees), and strengthens the overall organizational culture. The ability of face-to-face communication channels, such as teambuilding activities or other physical communication scenarios, to bring people closer and enhance the feeling of belonging contributes to the development of a team spirit. Consequently, employees are more likely to identify themselves as integral parts of the organization and feel connected to their

colleagues and the overall organizational mission. This sense of connection and commitment translates into increased motivation and dedication to achieving organizational goals. Given that a lack of motivation is a common reason for resistance to change, the importance of face-to-face communication in improving motivation cannot be overstated. Therefore, utilizing face-to-face communication is a crucial tool to effectively build a sense of community, a key objective of effective communication, which, in turn, mitigates resistance during change processes.

On the other hand, digital channels are perceived as crucial reinforcements to face-to-face communication according to the data findings. By facilitating the overall communication process, digital communication channels help mitigate resistance to change by ensuring that messages are effectively communicated. These messages include updates on the change process, reports and instructions on complex changes, supporting visuals and follow-ups, promotions and team restructuring, general systematic information, and meeting schedules and agendas. As a result, common reasons for resistance, such as a lack of information, are tackled by transmitting, informing, displaying, and documenting the messages through online platforms. Moreover, digital channels have the ability to reach a broader target audience, making them suitable for communicating with individuals in different locations. Therefore, utilizing digital channels is particularly advantageous due to their speed of message delivery and efficiency, accessibility and convenience, accuracy and record-keeping capabilities, ability to reach a large audience from anywhere, a variety of available channels, and constant flow of information.

Overall, effective communication about change necessitates a strategic combination of face-to-face and digital communication channels, as revealed by the additional factors uncovered during data collection. The selection of an appropriate communication channel is contingent upon the message and the target audience. Recognizing the audience's characteristics and preferences is paramount, as different individuals may respond differently to various communication styles. Face-to-face channels are considered more suitable when cultivating interpersonal relationships with individuals who possess more challenging personalities, as this approach proves more effective. However, when targeting a supportive audience, delivering information clearly remains essential, irrespective of the communication channel. Furthermore, change agents play a vital role in garnering support and disseminating crucial information throughout all organizational levels.

Utilizing face-to-face channels is preferred due to their inherent advantages in fostering accessibility and leveraging the influence of change agents. Nonetheless, considering the accessibility aspect, a combination of both face-to-face and digital channels should be contemplated for optimal communication outcomes.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the summary of the research by highlighting the contributions of the thesis to the research area, the practical implications of the study, study limitations, as well as suggestions for future research.

6.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

Utilizing a mixed-method approach in the present research offers contributions across three key areas: reinforcing existing literature, introducing novel insights that challenge current research perspectives while presenting avenues for future exploration, and identifying uncharted areas that warrant further investigation.

Firstly, the findings align with prior studies, confirming the advantages of face-to-face communication channels in terms of their media richness and ability to facilitate prompt feedback. Notably, the role of change agents emerges as a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of influence strategies, with their credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity, and expertise identified as key elements (Armenakis et al., 1993). Additionally, the significance of the change message itself is underscored, as emphasized in earlier works (Armenakis et al., 1993). These congruences with existing literature provide robust support to the present research's findings.

Secondly, certain aspects deviate from prevailing studies. For example, while resistance to change is often attributed to individuals' belief in their ability to enact the change, the findings reveal that self-doubt rarely surfaces as a prominent reason for resistance. Moreover, despite the general advocacy for participatory and two-way communication in research, the findings indicate a norm of top-down decision-making in most change implementations, with minimal concerns regarding this approach. However, feedback remains valuable in fostering a harmonious work environment and contributing to improved team dynamics. In this context, two-way communication reflects the company's care for its employees rather than a decision-making mechanism in general.

Thirdly, the research identifies unexplored areas that warrant future investigation. For instance, the sequence in which communication channels are employed can notably impact the acceptance of change implementations. Furthermore, the findings establish a connection between the use of face-to-face communication channels and the cultivation of affective commitment within organizations. This novel insight bridges the concepts of affective commitment and its positive impact on fostering a sense of community, which ultimately supports successful change implementation. Previous studies have primarily examined affective commitment in relation to leadership styles or communication strategies, making this linkage a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge. Additionally, the research defines criteria for comparing communication channels and factors that guide the selection of appropriate channels, offering a framework for future empirical investigations on this subject.

6.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

During change processes, resistance to change appears to be a frequent occurrence that prevents organizations from reaching a successful change outcome. To deal with resistance and its reasons, managers should facilitate employees' readiness for change which comes with the understanding of why the change is happening and what consequences it bears. Effective communication is the key success factor in mitigating resistance to change, creating readiness for change, and implementing the change itself. Informing employees about the change in a clear manner and creating a sense of community are two main goals of effective communication that managers should keep in mind. To design an effective communication strategy, managers should consider the most effective communication channel/-s to convey a certain message. Understanding similarities and differences between digital and face-to-face communication channels as well as factors that make a specific channel a better way to deliver the message will help managers to become more efficient in communicating the change and dealing with resistance to change.

Firstly, the findings indicate differences in the types of messages that are suitable to be communicated by different channels. Each communication channel possesses its own unique features, such as text-based messaging or face-to-face interaction. These features play a significant role in determining the effectiveness and acceptance of the change message. For instance, a

complex technical explanation may be better conveyed through a detailed email, where recipients have the opportunity to review and refer back to the message. On the other hand, a complex message that needs in-depth discussion is more suitable for a face-to-face meeting where immediate feedback and clarification can be sought. By recognizing these differences, organizations can tailor their change messages to specific communication channels, increasing the likelihood of understanding and acceptance among the target audience.

Secondly, the findings suggest that the respective features of the two channels, such as their level of interactivity, immediacy, and personalization, can influence the actual acceptance of the change message. For example, a communication channel that allows for two-way interaction, such as a video conference or a town hall meeting, provides an opportunity for employees to ask questions, share concerns, and engage in a dialogue about the proposed change. This level of interactivity and personalization fosters a sense of involvement and ownership, increasing the likelihood of acceptance and commitment to the change. On the other hand, a one-way communication channel, such as a mass email or a memo, may limit the recipient's ability to seek clarification or express their opinions, potentially leading to reduced acceptance and understanding of the change message. This highlights the importance of adjusting the message according to the communication channel and the target audience. By understanding the specific features and characteristics of each channel, organizations can choose the most appropriate one to deliver their change message and adapt the content accordingly. This includes considering factors such as the complexity of the message, the level of interaction required, and the preferences of the target audience. By doing so, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of their change communication efforts, increase acceptance and understanding among employees, and ultimately facilitate successful change implementation.

Thirdly, the sequence of channels used to deliver the message is another important factor. Depending on the complexity and importance of the message, utilizing multiple channels in a specific order can enhance comprehension and engagement. For instance, a change message could be introduced through a company-wide email, followed by an interactive workshop or video conference to provide further clarification and address questions. This sequential approach allows for a gradual flow of information and promotes a deeper understanding among the recipients. In light of the combination of using both communication channels, accessibility and usability of the

message play a significant role, as different channels have varying accessibility requirements and limitations. For instance, not all employees may have access to certain technologies or may face language barriers. Delivering the change information efficiently requires organizations to consider these factors to ensure that the chosen communication channel reaches all recipients. Usability refers to how easily the audience can comprehend and interact with the message. Channels that offer clear and concise information, visual aids, or opportunities for engagement enhance the usability and effectiveness of the message, increasing its acceptance and understanding among the target audience.

Lastly, the research findings provide the practical implication that the face-to-face communication channel is especially applicable to creating a sense of community within organizations. In line with the existing literature, the findings show that the face-to-face communication channel facilitates two-way communication more effectively because it allows participants to receive instant feedback. In physical interactions, individuals engage in real-time discussions, ask questions, and clarify any uncertainties. The immediate feedback loop enables a deeper level of understanding and promotes active engagement, ensuring that the change message is conveyed and comprehended by the participants. Further, the “human touch” that the face-to-face channel entails makes changes in moods and emotions detectable. Nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice provide valuable hints for change makers to adjust their communication style or strategies based on the emotional responses of the participants. Being able to read and respond to these nonverbal cues allows for better alignment and empathy, creating a supportive environment for the change process. All effects combined, face-to-face interactions provide opportunities for individuals to establish personal connections and develop trust within organizations. Through direct communication, participants can build rapport, share experiences, and develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives. This sense of trust and transparency enhances participation in the change process, as employees feel more sincere and committed to the proposed changes, which reduces resistance and encourages active engagement, as individuals perceive the change as a collective effort rather than an imposed mandate.

6.3 STUDY LIMITATIONS

Despite the contributions of this study, there are a few limitations to consider. First of all, the sampling size for the empirical study was limited, including 10 managers for the interview and 58 respondents of the survey which may not be representative to draw objective conclusions about the factors that influence the choice of the most effective communication channels. Having a bigger sampling size would allow applying a 7-scale Likert scale in the survey and receiving more nuanced information on respondents' perceptions and preferences of communication channels. Therefore, caution should be taken when generalizing the findings of this study to other contexts. The same limitation could be applied to the limited number of managers interviewed. It might be difficult to see objective patterns from 10 interviews since there may be biases in participant responses due to social desirability, cultural differences, different industries, or other factors.

Second of all, the empirical study relied (survey in particular) on self-report measures to assess resistance to change, and perception of the effectiveness of communication channels. This may have resulted in biased or inaccurate responses. Moreover, the data collection approach might be deemed as limited. The survey and the interview questions and their structure could be improved for future studies in order to get more aspects of data. Improvements could be made in terms of redesigning the survey questions and aligning them more specifically to the comparative criteria of the channels as well as the factors that motivate and contribute to the selection of appropriate communication channels and developing the most effective communication strategy.

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the sample size and time constraints. In light of these limitations, future research endeavors could build upon this study by expanding the sample size to obtain more accurate and representative responses. Furthermore, incorporating a mathematical analysis of the data could help establish a more precise understanding of the potential relationship between communication channels and the mitigation of resistance to change. Moreover, future studies can investigate the impact of different communication channels during different stages of change. For example, some changes may require more face-to-face interaction to build trust and address concerns, while others may be

better suited to digital communication due to their technical nature. Investigating the effectiveness of different communication channels for different types of change can help organizations tailor their change management strategies to achieve better outcomes.

Additionally, future studies can explore the impact of different communication channels in various cultural and professional contexts. Investigating how different communication approaches and channels affect resistance to change within different cultures and fields can provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to implement successful change initiatives. Understanding the interplay between communication strategies, cultural dynamics, and specific industry settings can help organizations navigate the complexities of change management more effectively. Finally, future studies can investigate the long-term effects of using digital and face-to-face communication to reduce resistance to change. While this study focused on immediate reactions to change, it is important to understand how these interventions can affect employees' attitudes and behaviors over time.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. SURVEY QUESTIONS

Hello! We are Yuliia and Aggie, students of Master in Management at Lund University School of Economics and Management. We are currently working on our thesis project on the topic of ***“Digital vs. Face-to-Face Communication for Decreasing Resistance to Change”***.

If you have had working experiences and faced some change processes at your workplace, please help us by filling it this short Google form:) The survey will take you up to 8 minutes. Thank you very much! We appreciate your time!

Part 1. Introduction

1. How would you describe your role at work?
 - a. I am an employee
 - b. I work on a management level
 - c. Unemployed

2. Your age
 - a. <20
 - b. 20-29
 - c. 30-39
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50-59
 - f. 60+

3. Your gender
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. I prefer not to say

4. Your company size:

- d. Small: less than 50 people
- e. Medium: 50-250 people
- f. Large: more than 250 people

5. How would you describe the type of company you work/worked for?

- a. Startup (fast-paced, innovative, agile)
- b. Established (structured, less agile)
- c. Other _____

6. Your working format:

- a. In the office
- b. Remote
- c. Hybrid (office or work from home)

Part 2. Reaction to Organizational Change

Organizational change refers to any significant alteration in an organization's structure, processes, or culture. It can take many forms.

1. How would you describe the change in the company?

- a. Structural: changing the organization's formal structure, such as its reporting lines, roles and responsibilities, or business units.
- b. Process: changing the way the organization works, such as by adopting new procedures, workflows, or systems.
- c. Cultural: changing the values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape the organization's cultures, such as by promoting teamwork, innovation, or customer focus.
- d. Strategic: changing the organization's overall direction or focus, such as by entering new markets, developing new products, or adopting a new mission.
- e. Other _____

2. How would you describe the extent of change?

- a. It represents a fundamental shift in the company
- b. It represents an improvement, but not a fundamental shift
- c. It has only minor impacts and is not considered a significant shift

3. How do you feel about the change? (multiple choice)

- a. Excited
- b. Nervous
- c. Confused
- d. Resistant
- e. Indifferent
- f. Other

4. If you are NOT excited about the change, how would you assess the reason(s) why you felt that way? (multiple choice)

- a. I will participate in the change only when I know the risk of standing still is greater than moving forward
- b. I'm afraid that I don't have the skills to transit well
- c. I don't believe the company can make the change
- d. I think the change is only a temporary fad
- e. I have limited information about the change
- f. I have low motivation because I feel overwhelmed by the continuous change
- g. I'd rather keep the status quo because I feel that I will be worse off at the end of the change
- h. I'm concerned about job security
- i. There are not adequate benefits and rewards for me
- j. I don't want to leave my team and my colleagues
- k. Other_____

Part 3. Perception of Communication Channels (Digital vs. Face-to-Face)

- **Digital communication:** any form of communication that takes place electronically, such as email, video conferencing, or instant messaging.

- **Face-to-Face communication:** any form of communication that takes place in person, such as a meeting or conversation.

1. What type of communication channels have you received information about the change from? (multiple choice)
 - a. Email
 - b. Video Conferencing
 - c. Formal documents (newsletters, presentations, annual reports, etc.)
 - d. Messaging platforms (Slack, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
 - e. In-person meetings
 - f. Other _____

2. Which communication channel(s) do you prefer to receive information about the change?
 - a. Digital communication
 - b. Face-to-face communication
 - c. Both

3. Do you feel more comfortable asking questions or giving feedback through digital communication channels or face-to-face communication channels?
 - a. Digital communication
 - b. Face-to-face communication
 - c. Both

4. How effective do you think digital communication has been in helping you understand the change? (Likert scale: 0 - Not helpful, 5 - Very helpful)

5. Do you feel that the use of digital communication channels has made it easier to build relationships with your colleagues/company during the change process? (for example, trust, a sense of community, and support from the company, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

6. Do you feel that the use of digital communication channels has made it easier to address your needs during the change process? (for example, address your queries, provide job security, reduce uncertainty, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

7. Do you feel that the use of digital communication channels has made it easier to empower you during the change process? (for example, motivate you, facilitate your participation, provide feedback, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

8. Do you think digital communication has affected you in other aspects during the change processes? Please give a short answer. (Open question)

9. In your opinion, what type of message is more suitable to be communicated through digital channels? (name 3+ aspects) (Open question)

10. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using digital communication channels? Use 3 words to describe them respectively. (Open question)

11. How effective do you think face-to-face communication has been in helping you understand the change? (Likert scale: 0 - Not helpful, 5 - Very helpful)

12. Do you feel that the use of face-to-face communication channels has made it easier to build relationships with your colleagues/company during the change process? (for example, trust, a sense of community, and support from the company, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

13. Do you feel that the use of face-to-face communication channels has made it easier to address your needs during the change process? (for example, address your queries, provide job security, reduce uncertainty, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

14. Do you feel that the use of face-to-face communication channels has made it easier to empower you during the change process? (for example, motivate you, facilitate your participation, provide feedback, etc.)

(Likert scale: 0 - Strongly disagree, 5 - Strongly agree)

15. Do you think face-to-face communication has affected you in other aspects during change processes? Please give a short answer? (Open question)

16. In your opinion, what type of message is more suitable to be communicated through face-to-face channel? (name 3+ aspects) (Open question)

17. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using face-to-face communication channels? Use 3 words to describe them respectively. (Open question)

18. From your perspective, which communication channel(s) do you think have been most effective in letting you embrace the change?

- a. Digital communication
- b. Face-to-face communication
- c. Both

19. Do you feel that your organization does a good job of communicating changes and their impacts to employees?

- a. Yes
- b. No

20. If you answered “No” to the previous question, what could be done to improve communication about change? (Open question)

21. Overall, you will be more likely to engage and commit to the change if the manager uses more:

- a. Digital communication
- b. Face-to-face communication
- c. Both

APPENDIX 2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you undergone any organizational changes and what were they about?
2. In what way did you communicate the change? Or in what way were you informed of the change?
3. What are the processes of communication? Did you have any procedures to follow?
4. Did you notice any “resistance” during the process? From your perspective, what are the reasons?
5. What’s your perception of communication’s role to deal with resistance?
6. In what way did communication help change? Aspects. Specify digital vs. face-to-face channels
7. Your perception of digital and face-to-face communication (types of messages they convey, effects they achieve)
8. What are the factors/criteria that make you select a specific channel for communicating the change?
9. What communication barriers came across the way of communicating?
10. Is there any feedback process concerning communication that allows stakeholders or employees to address their concerns or questions?
11. What is your overall reflection on communication in dealing with resistance or difficulties in change management?
12. After our conversation, what’s your reflection on your past experience in communication strategy to deal with resistance?

APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEWED EXPERTS

Interviewee	Position	Company	Industry	Country
1	Vice-president	TD Bank	Banking	USA
2	Communication manager	StartUp	Tech	Sweden
3	Communication manager	Volvo	Automotive	Sweden
4	Sales Manager	Takaokaya	Food	Poland
5	Communication and marketing manager	Hyatt	Hotel	Vietnam
6	Managing director	Sauermann Group	Manufacturing	China
7	General Manager	NDA	IT	USA
8	CEO	NDA	Consultancy	Sweden
9	Head of Communications	NDA	NDA	Indonesia
10	Marketing Manager	Business Sweden	Consultancy	Sweden

Table 4. The list of interviewed managers

APPENDIX 4. TOP 12 TYPICAL REASONS FOR RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

1. Misunderstanding is about the need for change/when the reason for the change is unclear: If the staff members do not comprehend the rationale behind the need for change, it is expected that they will exhibit resistance. Particularly, individuals who strongly believe that the current method of operation is effective and has been successful for a significant period, spanning twenty years, are likely to resist change.

2. Fear of the unknown: One of the most prevalent reasons for resistance is the fear associated with the unknown. People are inclined to take action towards unfamiliar territory only if they genuinely believe, and perhaps more significantly, feel that the risks associated with maintaining the status quo are greater than those of embracing a new direction.

3. Lack of competence: Although rarely admitted, individuals may experience fear when they perceive that change within an organization necessitates acquiring new skills, and they believe they will struggle to adapt effectively to the transition.

4. Connected to the old way: Introducing a new way of doing things in an organization, regardless of its rationality, sets up a clash against ingrained habits and emotional attachments formed with individuals who advocated for the old approach. Overcoming this resistance is not a trivial matter.

5. Low trust: When people lack faith in their own abilities or in the organization's competence to effectively manage the change, resistance is likely to arise.

6. Temporary fad: When individuals perceive the change initiative as a passing trend or temporary phenomenon, resistance is more likely to occur.

7. Not being consulted: Allowing individuals to participate in the change process reduces resistance. People appreciate being informed about ongoing developments, particularly if their job

security may be affected. Informed employees tend to have higher job satisfaction compared to those who are uninformed.

8. Poor communication: The importance of effective communication in change management is self-evident. There is no such thing as excessive communication when it comes to managing change. Insufficient or ineffective communication can hinder acceptance and increase resistance.

9. Changes to routines: Comfort zones are closely linked to routines, which individuals tend to cherish as they provide a sense of security. Consequently, resistance is likely whenever change necessitates altering established routines.

10. Exhaustion/Saturation: Compliance should not be mistaken for acceptance. Individuals who feel overwhelmed by the continuous change may resign themselves to it and go along with the flow, but their motivation is low, and they do not genuinely embrace the change.

11. Change in the status quo: Resistance can also stem from individuals' perceptions of the change. For instance, if individuals believe that they will be worse off after the change or if they perceive the change as benefiting another group, department, or person, there may be unspoken anger and resentment.

12. Benefits and rewards: When the perceived benefits and rewards of implementing the change are not deemed sufficient to justify the effort and challenges involved, resistance is more likely to occur.

APPENDIX 5. THE RESULTS OF MANN-WHITNEY U-TESTS

	Group	N	U	p	z (mean deviation)
Understanding Change	Digital	50	2204	2	6.375
	Face-to-face	50	1703		
Building relationships with colleagues	Digital	50	2615	0.016	-2.4204
	Face-to-face	50	1078		
Addressing employees' needs	Digital	50	2316	1.999	3.194
	Face-to-face	50	1477		
Empowering employees	Digital	50	2331	2.181	2.181
	Face-to-face	50	1405		

Table 5. The results of Mann-Whitney U-Tests

APPENDIX 6. RAW DATA FROM THE SURVEY

58 responses

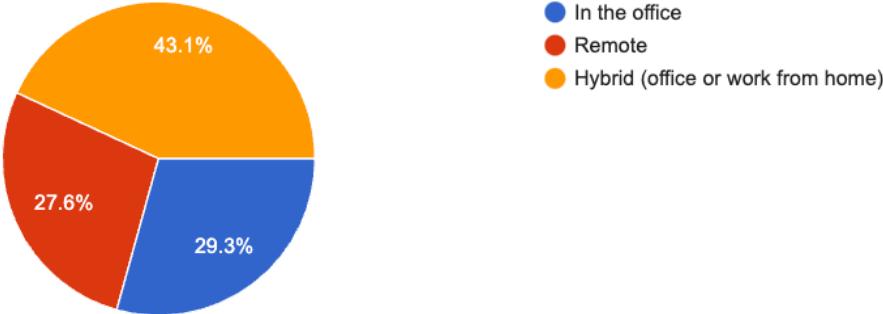


Figure 7. Respondents' working formats

58 responses

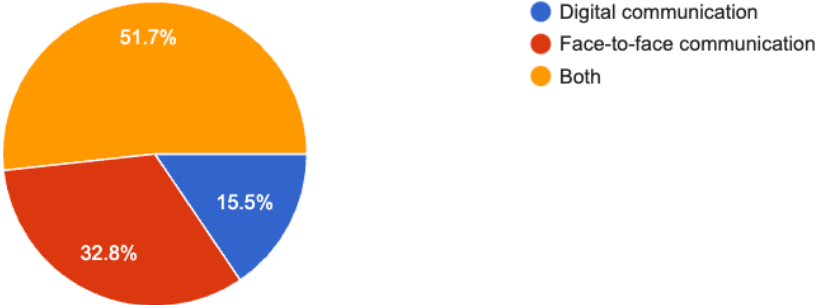


Figure 8. Preferred channels to receive information about the change from

58 responses

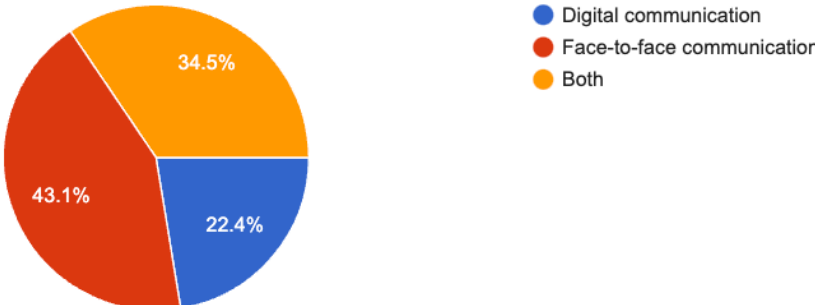


Figure 9. Preferred communication channel for asking questions and giving feedback

58 responses

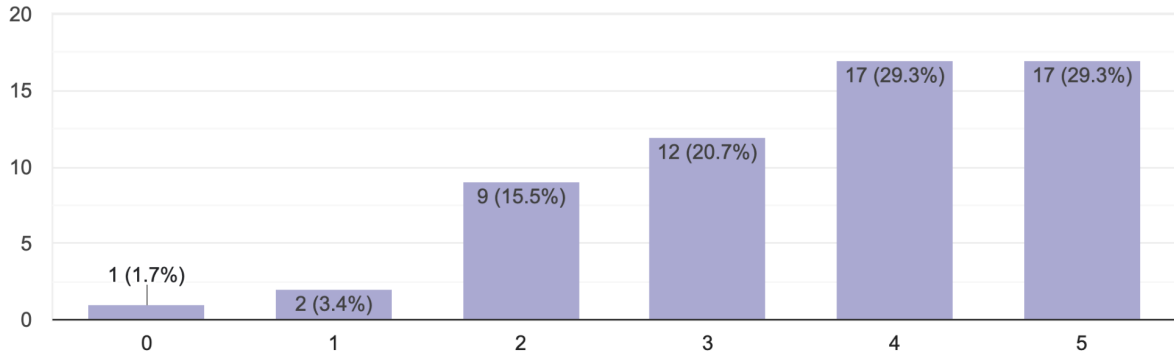


Figure 10. Effectiveness of digital channels in the process of understanding the change

58 responses

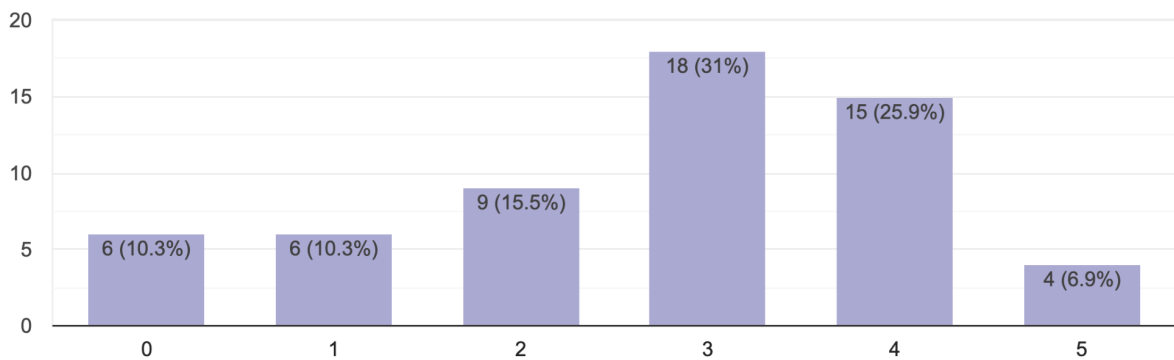


Figure 11. Digital channel: building relationships with colleagues

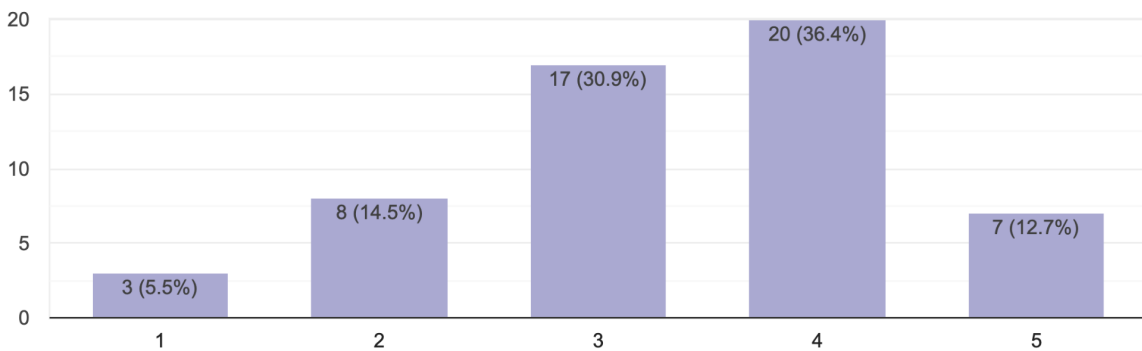


Figure 12. Digital channel: addressing employees' needs during change

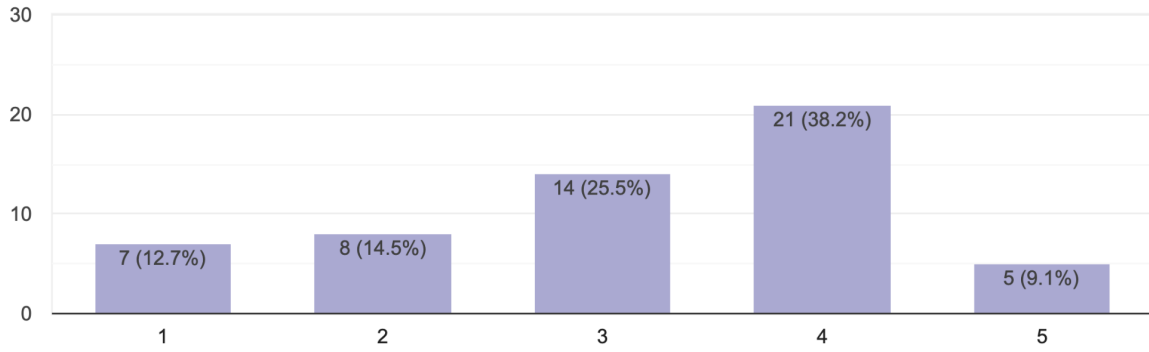


Figure 13. Digital channel: empowering employees during change

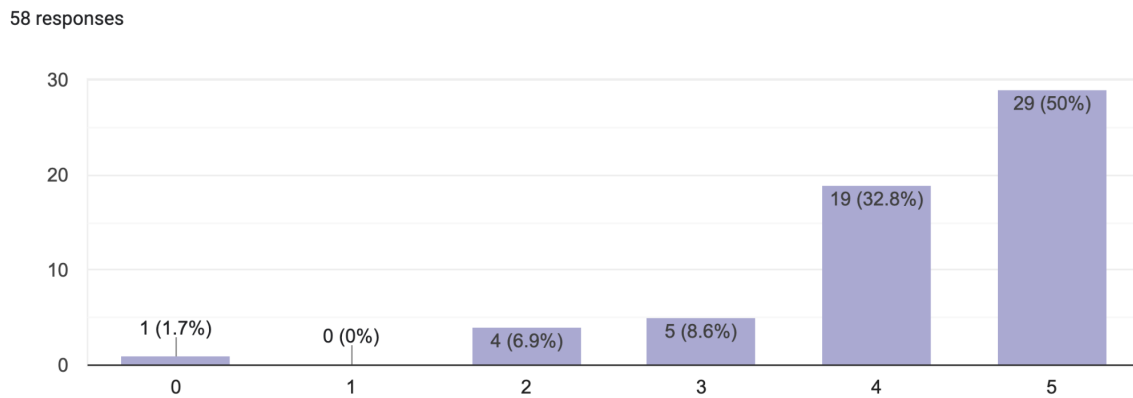


Figure 14. Effectiveness of face-to-face channels in the process of understanding the change

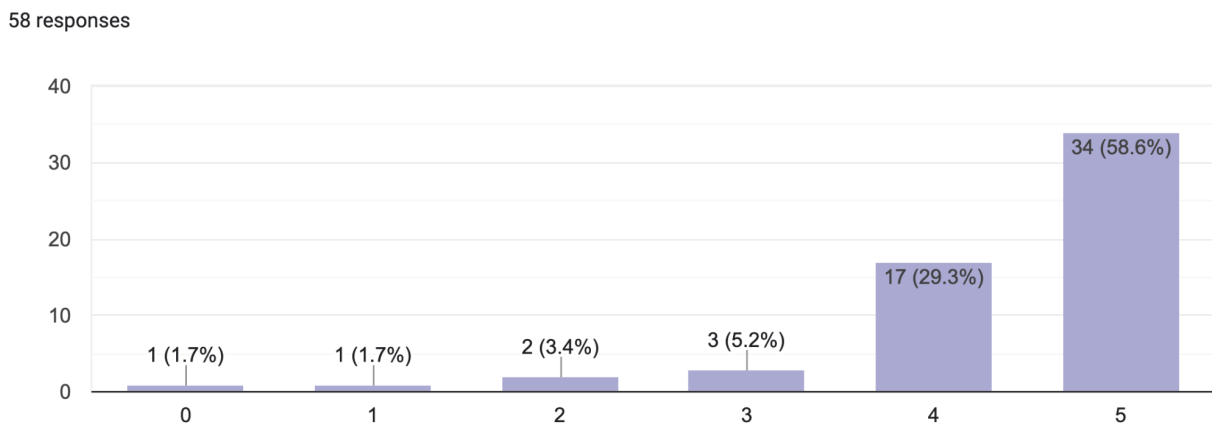


Figure 15. Face-to-face channel: building relationships with colleagues

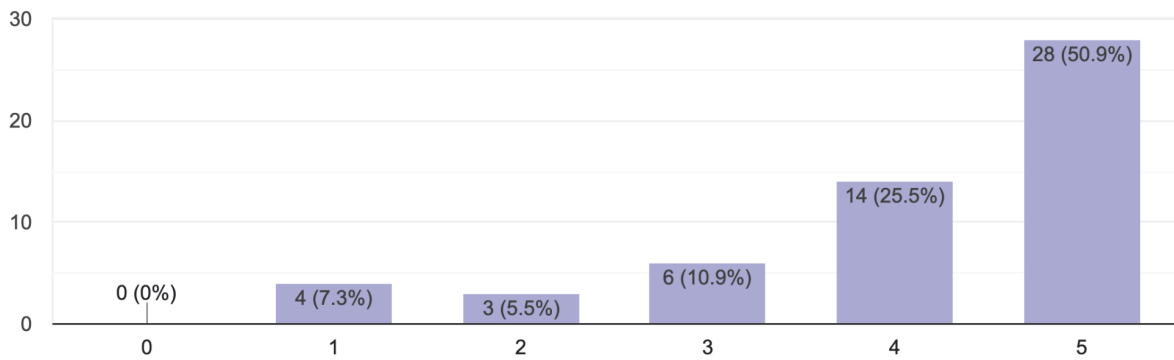


Figure 16. Face-to-face channel: addressing employees' needs during change

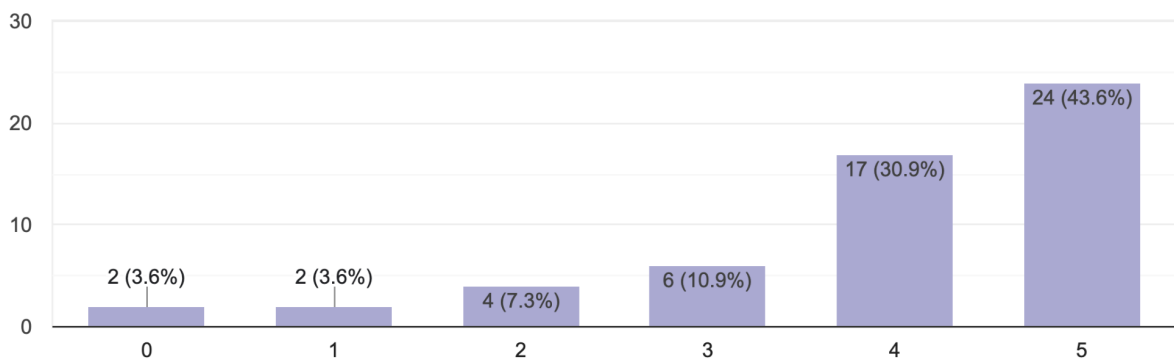


Figure 17. Face-to-face channel: empowering employees during change

58 responses

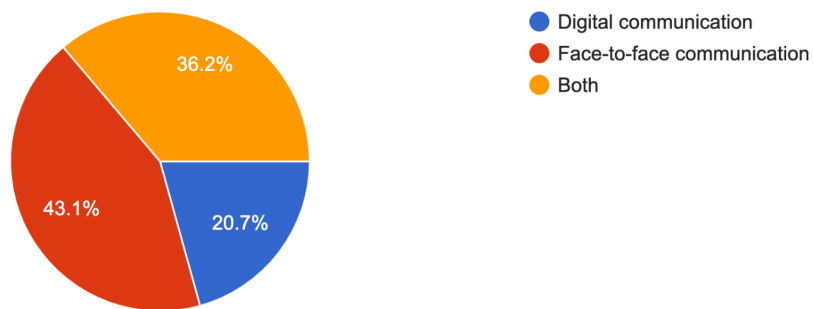


Figure 18. Effectiveness of communication channels in embracing the change

58 responses

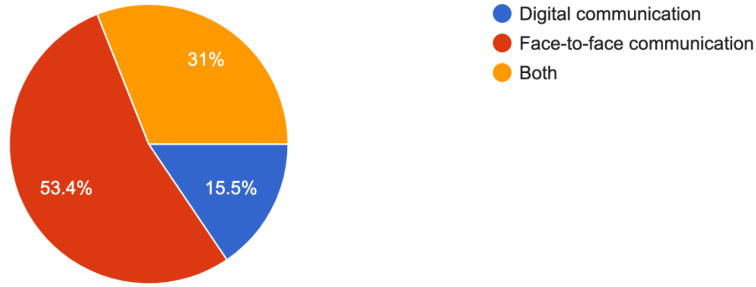


Figure 19. “You will be more likely to engage and commit to the change if the manager uses more...”

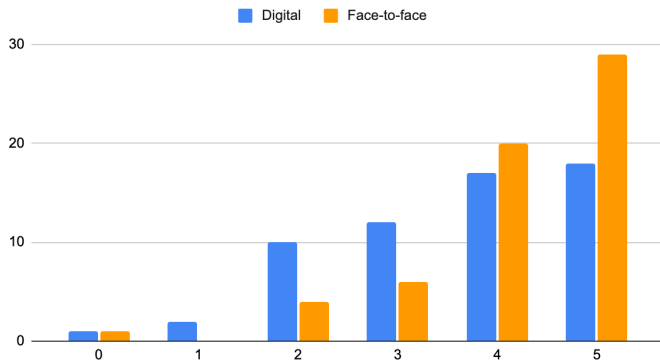


Figure 20. Effectiveness of understanding the change, number of people

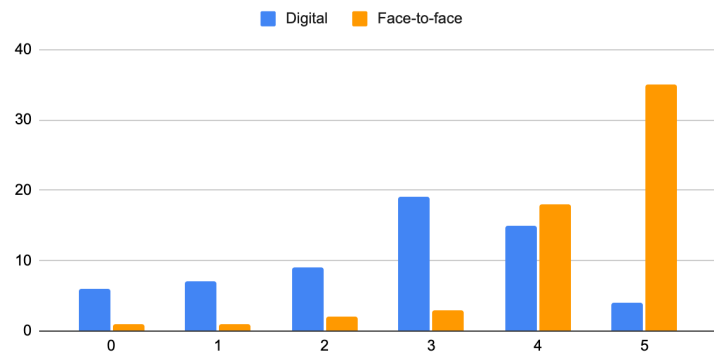


Figure 21. Effectiveness of building relationships with colleagues, number of people

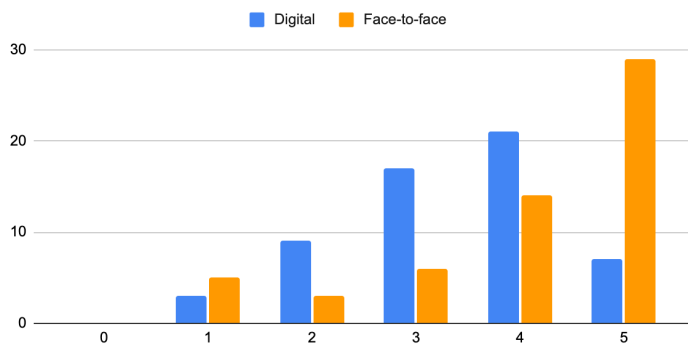


Figure 22. Effectiveness of addressing employees' needs, number of people

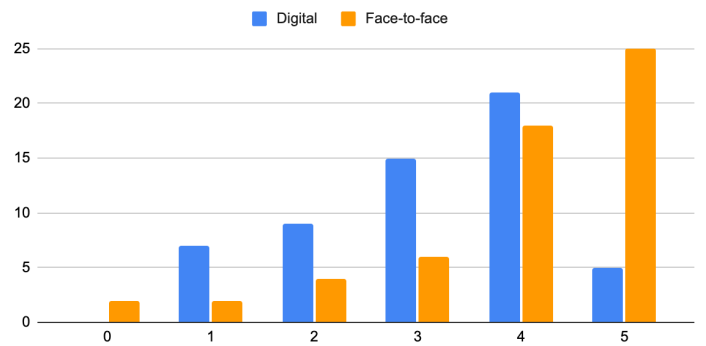


Figure 23. Effectiveness of empowering employees, number of people

