



Gain or loss: A conceptual framework of employee well-being during change

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Organisational change is inevitable within the increasingly volatile and complex world of work; this is a reality that no organisation or employee can escape. It is well known that change failure may have a profoundly negative impact on employees' well-being. Many previous studies exploring the impact of organisational change on employee well-being adopted a quantitative approach – hence the need for a qualitative study that focuses on the lived experiences of change recipients.

Design/methodology/approach: This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study explored employees' lived experiences of organisational change and its impact on their well-being. This qualitative study used purposive sampling, where semi-structured interviews yielded rich data.

Findings: Organisational change comprises both personal and professional ill-being and well-being descriptors. Those affected by restructuring and system change – and who 'survive' it – deal with mixed emotions, as they not only have to cope with its burden on themselves, but also on those working with them.

Recommendations/value: The subsequent negative impact this has on employee well-being can, however, be moderated by creating an inclusive, safe organisational support environment in which effective communication channels allow the voices of employees and management to influence the change management process, as well as its outcomes for organisational strategy and goals

Managerial implications: Management should understand the social context within which change occurs and how it impacts on employee well-being. Organisational change should be informed contextually to ensure a systematic and inclusive approach, emphasising the importance of communication.



Keywords

Communication; Content analysis; Employee well-being; Ill-being; Interpretivist paradigm; Multidimensional; Organisational change; Qualitative study; Semi-structured interviews; Survivor syndrome

JEL Classification: M12, M50

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The world of work is shaped by trends such as technological advances, environmental emergencies and the global economy (Simuth, 2017). With continuous volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the world of work (Malatjie, 2019), organisations must adapt quickly to survive (Crosina & Pratt, 2019). Consequently, organisational change is inevitable (Malatjie, 2019), a reality that not one organisation or employee can escape (Hay *et al.*, 2020). Yet, it is well known that organisational change, if not managed effectively, can have a profoundly negative impact on employees' well-being (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020), leading to insecurity and uncertainty, increased anxiety and stress levels, all of which result in reduced organisational growth and productivity and, ultimately, change failure.

Many previous studies focused on the impact of organisational change on objective measures of organisational change initiatives by means of productivity and result indicators (Franco *et al.*, 2015; De Jong *et al.*, 2016; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Jacobs & Keegan, 2018). However, over the last few years, numerous researchers have expressed the urgent need to explore further the subjective lived experiences of employees and the impact of change on their well-being (Franco *et al.*, 2015; De Jong *et al.*, 2016; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Jacobs & Keegan, 2018). While organisational change clearly has an impact on employee well-being, the subjective perceptions of employees in this respect are still unclear (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017). This raises the following question: *What are employees' lived experiences of organisational change and its impact on their well-being?* Hence the need for this qualitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of employees' lived experiences of the impact of organisational change on their well-being. Another objective of the study was to develop a conceptual framework (Figure 1) outlining these experiences, which will contribute to the literature and provide a better understanding of "the active roles that change recipients play in organisational change events" (Oreg *et al.*, 2018:65) towards assisting organisations in better managing change initiatives directed at enhancing employee well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of literature conceptualising organisational change and well-being. It will conclude with a review of how organisational change impacts employee well-being.

2.1 Organisational change

Generally, change refers to creating something different (Brijball-Parumasur, 2013). Similarly, in the organisational context, change refers to changing the prevailing conditions in an organisation from one state to another and it often relates to structural and/or process-related changes (Fløvik *et al.*, 2019). Over the years, numerous change theories have been developed and these have informed change initiatives in organisations. Such theories include Kurt Lewin's (1947) classic change model, Mintzberg's (2003) change model, the system learning concept of Senge (1990), Kotter's (1996) model of change and the transformational versus transactional models of Hargrove (2003). In organisations, the aim of the change agent is to change the current status quo by communicating the newly required state and ensuring it is implemented successfully. This requires taking employees out of their comfort zones and getting them to embrace the change (Maharaj & Pooe, 2021).

Inevitably, change results in considerable uncertainty, fear and anxiety among employees for numerous reasons, which could include change agents' poorly executing their roles, flawed change management plans and employees' possibly losing their employment (Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2013; Maharaj & Pooe, 2021). This necessitates a better understanding of the interaction between the organisational change context, the change process and the impact of organisational change on employee well-being (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2015; Nikolova *et al.*, 2016; Harney *et al.*, 2018).

2.2 Well-being

Early perspectives on well-being are well represented in the works of scholars, such as Maslow's self-actualisation, Rogers's optimally functional person, Frankl's will to meaning, Antonovsky's salutogenic characteristics, Diener's subjective well-being and Veenhoven's equation of well-being with happiness and quality of life, to name but a few (Wissing, 2020). Research distinguishes between general well-being and employee well-being since the work context can be quite different from general life situations (Zheng *et al.*, 2015; Jarden *et al.*, 2021) – all of which are important to employees. "Employee well-being" is defined as "the entire quality of an employee's experience and functioning at the workplace" (Grant *et al.*, 2007:52). Similarly, Kaplan *et al.* (2017:4) defined employee well-being as "the sum of a

person's emotional experiences and the subjective evaluations of their work and life situations". According to Grant *et al.* (2007), employee well-being may be best understood in terms of the three core dimensions of happiness, health and relationships. However, to create a flourishing positive institution in which employee well-being is key, Rothmann (2020) focuses on the importance of emotional well-being and social well-being. Emotional well-being includes cognitive components, which indicate the degree to which "we perceive our wants to be met", and affective components, which consider the extent "to which our needs are satisfied" (Rothmann, 2020:272). Social well-being is aligned with relationships (Grant *et al.*, 2007), which include our experience of social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualisation and social coherence (Keyes, 2005; Rothmann, 2020).

2.3 Impact of organisational change on employee well-being

Change recipients may experience organisational change as an opportunity to gain or as a potential risk of loss, with either good or bad outcomes (McKinley & Scherer, 2000 & Fløvik *et al.*, 2019). Many previous studies indicate that organisational change has a predominantly negative impact on employees' well-being (Westgaard & Winkel, 2011; Burke *et al.*, 2015; De Jong *et al.*, 2016; Koukoulaki *et al.*, 2017; Harney *et al.*, 2018; Otto *et al.*, 2018). Such experiences are mostly due to an overpowering sense of uncertainty, which subsequently results in employees' viewing organisational change initiatives in a negative light (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008; Köper & Richter, 2014; Pahkin *et al.*, 2014; Gupta, 2016; Nikolova *et al.*, 2016; Fløvik *et al.*, 2019; Malatjie, 2019). While organisational change generally has an adverse impact on employees, Fløvik *et al.* (2019) found that the adverse impact decreased as time passed. Loretto *et al.* (2010) found that change will not necessarily have a negative impact on change recipients and, occasionally, a positive impact might be expected. Wiezer *et al.* (2011) agree with Loretto *et al.* (2010) that organisational change does not adversely impact all employees and that some employees may regard organisational change as positive, as it has the potential to improve chances of securing better positions in the organisation and enables employees to influence the future state of the organisation positively (Wiezer *et al.*, 2011). Thus, although organisational change is generally experienced as negative, employees also retain a sense of hope and expectation that the outcome of a change process and/or initiative may lead to increased organisational success (Hay *et al.*, 2020).

The literature also indicates that all employees are either directly or indirectly affected by change initiatives such as restructuring, thus leaving no one exempt (Burke *et al.*, 2015; Koukoulaki *et al.*, 2017). Notably, organisational change poses a threat to employees' well-being (Kaltianen *et al.*, 2020), with significant consequences for all employees (Winslow *et al.*, 2017), the organisation in question and the broader economy (Kaplan *et al.*, 2017). An

example would be how employees of organisational change experience a form of organisational trauma that manifests as reduced organisational commitment, poor job satisfaction, low morale and a lack of trust (Vermeulen & Wiesner, 2000; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). As such, it is of the utmost importance that organisations pay attention to promoting employee well-being to ensure employees are capable of performing their roles in line with organisational strategy (Diener *et al.*, 2017).

Ultimately, although change may be unavoidable, the adverse impact of change on employee well-being can be moderated (Day *et al.*, 2017). Researchers have considered the importance of communication, employee participation and organisational support in organisational change contexts (Westgaard & Winkel, 2011; Wiezer *et al.*, 2011; Van Den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013; Erciyas, 2019). Franco *et al.* (2015) suggested that the presence of trust, transparency and care may positively affect employee well-being. Dimitrova (2019) found that trust is a key requirement for the successful implementation of change initiatives and according to Rahman *et al.* (2020), both organisational support and organisational empowerment are positively associated with employee well-being. However, existing research seems to have largely overlooked the impact of organisational change on the lived experiences of employees with the aim of providing a framework that could assist in the process of managing change initiatives to enhance employee well-being.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

The researchers in this study followed a qualitative approach (Salkind, 2018) underpinned by the interpretive research paradigm (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). They used an inductive research approach (Newman *et al.*, 1998) by providing rich information (Featherston, 2008) about the descriptions of employees' lived experiences. Furthermore, they adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological strategy to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisational change context and the impact it has on employee well-being by using rich and descriptive language (Kafle, 2011).

The research was conducted within the South African workplace context with the primary focus on employees involved in organisations that implemented restructuring and system change processes. The restructuring involved changes to the existing structure of the organisation (McKinley & Scherer, 2000), and the system change processes included the updating and renewing of systems (Werner, 2016).

3.2 Selection of participants

The study included participants from numerous organisations who have been exposed to and experienced organisational change initiatives, such as leadership changes, policy and strategic changes, retrenchments and/or restructuring in the South African workplace context. Therefore, it was not possible to determine the population size. The researchers used purposive sampling to identify information-rich cases (Kafle, 2011). This involved the identification and selection of six participants who were well-versed in the phenomenon being studied, namely organisational change settings, which included restructuring and system change processes (Etikan *et al.*, 2016) to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and to enable the development of a framework (Benoot *et al.*, 2016). A brief demographic overview of the participants is provided in Table 1. Most (67%) of the participants were female, and 33 percent were male. While 67 percent reported having a university degree, 34 percent had a high school certificate or college diploma. One-third of the participants reported their roles were best described as support, another third as professional or technical, and the last third as managerial. All the participants were exposed to a combination of change initiatives. All participants were exposed to policy and strategic changes, while 67 percent of the participants were exposed specifically to leadership changes and 33 percent to system and process changes. Eighty-three percent were part of the restructuring, and 83 percent of the participants reported having been exposed to a retrenchment process. The sample size of six participants was deemed sufficient when a point of data saturation was achieved (Guest *et al.*, 2006) and no new information, codes and themes emerged (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Table 1: Sample demographics

Demographics	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	67%
Male	33%
<i>Education</i>	
High school certificate	17%
Some college diploma	17%
BCom, BSc, or other university degree	50%
Graduate degree	17%
<i>Nature of position</i>	
Support	33%
Professional/Technical	33%
Manager	33%
<i>Nature of change exposed to</i>	
Leadership changes	67%
Policy and strategic changes	100%
System and process changes	33%
Restructuring	83%
Retrenchments	83%

Source: Authors compilation.

3.3 Data collection

The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of employees' lived experiences of organisational change and the impact on their well-being (Kafle, 2011). An interview guide was prepared and used to guide the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The following questions were asked. What is your understanding of what constitutes well-being in the workplace? What is your understanding of organisational change? Describe how organisational change has impacted or is currently impacting your well-being in the workplace. What recommendations would you make to the organisation as to how the organisation may improve your experience of organisational change so that it impacts more positively on your well-being? By applying techniques such as reflection, paraphrasing, summarising and clarifying, the researchers were able to encourage the participants to elaborate on their lived experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants and the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The reliability was checked by reading the transcriptions while listening to the recordings (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). These transcriptions were anonymised by allocating pseudonyms to each participant.

3.4 Data analysis

The process included collecting suitable data, whereafter the researchers engaged in the process of making sense of the data (Elo *et al.*, 2014). Engaging with the data in this way familiarised the researchers with the body of material while classifying the data into smaller, more manageable items for analysis (words or themes) (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). These words or themes were added to the text as notes and headings while the researchers read the interview transcripts. The headings were then transferred onto a coding sheet. Categories were generated to describe the research phenomenon by grouping the headings together based on their similarity and relatedness. The researchers used a colour-coding system by assigning different colours to different groups. This process was followed repeatedly to make the necessary adjustments and refinements that led to the emergence of overarching themes. Each of the themes was represented by several words and short phrases that served as sub-themes. This process enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspective regarding the impact of organisational change on their well-being and to report on these by using content-related categories to describe the phenomenon.

3.5 Measures of trustworthiness

Gaya and Smith (2016) propose that credibility, transferability and dependability are analogous to the concepts of reliability and validity used in quantitative approaches. In this study, credibility was ensured by transcribing the audio recordings verbatim and using representative verbatim quotations to report the findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Therefore, the data reported in the findings were representative of the participants' true voices. Transferability was addressed with purposive sampling, providing a detailed description of the research context and using appropriate quotations (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Dependability was ensured by providing a detailed account and description of the research process, including the data collection, data analysis and data interpretation, and by reporting on the findings using appropriate quotations (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate research ethics review committee. All participants were required to sign an informed consent before the interviews commenced. The

researchers also took the necessary steps to ensure all participants' anonymity and confidentiality, for example, by using pseudonyms and ensuring all data were securely stored.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study are based on the sample material, that is, verbatim transcripts of the interviews that were conducted with six participants to gain a deeper understanding of their subjectively lived experiences of how their well-being is influenced within organisational change contexts. A further objective of this study was to develop a basic framework (see figure 1 below) that can act as a guide to enable organisations to manage change initiatives so that suitable consideration is given to how employee well-being can be better protected. Four prominent themes emerged from the interview data, namely (1) well-being descriptors, (2) ill-being descriptors, (3) employee expectations and (4) survival. The comments from the participants (noted as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) are interspersed with the reporting of the findings.

Theme 1: Well-being descriptors

As illustrated below, well-being played a significant role in the way that the participants experienced organisational change and it remained a central concept throughout the interviews. Well-being was found to be a multidimensional concept (Marsh *et al.*, 2020; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2020) that considers the "whole person" (Butler *et al.*, 2019; Lee, 2022). For instance, the participants stated that well-being included physical, mental and emotional well-being:

I think there are lots of elements to well-being – there is your physical well-being ... mental well-being (Participant 3).

... well-being in the workplace would be like a healthy working environment ... like emotional and like mental ... (Participant 4).

The participants perceived that a genuine sense of belonging enables them to overcome obstacles, grow and excel in their work and engage with organisations. These experiences closely resemble eudaimonic well-being, that is, practising and acting with virtue (Athota, 2017) to realise optimum human potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The specific responses included the following:

... as a human being, of where I belong and why I can add value (Participant 1).

... that you feel valued by your employer. That there is space for you to grow (Participant 2).

Feeling as if there are resources available (Participant 3).

It was found that happiness underpins well-being in the workplace and that employees who feel happy in the workplace tend to feel more energetic, more productive, more engaged and, ultimately, more committed to the objectives, such as the change initiative. These positive feelings are then an incentive to increase work performance (Kidd, 2008; Zito *et al.*, 2019) and, hence, organisational profitability (Awada & Ismail, 2019). Such experiences are closely aligned with hedonic well-being, which has a strong pleasure orientation (Athota, 2017). The participants expressed the following views:

I think it is massively important, um, because I think if you are in an environment where you feel happy and healthy and your well-being is taken seriously, then you are likely to want to spend time there (Participant 3).

I think if people, uhm, are happy and it's a good environment, then it'll reflect in their work. Um, people would go above and beyond (Participant 4).

... you'll be very positive and, uh, give much more inputs (Participant 5).

... everyone participates ... It makes everyone happier (Participant 5).

That you can just give your best for the company, you will walk the extra mile for the company (Participant 6).

Theme 2: Ill-being descriptors

The findings of the study support the literature, which indicates that organisational change has a generally negative impact on employee well-being (Day *et al.*, 2017; Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017), which manifests as ill-being. The experiences of ill-being manifested in the participants' personal and professional lives and affected them financially, emotionally and psychologically (Schiro & Baker, 2009; Lee, 2022).

The participants specifically referred to the impact of organisational change and how their experiences had manifested in their personal lives as a major concern, especially the concomitant inability to plan for the future. The uncertainty associated with the organisational change was a major contributing factor to ill-being, flamed by feelings of nervousness – perhaps even anxiety – as a result of the lack of security and, to some extent, the urge to flee (Smollan, 2017). This had a negative impact on employee well-being (Burke *et al.*, 2015; Harney *et al.*, 2018). The participants' responses included the following:

I'm very uncertain about future prospects (Participant 1).

It kind of leaves you, you know, like on shifting ground, you're not really sure of what to do, how to do your job. You know, it messes a little bit with the security of the employees (Participant 2).

There was so much insecurity and so that makes you really nervous (Participant 3).

I think it just impacts on you emotionally and mentally because you never know what's going to happen (Participant 4).

But, not knowing, I mean you just can't run away (Participant 5).

The participants also perceived professional ill-being as a dimension of subjective well-being, which combines the properties of physical, mental and emotional ill-being and alludes to resistance to change. The participants stated that they tended to disengage from their work, and productivity appeared to have stagnated or decreased. The specific responses included the following:

You don't work as hard as you used to and it's not because you don't want to, it kind of just happens? (Participant 2).

In that negative space you feel like you only want to do what your contract says. Nothing more, nothing less (Participant 2).

... just very uninterested in the work ... you feel like you just have no interest in your work (Participant 4).

He'll just sit in a meeting and listen to everything and he won't give any input at the meeting (Participant 5).

Theme 3: Employee expectations

Employees' well-being is affected by organisational changes and is informed by not only the organisation's expectations of the employee (Lee, 2022) but also the employees' expectations. Disregarding employees' expectations may have an adverse impact on their well-being (Lundmark *et al.*, 2022). Communication is often a key expectation of employees and is crucial during change processes. As illustrated below, poor communication was cited by participants as a significant contributor towards understanding how ill-being manifests for employees in organisational change contexts (Smollan, 2017). The findings relating to employee expectations indicated that the participants had not received any communication from the organisation in some instances or that communication was perceived to be inadequate in other cases; in certain instances, employees even believed that the organisation was not being transparent or open in what was communicated. Consequently, participants

alluded to the fact that the communication failed to meet their expectations. They stated the following:

If they can be open and transparent about the plans for the future (Participant 1).

I feel a lot more comfortable going to my manager and asking him because he's being open to us. What you give is what you get (Participant 2).

... they could have handled their communication a lot better (Participant 2).

... some line of communication would have been nice (Participant 4).

... open the lines of communication. Uhm, give us more information as to why they were restructuring or what was this process was in aid of (Participant 4).

The participants also saw consultation as a key consideration. It was clearly important for the participants to feel included and heard before decisions were taken. For instance, the participants stated the following:

If there's an issue, let them know about it, deal with it and get on with life (Participant 2).

... it's so frustrating when you've got questions and they're not being addressed ... Instead of someone actually looking to listening to you (Participant 3).

... more open communication and maybe ask us for our input into the whole process or if you have any ideas or you know things that they could have done differently in in how they carried out the process (Participant 4).

I think it's very important that you get input of everyone involved (Participant 5).

Just speak to them before you take that decision (Participant 6).

Theme 4: Survival

It was clear that all the participants – both those who survived the change or those who saw themselves as victims of it – felt that their mental health had been affected by the organisational change context (Schiro & Baker, 2009; Simuth, 2017; Fløvik *et al.*, 2019). The participants' expressions indicated that they were/had been carrying the burden of the impact of organisational change on their well-being, as well as the burden they experienced on behalf of the victims who had not survived the organisational change initiatives. The participants found it exceedingly difficult to cope with organisational change and to survive, even long after the aftermath of the change (Kidd, 2008; Dlouhy & Casper, 2020). Some participants made these observations:

It's still impacting me. It's now been two years since we've lost the majority of the team members we had (Participant 1).

There's no ways to be unaffected when they're such big change happening around you (Participant 3).

That's really hard. 'Cause you get used to the people you get very used to your management. You get used to everything (Participant 6).

The participants reported mixed emotions following the organisational change event. Mixed emotions refer to the intense and relatively enduring positive and negative feelings that employees experience in relation to the change event (Zoogah & Beurgre, 2013). Participant 3 stated the following:

But in my team there were only two of us, so we were watching this change almost from the outside. Um, and it was, uh, it was. I don't know if it. I don't know. It was very confusing position to be in because you're incredibly grateful that you your job is secure. Where's all your colleagues are facing massive employment insecurity, but in the same breath you your feeling for your colleagues and your heart is breaking for them and the trauma that they're going through (Participant 3).

5. DISCUSSION

The four themes that emerged from the empirical part of the study (i.e. well-being descriptors, ill-being descriptors, employee expectations and survival), together with the literature reviewed, provide a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences of organisational change and its impact on employee well-being. Figure 1 depicts these findings as a conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for managing change initiatives directed at enhancing employee well-being



Source: Compiled by authors

Organisational change is a constant in the world of work, stretching employees and taking them out of their comfort zone as it changes the status quo, often resulting in feelings of uncertainty, fear and anxiety, all of which directly affect an employee's well-being (Harney *et al.*, 2018; Maharaj & Pooe, 2021). The changes may assume the form of structural and/or process-related changes within an organisation (Fløvik *et al.*, 2019).

The results of this study illustrate the significant role that well-being plays in how the participants experienced organisational change and interacted with it. Well-being was found to be a multidimensional concept (Marsh *et al.*, 2020; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2020) that considers the "whole person" and includes physical, mental and emotional well-being (Grant *et al.*, 2007; Butler *et al.*, 2019; Lee, 2022). Aligned with the work on the emotional and social well-being of Rothmann (2020), participants emphasised the important role that a sense of belonging plays in enabling employees to deal with the challenges arising from the change initiatives through positive experiences of social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualisation and social coherence. These findings also align well with eudaimonic well-being, that is, practising and acting with virtue to function optimally (Athota, 2017; Wissing,

2020). Also, in line with the hedonic well-being perspective, it was evident from the findings how happiness (pleasure orientation) results in increased work engagement, employee commitment to meet the objectives of the change initiative and overall better performance, productivity and organisational profitability (Awada & Ismail, 2019; Zito *et al.*, 2019; Wissing, 2020).

On the other hand, ill-being also seems to play a vital role, considering the longstanding perception that organisational change is always negative and affects an employee's life both personally (emotionally, economically and psychologically) and professionally (lack of job security, uncertainty, disengagement and poor performance) (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017; Harney *et al.*, 2018; Lee, 2022). Ill-being can therefore prove to be a major source of resistance to change, resulting in the change initiative's failing or not meeting its set objectives (Smollan, 2017).

Employee expectations emerged as an important point of consideration for organisations during any organisational change initiative, yet it is often ignored or dealt with as an afterthought (Smollan, 2017; Lee, 2022). It is clear how change agents seem to focus predominantly on the organisation's expectations and, as a result, decisions are made that affect not only the employees' well-being but also the success of the change initiative (Lundmark *et al.*, 2022). Management of effective communication is key as it will provide employees with the opportunity to consult with management so that the employees have a platform to express their concerns, share their knowledge and give inputs before important decisions are made that will affect them directly. It also imparts feelings of trust in the employees when such communication occurs promptly, comprehensively and transparently (Zwikael & Smyrk, 2015; Van Niekerk, 2017).

Living through a change initiative seems to be a fight for survival that coincides with many mixed emotions, both positive and negative (Zoogah & Beugre, 2013). No person's well-being is left unscathed by the burden that they are required to carry, whether it is because they feel guilty that they survived the restructuring/change while their colleagues did not or merely from witnessing the impact of the change on the well-being of others or on themselves (Kidd, 2008; Schiro & Baker, 2009; Simuth, 2017; Fløvik *et al.*, 2019; Dlouhy & Casper, 2020).

Organisational support becomes an important enabler for organisational change initiatives to succeed as it is key to ensuring healthy, engaged employees who are vital in executing the change initiative and thus having a positive influence on the potentially adverse impact of the change initiative on the employees' well-being (Day *et al.*, 2017; Van Niekerk, 2017; Alfes *et al.*, 2019). Ensuring a successful change initiative while simultaneously ensuring the well-

being of the employees is mainly driven by three factors, namely communication, participation and support (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Erciyas, 2019; Marsh *et al.*, 2020; Ruggeri *et al.*, 2020). Employees should be afforded the opportunity to participate throughout the change process and have their voices heard through a process of consultation (Van Niekerk, 2017). A well-structured communication strategy should be developed to ensure transparent, prompt and comprehensive communication that inspires trust in the employees. Finally, change agents should acknowledge employees' potential fears, anxieties and uncertainties and create a work environment that empowers employees and makes them feel safe to share their lived experiences and how these affect their well-being (Franco *et al.*, 2015; Rahman *et al.*, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The objective of this study was to understand the impact of organisational change on employee well-being. Although the participants' experiences of organisational change differed, they generally emphasised the negative impacts of organisational change. Four themes emerged from the data, namely well-being descriptors, ill-being descriptors, employee expectations and survival. The participants highlighted the extent to which the implementation of inadequate communication strategies appeared to be problematic. However, Figure 1 illustrates that the adverse impact of organisational change could be overcome by recognising and meeting employees' expectations, ensuring effective communication and providing the appropriate organisational support.

Essentially, organisations and facilitators of change management should understand that communication is a point of immense concern for employees and that the implementation of effective communication strategies is key in determining how employees' well-being is affected by organisational change. Cultivating a sense of belonging through consultation and considering employee inputs before making key decisions will enhance employees' engagement in and commitment to the change process. Change agents, leaders and industrial and organisational psychologists should attune themselves to the moderating factors that will alleviate the negative impact of change and enhance employee well-being by creating a more humane organisational change context. It is proposed that this be done by creating forums in which employees' voices can be heard during the planning, implementation and concluding phases of the change process.

Since organisational change is both dynamic and complex in nature and, given the limited focus on participants' experiences, longitudinal studies could be undertaken to gain a better understanding of the impact of organisational change on employee well-being over time.

Future research could also explore the differences between the experiences of the victims and the survivors of change. Future research could focus on the managers who must enact the change to gain insights into their experiences and the competencies that they need to steer organisations and employees successfully through the change initiatives.

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