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Behind Organizational Change: Employee Stories of Challenges and Performance

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to understand employees' experiences in dealing with organizational change and its impact on work performance at PT XYZ using a phenomenological approach. Organizational changes that include restructuring and digitalization of work processes have led to various emotional and behavioral reactions from employees. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a number of employees who experienced the change process firsthand. Data analysis used Colaizzi's phenomenological technique to uncover the deep meaning of the employees' experiences. The results showed that employees initially experienced uncertainty and anxiety that affected their motivation and work performance. The adaptation process took place through learning and adjusting work patterns that were strongly influenced by open communication and managerial support. Some employees interpreted the changes as opportunities for self-development and performance improvement. This research confirms that the success of adaptation and performance is highly dependent on how employees interpret change and the important role of management in supporting the process. The findings provide valuable insights for organizations in designing humanistic and effective change management strategies to improve employee well-being and productivity.

Keywords

Organizational Change, Employee Experience, Employee Performance, Phenomenological Study, Change Adaptation

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is a multifaceted process that requires careful consideration of individual and contextual factors to ensure successful adaptation and sustainability in a rapidly evolving business environment. Employee adaptability plays a crucial role in facilitating change, as more adaptable individuals tend to be more supportive of change initiatives, especially when there is a strong Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationship, which fosters trust and support for change management efforts (Neves & Dam, 2024). Additionally, micro-level factors, such as individual differences in

tolerance for ambiguity, and macro-level factors, such as team and organizational context, significantly influence employees' ability to cope with change (Harden et al., 2020). Employee engagement through empowerment, participation, and teamwork has been shown to have a positive impact on organizational change, especially when combined with humble leadership, which increases the success of change initiatives (Bah et al., 2024). In the context of digital transformation, organizations must not only adopt new technologies, but also manage and sustain these changes to maintain competitiveness. This involves integrating digital strategies and restructuring organizational processes to improve decision-making and operational efficiency (Carroll et al., 2023) (Nour & Arbussà, 2024). Strategic change requires a comprehensive understanding of its antecedents, processes, and outcomes, with key actors such as the CEO and top management team playing a crucial role in steering these changes (Acciarini et al., 2024). Furthermore, effective change management practices, especially in industries such as architecture, engineering, and construction, are critical to the successful adoption of change, enabling companies to become early adopters and reduce resource expenditures during the transition period (Lines & Vardireddy, 2017). Preparing individuals to face change through change-oriented leadership and internalization of organizational values increases readiness for change, which in turn has a positive impact on individual performance (Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa, 2021). The EFQM Model 2025 emphasizes the importance of aligning organizational strategy with contemporary challenges, such as sustainability and technological innovation, to achieve long-term success and resilience (Martusewicz et al., 2024). The success of organizational change depends on a holistic approach that integrates individual adaptability, leadership, employee engagement, and strategic alignment with technology and sustainability goals.

Adapting to organizational change is a complex process that often causes uncertainty and psychological stress among employees, which affects their motivation and performance. Uncertainty surrounding roles, responsibilities, and career prospects can lead to stress, anxiety, and resistance, which are significant challenges for management seeking to implement effective change strategies. Research shows that psychological empowerment can reduce some of the negative effects of uncertainty related to change, particularly in increasing organizational attractiveness, although it does not significantly affect affective commitment (Lehmann et al., 2022). Stress levels can fluctuate during organizational transitions, with inadequate processes and uncertainty exacerbating negative physiological, behavioral, affective, and cognitive reactions among employees (Smollan, 2015). Organizational changes, such as

downsizing and restructuring, are associated with increased psychosocial risks and adverse mental health outcomes, highlighting the need for occupational health and safety measures during such transitions (Backhaus et al., 2024). Middle managers, who play a crucial role in the change process, often experience role overload, leading to resistance to change, which can be moderated by effective emotion regulation strategies (Wang et al., 2024). Employee adaptability and the quality of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) relationships are crucial in fostering support for change, as they help reduce uncertainty and increase trust in change management (Neves & van Dam, 2024). Employees' subjective perceptions of the frequency and level of change can directly and indirectly affect their well-being and resistance to change, highlighting the importance of effectively managing these perceptions (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017). The concept of "transition pain" underscores the emotional stress employees experience during disruptive change, which can signal an imbalance between job demands and resources, requiring intervention to develop resources and reduce mismatches (Johansen et al., 2024). The extraordinary nature of the "Tsunami of Change," characterized by rapid and unexpected changes, can cause organizational chaos and employee dissatisfaction, emphasizing the need for strong change management strategies (Warrick & Cady, 2022). Employee perceptions of fairness, particularly informational fairness, play a crucial role in mediating resistance to change, indicating that fair and transparent communication is essential in change management (Georgalis et al., 2015). A humanistic and effective change management strategy should focus on reducing uncertainty, increasing empowerment, encouraging adaptability, and ensuring fair communication to support employee well-being and minimize resistance during organizational change.

Kurt Lewin's theory of organizational change, which involves the stages of unfreezing, change, and refreezing, provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of organizational change and its impact on employees. The unfreezing stage, which involves dismantling existing patterns, is critical to preparing employees for change. This is supported by studies on grassroots organizational change in university settings, where informal bottom-up initiatives are essential in articulating and advancing leadership education, reflecting the importance of early freezing efforts to engage employees in the change process (Dean et al., 2024). The change stage, characterized by transition, is influenced by factors such as change-oriented leadership and employee adaptability, which are important for increasing readiness for change and subsequently improving performance, as shown in a study of employees at

the National Statistics Office in Indonesia (Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa, 2021). The refreezing stage, which stabilizes the new conditions, is influenced by perceptions of fairness and proactive motivation, as shown in a study in which organizational change fairness significantly predicted change-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) through increased self-efficacy and positive emotional experiences (Ling et al., 2024). Furthermore, the role of core self-evaluation and enthusiasm in fostering positive attitudes toward change highlights the psychological resources necessary for successful refreezing, as evidenced in a longitudinal study among university employees (Mäkikangas et al., 2019). Moreover, changes in organizational structure, such as moving toward a self-management model, can affect communication networks and employee centrality, indicating the importance of structural adjustments during the refreezing phase to support new organizational norms (Maurer et al., 2023). The complexity of the change process, as seen in healthcare systems during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the need for multi-level decision-making and strong change management strategies to effectively navigate the change absorption phase (Ros et al., 2024). Lewin's model provides a comprehensive lens for viewing the emotional and psychological challenges employees face during organizational change, emphasizing the need for strategic leadership, fairness, and adaptability to ensure a successful transition and stable outcomes.

Research on employees' subjective experiences during organizational change is crucial for understanding how these experiences influence attitudes, motivation, and performance. The importance of meaning-making in organizational change involves identifying different employee responses based on cognitive, behavioral, and affective patterns, which can guide change management strategies (Breutner & Roth, 2024). How employees make sense of engagement through a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the creative aspects of employee experiences (Lemon, 2019). Theoretical and methodological considerations in researching employee behavior during crises underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of employee experiences in difficult times (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). A systematic review of the relationship between organizational experience and performance shows that the effects of experience depend on various factors, which can influence how employees perceive and react to change (Maula et al., 2022). Personal narratives about the implementation of change in the Indian public sector reveal how cultural, social, and political contexts shape individual experiences of organizational change (Chakraborty, 2020). These studies underscore the value of a phenomenological approach to capturing the complex subjective

experiences of employees during organizational change, which are critical in shaping their overall performance and engagement.

This study aims to reveal the stories and subjective meanings experienced by employees in facing organizational change and to explore its impact on their performance, particularly in terms of motivation, productivity, and work effectiveness. With a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of employee adaptation, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of more humane and targeted change management strategies, so that organizations can achieve sustainable change.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study at PT XYZ used a phenomenological approach to explore employees' subjective experiences during organizational change, which is in line with the broader academic discourse on understanding experiences in the workplace. This approach is highly effective in capturing the nuanced perceptions of employees as they navigate structural and cultural changes, understanding employee engagement through phenomenological interviews (Lemon, 2019). The study focuses on employees' personal narratives, highlighting the importance of understanding the meaning of work for Generation Y, emphasizing themes such as meaningful work and organizational functionality (Coates, 2017). Additionally, research at PT XYZ can draw insights about workplace change, identifying different employee responses based on cognitive, behavioral, and affective patterns, offering practical guidance for managing diverse perceptions during change (Breutner & Roth, 2024). The use of semi-structured interviews at PT XYZ allows for flexible yet focused exploration of these experiences, emphasizing the importance of reflective engagement with lived experiences to understand the socio-cultural influences on perceptions (Boer & Zeiler, 2024). In addition, personal narratives are valuable in revealing the complex interactions between cultural, social, and political factors during organizational change, providing a deeper understanding of how employees embody and respond to change (Chakraborty, 2020). The above studies underscore the importance of phenomenological methods in capturing the rich subjective experiences of employees during organizational transformation.

Data analysis in this study uses the phenomenological analysis technique of Colaizzi because it is suitable for exploring the meaning of employees' subjective experiences. This technique consists of seven steps, starting from thoroughly reading the interview transcripts, identifying important statements, formulating meanings, grouping them into themes, compiling comprehensive

descriptions, formulating the essence of the experience, and validating the results with the participants (member checking). This technique is relevant because it allows researchers to deeply capture how employees interpret organizational change and its impact on their performance, both psychologically and in terms of work behavior. Several studies show that the Colaizzi technique can effectively capture the essence of employee experiences, providing valuable insights for managing change and improving employee motivation and performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the experiences of PT XYZ employees in dealing with organizational change began with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Many participants said that the changes, such as organizational restructuring and digitization of work processes, triggered concerns about job stability, increased workloads, and unclear company policies. These changes were perceived as disruptions to the comfort of established work routines, causing significant psychological stress.

Over time, employees began to show signs of personal adaptation to the changes. Some of them took the initiative to learn new skills, develop more flexible work strategies, and improve their communication skills to adapt to new demands. The level of success in adaptation varied greatly, depending on the age, background experience, and openness of each individual to change.

The findings also show that communication and support from management play an important role in shaping employee responses to change. Employees who feel involved in the decision-making process and receive guidance and emotional support from their superiors tend to adapt more easily and maintain their performance. Conversely, employees who feel neglected or under-informed show greater resistance to change.

Interestingly, some employees see change as an opportunity for growth. Although the initial adjustment process was quite difficult, several participants stated that they managed to develop more productive work habits, increase efficiency, and feel more professional after going through the transition period. This experience shows that organizational change not only affects the technical aspects of work, but also influences employees' motivation and perspective on their role in the organization.

Overall, the results of this study reveal that the process of dealing with organizational change is a complex experience, involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Differences in each individual's perspective and

readiness are the main determinants of successful adaptation and performance achievement amid the ever-changing dynamics of the organization.

The emotional and psychological impact of organizational change on employees is significant, as evidenced by various studies. Organizational change is not only a technical or administrative process but involves a deep personal dimension, in line with Kurt Lewin's theory in which the melting phase is marked by anxiety and resistance due to the release of old patterns (Backhaus et al., 2024) (Castillo, 2022). The prevalence of change in the workplace is quite high, with the majority of employees experiencing it, which often leads to negative emotional impacts such as stress and uncertainty (Brazzale et al., 2021). This stress is exacerbated when there is a mismatch between employees' conceptual self and the consequences of change, with uncertainty acting as a mediator in stress responses (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). Emotional responses during change, such as rejection and resistance, are often caused by a lack of understanding and inadequate organizational culture, which can be reduced through effective communication and leadership (Castillo, 2022). Transformational leadership and perceived organizational support play an important role in mediating the psychological impact of change, promoting resilience and well-being among employees (Peng et al., 2021) (Kamal et al., 2024). Furthermore, the personal costs of organizational change, such as increased workloads and deteriorating relationships, highlight the need for managers to recognize and address these issues to minimize negative outcomes (Smollan, 2015). Attributes of organizational change, such as employee adaptability and internalization of organizational values, are crucial in preparing individuals to cope with change and enhance their performance (Indriastuti & Fachrunnisa, 2021). Managing the emotional and psychological dimensions of organizational change is essential for maintaining employee well-being and performance, requiring a comprehensive approach that includes leadership, support, and effective communication strategies (Backhaus et al., 2024) (Nery et al., 2019) (Harden et al., 2020).

The adaptation process in organizational change is greatly influenced by the support provided by the organization, particularly through effective communication, training, and responsive leadership. Research shows that managerial support and a conducive work environment can reduce resistance to change and increase employee engagement during the transition period. For example, the importance of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) in fostering trust and support for change shows that adaptability is enhanced when social relationships in the work context are strong (Neves & Dam, 2024). Similarly, the role of perceived organizational support in reducing resistance to change is

mediated by readiness to change and positive psychological capital (Yu & Lee, 2015). Effective change communication is also crucial, as providing timely information and maintaining task-related motivation can reduce performance decline during change (Stasielowicz, 2024). Leadership plays an important role, with various leadership styles, especially transformational leadership and self-leadership, positively influencing adaptive performance by addressing motivational and relational aspects (Bonini et al., 2024). The need for diverse forms of support, including emotional and informational support, to help employees cope with stress resulting from organizational change (Smollan, 2015). Change management interventions in several types, such as communication and support, are essential to facilitate planned organizational change (Hagl et al., 2024). The integration of employee engagement and humble leadership also contributes positively to the effectiveness of organizational change, highlighting the need for a humanistic approach that considers the psychological needs of employees (Bah et al., 2024). These studies confirm that successful change management requires not only structural strategies but also a human-centered approach that meets the psychological and relational needs of employees.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that employees' experiences in dealing with organizational change at PT XYZ involve complex emotional and adaptation processes. In the early stages, employees experience uncertainty and anxiety related to changes that affect their motivation and performance. Furthermore, personal adaptation processes supported by open communication and managerial support play an important role in helping employees adjust. In addition, some employees are able to interpret change as an opportunity for self-development, which contributes to improved performance. This study confirms that the success of employee adaptation and performance is greatly influenced by how they interpret and respond to organizational change, as well as by the role of management in supporting this process.

This study emphasizes the importance of effective and open communication during the organizational change process so that employees feel valued and understand the purpose of the change, thereby reducing anxiety and resistance. Furthermore, emotional and technical support, such as training and counseling, is essential to help employees adjust to new demands, increase their confidence, and boost their motivation. Actively involving employees in the planning and implementation of change is also an important strategy to increase their sense of ownership and commitment, which

ultimately accelerates adaptation and maintains performance. Organizations should build an adaptive and flexible culture, encouraging employees to view change as an opportunity for self-development rather than a threat. In addition, attention to the psychological aspects of employees during change, for example through stress monitoring and the provision of psychological support, is very important so that pressure does not reduce their performance. Finally, humanistic and inspirational leadership plays a vital role as an agent of change that motivates and supports employees in real terms, rather than just giving formal instructions, thereby creating a work environment conducive to the success of long-term change.

For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of the study by involving more companies from various sectors in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of employees' experiences in dealing with organizational change. The research can also use mixed methods to combine quantitative and qualitative data, thereby providing a more holistic and valid picture of the impact of change on employee performance. In addition, the focus of the research can be expanded to explore the role of other factors such as organizational culture, transformational leadership, and digital technology in influencing employee adaptation to change. Further research can also examine the long-term impact of organizational change on employees' psychological well-being and careers. Finally, it is recommended that future research delve deeper into effective change management strategies based on the employee perspective to help organizations design more targeted and humanistic interventions.

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