

**To determine how Middle Management can
be effective as a change agent**

Ray Doyle

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Abstract

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Organisational change has become one of the most important skills for businesses to learn in the current environment. However, the vast majority of them fail. The middle managers are regularly highlighted as being the principal reason for this failure, due to their inability to implement change. The purpose of this research is to determine how middle management can be effective as a change agent. It will present the challenges middle management face. It will elucidate why resistance to change may exist and provide solutions with supporting evidence on how to overcome this resistance. It will examine middle managements role is achieving success in a change initiative and uncover the subtle obstacles that prevent them from delivering change for the organisation.

A qualitative case study was performed in the telecoms industry. This industry was chosen as it has a rich history of transformation. Through the use of semi-structured interviews and reflective journals which contained participant observations, data was gathered to interrogate the middle management hurdles in the change arena.

The results indicated a lack of inclusion from the senior executives. There was poor and ineffective communication with little opportunity to influence the change strategy or provide feedback. It uncovered how company loyalty can evolve and challenges the organisation to harness it.

Middle managers perform a number of extra roles on top of their normal duties. They want change to succeed and have the most influencing effect on the workforce. They can provide key learnings and feedback to the architects of change. They need to be engaged and given the tools and support to enable them to be effective change agents. In this era of perpetual and rapid change, it is vital for businesses to implement change successfully. Their future may depend on it.

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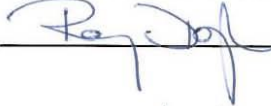
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1 - Introduction

1.1 – Rationale for the study

The rationale for this study is to specifically examine the role of middle management in the change process and understand the challenges which prevent them from being great change agents. It will attempt to discover the impact middle management has on the success factor of transformational change. There has been much research on why transformational change fails and different approaches on how to engage with middle management, but there is a lack of research on how to enable them to be effective (Huy 2001, 2002; Balogun, 2003; Mantere, 2008). There continues to be a high failure rate in change initiatives. Business can't afford to plan and resource such changes without them being successful. Middle management are essential to the success of a change programme and a better understanding is required to know if middle management are responsible for some of these failures and if so, what can be done to assist them to succeed. In order to establish answers to these questions, an analysis on existing literature will be reviewed.

The research will be based on a case study that will take place on the Irish telecoms sector, which has gone through significant change over the last number of years. This industry is a particularly dynamic one where change is constant, through company sales, acquisitions, consolidations and customer behaviours. For the purpose of this study, managers will take part in a series of in-depth interviews in order to capture their experience of working through change. With this in mind, the research aims to explore, through qualitative analysis, the experiences of middle management in a change process, and develop a set of recommendations which may be used in future change activities to improve the success rate of a change program. There have been numerous articles that espouse the importance of middle management in the change process (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990; Floyd and Lane, 2000).

This research will attempt to validate and confirm this theory. There is an expectation that the results will show that middle management will have a different perspective from senior executives, on what is considered change success and why change fails. Adaptability is the new competitive advantage suggests Reeves & Deimler (2011). Companies that identify changes in the marketplace and are able to adjust will benefit and perform better in the

longer term. They need middle management in place to drive these changes in processes, business models or strategies. Therefore it is imperative that this group within the company are effective at implementing these changes. Traditionally, businesses were encouraged to be stable, and to seek out and secure a sustainable competitive advantage, according to Worley & Lawler III (2006). Middle management was tasked with delivering a stable environment as this was thought to be effective, desirable and achievable. In fact, the financial markets rewarded companies that fell into this category (Worley & Lawler III 2006).

There are many programs, such as Six Sigma, which advocate this approach is predictability and stability. Therefore when change is required, middle management is obliged to adopt a different role. Johnson & Hartel (2014) describe what other functions middle management must now carry out. They propose that they are able to bridge the focus between the senior leadership and the rest of the company. The speed at which change can be implemented can be down to the trust between the middle management and their team. If they are effective, they can address and support team members concerns & worries and overcome some of the resistive elements. They can actually offer constructive feedback to the executives which may help in fine tuning the implementation of the change programme. This is achieved through patient, thoughtful and inclusive discussion with their own teams. Overall they are vital to the success of any change programme. Kotter (1996) stated that 70% of organisational transformations fail. He established an eight stage process to underpin a successful change. However, this process is presented in an overall approach. There still remains a knowledge gap between the implementation of that strategy and day to day activities.

Kotter (1996) articulates the need for a coalition of resources to lead the change, but doesn't develop on the challenges faced by some of these members who have to address issues every day. According to Ben Trowbridge, CEO of Alsbridge, (2011), "Whether sourcing or implementing some other major change program, middle managers can be your strongest ally or your weakest link". Dopson & Stewart (1990) suggest that middle management can be seen as obstacles to change as they feel threatened or have some vested interest in resisting change. Scase & Goffee (1989) argues that the old image of middle management of being slow to initiate or champion change is a lingering one. However, despite these perceptions, Herzog & Jimmison (2006) argue that middle

management can perform a key function as change agents. Huy (2001) states that middle management “make valuable contributions to the realization of radical change at companies--contributions that go largely unrecognized by most senior executives”. Clearly there is a requirement for middle management to be effective at delivering and implementing the new change. In spite of some legacy concerns about the performance of middle management as change agents, it is clear that if the company wants to be in contention for a successful change programme, then this group needs to be effective at executing the strategy. This area of change will benefit from further study which this piece of research to attempt to address.

1.2 – Objectives of the research

The objective of this research is to give insight into the challenges and obstacles which middle management face during a change programme. The research will endeavour to uncover if the perception of middle management being resistant to change is valid. It will explore the relationships between middle management and their teams and their relationship with senior management and executives and how they may change through the change process. It will attempt to reveal the factors which affect the middle management effectiveness in promoting and implementing change. It will look at the main sources of resistance for middle management in a change process. The findings of this study will shed light on how the type of communication delivered can impact on the ability of middle management to deliver on the change objectives. The research will also probe the role of being both the sense-maker and sense-giver in this process, leveraging off existing theory.

As middle management is the implementer of change and the recipient of change, middle managers are in a unique position to provide a better understanding of change processes and why some are successful and others fail. Additionally, the results of the study could provide guidance on how to utilise the middle management more successfully to improve the chances of further change programmes being successful. This is a powerful piece of research which can contribute to existing literature on the subject to implementing successful change. A deeper understanding of this field is required to improve knowledge to the business to enable success in future change programmes. In this paper, the author will

attempt to explore these issues through a number logical and appropriate research questions.

Main research proposition

To determine how middle management can be effective as a change agent?

Sub research questions

What level of resistance can exist in middle management and what can be done to address this?

What level of training and support does middle management need to enable them to be effective?

Describe how company culture impacts middle managers ability to affect change?

What factors affect middle management's ability to deliver change successfully?

1.3 – Dissertation structure

In chapter one, an overview of the dissertation is presented. It provides the rationale for the benefits this dissertation will deliver and why it is valuable to research this subject. It will present the research objective and associated questions that support the nature of the research.

In chapter two, an analysis of the relevant literature associated with this subject is presented. There is appropriate application and critique of relevant theories and concepts. The ways in which existing literature impact on and shape the study are considered.

Chapter three details the research methodology. It details why this approach was taken and what are the pros and cons of this approach.

Chapter four presents the analysis of the research findings.

Chapter five presents the conclusions and recommendations. This will be derived from the existing literature and accumulated knowledge through the acquired data from the interviews and further analysis.

Chapter six consists of the conclusion and recommendations.

2 - Literature Review

2.1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 introduces the key themes of the research from existing literature. The literature will present existing theories on how middle management can be effective change agents. The literature comprises of peer reviewed journals, books, popular press and academic surveys related to change management and middle managers. The literature leverages off theories and models written by noted writers on the subject, for example, John Kotter. The research targeted contemporary and recent articles and compared and contrasted them with older publications to determine how the literature may have evolved over the years. It will endeavour to highlight potential gaps in the literature and question the current validity of some of the older research, in the current business environment. It is important to examine this subject as the business environment is changing and organisations have to adapt more often. Currently the research points to a high failure rate of change initiatives, with middle management being considered the main reason for this failure. In this swiftly changing environment, firm's need to respond quickly and successfully if they are to survive, sustain and prosper. Therefore they cannot afford to be unsuccessful in their change initiatives. Organisations must learn how their key ally in change, the middle managers, can be effective. It will highlight the reasons for change failure and promote suggestions to address this.

The chapter begins with a detailed examination of the key subjects related to the research. It explains the definition of what a change agent is and what is meant by the term 'middle management'. It describes the ongoing challenges with implementing change. It articulates well supported theories of why change fails and looks to provide academic evidence on strategies to address these issues. It examines the role of internal and external change agents and seeks to present the advantages of each. The chapter then moves specifically into researching the role and behaviours of the middle manager in the change process. It explores the importance of organisational culture and its influence on change success. It looks at the perceptions others may have of middle managers in a change process, and seeks evidence to establish if this perception is valid. Finally it will present the existing literature which argues how middle management can be effective change agents.

2.2 – Theme of a change agent

In order to investigate this topic, an understanding of what a change agent is, must be established. According to Heller & Hindle (1998), a change agent is an “enthusiast for change who can pass on their enthusiasm to others”. Harsh (2011) defines it as an individual who “acts as a catalyst and assumes the responsibility for managing change activities in the organisation”. These people must display certain characteristics. Sims (2002) states they must be an effective communicator and good collaborator. They should be an idea’s person, have super listening skills and be restless in the quest for delivery of a project. These qualities can stimulate a readiness in others to adopt change. Lunenburg (2010) describes a change agent as someone who has the “skill and power to stimulate, facilitate and co-ordinate the change effort.”

Ulrich (1997) states there are three different types of change. There is cultural change, which looks to transform the behaviours and principles of a business. There is Initiative change, which is a transformation of a company’s strategy through new projects and procedures. Finally, there is process change, which is transforming the way a company does things, from an operational level. It appears from the literature, that to become an effective change agent, an individual must display an energy and willingness to embrace change in support of the initiative. This suggests that a change agent must be fully committed emotionally and engaged early in the process to feel part of the decision making phase.

Battilana & Casciaro (2013) completed research on change within the NHS (National Health Service) and arrived at some powerful insights. They promote the idea that there are two types of workplace relationships. The first one is a formal structure and the second one is an informal network. They can both co-exist successfully. They propose that an effective change agent had a central role in the informal network of an organisation. This is irrespective of their official role within the company. Battilana & Casciaro (2013) also concluded that each change scenario may lean on one group more than the other, depending on the size of the change. For example, if it is a fundamental change of strategy, with dramatic reforms, then people who bridged disconnected individuals or group had a better chance of success. In contrast, if it were a minor change then a more formal unified approach was deemed more successful. One concern noted by Battilana & Casciaro (2013)

was the possibility of the change agents being too close to resisters. They observed that this became an issue when trying to drive through large scale change.

It is important to note that a change agent is not necessarily an internal employee. Lunenburg (2010) explains that companies will regularly hire outside consultants to initiate and deliver change programmes. The advantage is that they are not constricted by the company's culture, traditions or ways of working. They can arrive with a fresh perspective and develop a strategy and framework which can challenge the existing values. The disadvantage of outside influence is that they may misinterpret these company values and alienate the workforce. There can be a misunderstanding of the company's history and the behaviours of the employees. This can lead to failure in the change programme.

There appears to be a lot of evidence that demonstrates the needs for change agents within a company. They can be internal or external. They may have dual roles, supporting the day to day activities as well as the change initiative. The different types of change may require the adoption of different strategies. We are in a new era of regular and rapid change, whether it be customer behaviours, technologies or competition challenges. The ability of companies to change swiftly and with agility could sustain and even grow the business. Adaptability could be the new competitive advantage and companies should consider designing their business that are built to change (Worley and Lawler III, 2006; Reeves and Deimler, 2011).

2.3 – Theme of middle management

Another important item to be clear on is, what is meant by middle management. Herzing & Jimmieson (2006) state that these are individuals that operates below the senior management team. These senior executives develop and lead the strategy of an organisation. The middle management adopt and operate these strategies. According to Floyd & Woodridge (1994) middle management implements the decisions taken by the company executives. They provide feedback and are a soundboard for the senior management team to gauge the temperature of the workforce. Middle management turns the executive's vision into reality. Marichal & Segers (2012) states that the role of a middle manager is one that translates a high level strategy into actionable objectives. Woodridge, Schmid & Floyd (2008) make an interesting point, by pointing to the fact it is not very

important where they are in the organisational chart. They argue what is important is that they have a unique position to access both their direct report and how to influence their actions. They also have direct access to the senior executives. This “enables them to function as mediators between the organisations strategy and the day to day activities”.

Mollick (2013) proposes that middle managers are a vital cog in the business machine. They can perform in the traditional role of task managers but they can also support and encourage innovation. Mollick (2013) adds that they act as “facilitators, nurturers and selectors of creativity”. He continued by stating they are the ones that firm’s count on to get excited about projects and motivate the team to deliver objectives. Good middle managers will have developed interpersonal relationships with their team and can manage conflict and resolve differences to mould a high performance culture.

Middle managers are defined as the group that is able to link vertical and horizontal levels (Young 1990). They can make decisions in order to achieve goals and understand and implement decision from a higher level within the business. They are able to accomplish goals through other people (Mills 2000).

In the past, middle management was not considered when planning or executing a company strategy. They had a limited informal input into the strategy shaping (Floyd and Woodridge, 1997). Mills (2000) states that middle managers typically do not create policies, but instead interpret and implement. Balogun (2003) argues that the traditional view of a middle manager has changed. They are now expected to manage change as well as the day to day, business as usual activities.

It appears from the literature, that now middle management has an active participation in the change strategy. Their role has developed over the years as the business now recognises the benefits they can bring to the process. They are considered to be key contributors to the business as they have relationships with the workforce the senior management or executives do not. This is obviously important to deliver on business as usual activities to achieve goals and targets for their teams. But it appears that it is now being recognised as an integral part of delivering a successful change programme. They are able to support the employees within their team their relationships and their empathy.

2.4 – The theme of why change fails

Kotter (1996) is considered the leading expert on this subject and published a seminal piece of work which articulates the reasons why change fails and the size of the challenge. Kotter (1996) stated eight reasons why transformational efforts fail. The first is not creating a great enough sense of urgency. The second is not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition. The third is a lack of vision. The fourth is not communication enough. The fifth is not removing obstacle to the new vision. The sixth is not planning and creating short term wins. The seventh is declaring victory too soon. The eighth is not anchoring the change in the corporate culture.

Kotter (1996) stated that 70% of change initiatives fail. This is an enormous figure. In this new era of swift changes in consumer behaviours and threats from the external environment, from new competitors for example, firms must be able to adapt quickly and regularly in order to secure sustainability & profitability. There have been many organisations who have failed to embrace change and adapt to the shifting business environment with catastrophic consequences. One notorious example is Kodak.

The Economist (2012) reported that in 1976, Kodak had 90% of film and 85% of camera sales in America. Truly it was a giant, almost a monopoly in its industry and was ranked annually as one of the world's top brands. However, the company's market share collapsed and eventually it went bankrupt, due to their failure to adjust to the introduction of digital technologies. Kotter & Heskett (1992) suggest this due to Kodak's inability to adapt to consumer's needs quickly into the digital space and away from traditional film. The Economist (2012) supports this view by adding that there was a culture of complacency. An example of which was when Fujifilm, Kodak's main competitor, secured the sponsorship of the 1984 Olympic games which were held in America. It also contends that this culture of complacency led to poor values, such as arrogance, internally focused and bureaucratic. It stifled innovation and removed initiative from its core competencies. The irony, remarks Anthony (2012), is that digital transformation had been identified by Kodak. But there was a lack of urgency within the company which resulted in an absence of focus on new opportunities and no encouragement to pursue new revenue streams. The Economist

(2012) agrees with this suggestion by quoting Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School, that the executives 'suffered from a mentality of perfect products, rather than the high tech mind set of make it, launch it, fix it'.

In contrast, at the other end of the scale of organisational change is Apple. When Steve Jobs returned to the company in 1997, he created an environment of innovation and constant change. Johnson, Christensen & Kagermann (2008) report on the back of incredible advances to business models and culture, the market capitalisation of the company grew from \$1 billion in 2003 to \$150 billion just four years later. Of course not all companies can grow at such an extraordinary rate, but it demonstrates the value of adopting a culture of reinvention and change. Worley & Lawler III (2006) contend that in this era of globalisation, change is absolutely vital for the sustainability of any business. The firm needs to be flexible, scalable, agile and adaptable to changes in the industry and needs of the customer.

Kotter and Heskett (1992) suggest organisations such as Kodak, lack inspirational leaders. These companies are unable to reach out across national borders and understand the changing environment. As a consequence, they cannot guide and inspire their companies through a period of change. In this context, Kotter (1990) distinguishes between management which produces predictability and order, and Leadership which creates new direction and organisational change. So many firms, lacking in both, need strong leadership to break the 'victims of their own success' cycle and establish a new strategic focus. Setting direction and aligning appropriate constituencies are at the heart of leadership.

Lipman (2013) reports a very interesting study performed by the Tower Watson group. It highlights three things in particular, which are very powerful in the context of this research. It gathered data from 276 large scale companies across Europe, North America and Asia. First of all, it established that the view only 25% of change management initiatives were successful over the long term. This corresponds with Kotter's original study 20 years earlier and supports the need for continued research into this subject. Clearly a failure rate of over 70% of change programmes is not acceptable.

The second point which is fascinating from the point of view of this research project is the evidence relating to training of middle management. It stated that although 87% of middle managers did receive training to support them implementing the change, only 22% of them

felt it was 'effective' training. That is a very powerful message that businesses should reflect on. It is acknowledged that the middle managers are critical to the success of any change initiative. However, if they feel they are not getting proper and effective training, then it should be addressed. Perhaps it may be a quick and relatively cheap win.

The third point is equally damning in terms of effective communication. Managers across the business were asked about their understanding of the reasons why a particular change was taking place. 68% of senior management believe they 'got the message' why the change was taking place. That is actually quite concerning, that one out of three leaders of a company are not fully aware of why change is taking place. However that figure drops to 53% of middle managers being fully briefed and have a full understanding of the rationale behind this new initiative. Middle management bridges the gap between the senior team and the workforce. They are considered to be the driving force behind the implementation of this new change. However, if only one in two of this group actually understand the strategy related to this change, it would suggest it will be difficult for the middle management to adopt and promote the change effectively.

The Kotter article presents some terrific guidelines to achieving successful change. The Kodak example provides an example of where these philosophies were not promoted. However, what is interesting from the recent Tower Watson study is that the failure rate still remains consistent with Kotter's data 20 years earlier. There must be a gap in how his guidelines are utilised, if they are used at all. The middle managers still appear alienated from the company strategy. Kotter points to developing a powerful coalition, but in the Tower Watson study, they don't appear to fall part of this coalition.

2.5 – The theme of how to prevent change failing

The key reasons why transformations fail have been established. Of course, organisations want them to succeed. In this section, the theme of preventing failures will be explored. Kotter (2007) proposes that long term survival for an organisation requires reinvention and change is the ultimate test of a leader. It is a battle for hearts and minds as change is often resisted.

Kotter released a pivotal article in 1995, called 'Leading change; why transformational efforts fail', which underpins many contemporary views on this subject (Eisenbach, Watson, Pillai; 1999. Gratz, 2000. Smith, 2005. Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, Shafiq; 2012). It is still a recommended reference and must be examined fully in the context of this research.

Kotter (1996) has provided eight steps which provide a solid fundamental guideline. The most important thing is to have a sense of urgency when implementing the change. The failure of securing this urgency is responsible for 50% of all change failures. It requires the cooperation of many individuals across the business. Leaders need to be identified and promoted to manage the change. Overall it requires buy-in from at least 75% of all management.

Kotter (1996) references the importance of creating a powerful guiding coalition. He continues by stating that it requires a large core group to drive change. He identifies that this does not have to be part of the normal hierarchy and may sometimes benefit from informal relationships, where they don't have a shared history of teamwork. Finally he states there needs to be a shared sense of the company's problems and opportunities.

Kotter (1996) identifies the benefit of having a clear vision early in the change process as a vital action for success. It is common to have a blurry vision as the start of the process, but there needs to be focus on clarifying it straight away. He continues by saying many plans and programmes have objectives, but lack vision. He states that a successful vision should be able to be communicated within five minutes.

Kotter(1996) recommends communicating frequently and powerfully to embed the message. He continues by saying hearts and minds will never be captured without credible communication. He advises to talk about it every chance you get and don't just call special meetings to inform the workforce. He states if you keep it fresh in everybody's minds that will remember it and respond accordingly. He says it is vital to demonstrate the behaviours associated with the change. The workforce responds better when they see action rather than hear words. You must be in a position to address people's concerns or worries in an open and honest manner.

Kotter (1996) recommends putting a structure in place to manage the change and regularly monitor for signs of obstacles. He recommends identifying leaders within the organisation and changing them or hiring new ones if necessary. He also believes in recognising and rewarding for making change happen. He says big obstacles should be removed early in the process, and that includes people. Review performance and compensation systems to ensure they are in line with the vision.

Kotter(1996) recommends securing some early wins to prevent critics or resisters from gaining influence amongst the rest of the team. Target projects that may not need help from these critics. He also recommends being active rather than passive in your pursuit of these goals. He believes all of this will boost credibility of the change initiative.

Kotter (1996) warns against declaring victory too soon. He says premature celebration may kill momentum. He suggests that an analysis should be performed to see what went right and what needs improving. He believes it is difficult to motivate the troops if they believe they've already won.

Kotter(1996) recommends that these changes should become anchored in the company culture. He suggests that until these beliefs and values become part of the core of the company, they are likely to degrade. He recommends regular informal discussions with the team to reinforce the new change in culture and highlight the benefits to the business. He believes that these new values should be part of any new recruitment or training initiatives. Also, he states that there should be a robust succession planning strategy to ensure that when existing leaders move on, their legacy is not lost or forgotten.

Gabarro (1987) has a very similar perspective to Kotter. He refers to five key steps that typify successful turnarounds in change situations. He suggests moving quickly to diagnose underlying causes of performance problems. He also believes that one must take initial corrective actions that deal with obvious problems before their diagnosis or strategy is complete. Create a sense of urgency which highlights an organisation's problems and communicate this sense of urgency throughout the organisation. Articulate a mission and shared purpose that mobilizes the sense of urgency they have created. Create measurable and visible successes as early in the turn-around as possible.

Kotter has continued to perform research in this subject and has published an updated version in 2012, in which he now calls accelerators to change. He has now added that “there are three main differences between those eight steps and the eight “accelerators” on which the strategy system runs: (1) The steps are often used in rigid, finite, and sequential ways, in effecting or responding to episodic change, whereas the accelerators are concurrent and always at work. (2) The steps are usually driven by a small, powerful core group, whereas the accelerators pull in as many people as possible from throughout the organization to form a “volunteer army.” (3) The steps are designed to function within a traditional hierarchy, whereas the accelerators require the flexibility and agility of a network” (Kotter, 2012).

Kotter appears to have adjusted his points to reflect that environmental changes have become faster. He recommends better agility for an organisation to be ready for change. This appears sensible as the evidence in the literature points to more rapid changes in the business environment going forward. This is very interesting as he appears to acknowledge that the business world has changed dramatically within a short period of time. Change is occurring faster and more often. He has rightly adjusted his research to reflect this.

2.6 - The theme of internal and external change agents

Lunenburg (2010) describes the differences between internal and external change agents.

External Change Agent

1. He is the outside consultant hired by any organisation.
2. He is always a professional.
3. He works for a limited period of time for any organisation.
4. Hiring external change agent is expensive.
5. External change agent only outlines the change process.
6. He primarily gives recommendations. He does not work as a linkage person.

Internal Change Agent

1. He is the inside consultant who is an employee of the organisation.
2. He is not always a professional.
3. His working period is not limited.

Internal Change Agent

4. Working with an internal change agent is economical for an organisation.
5. An internal change agent works for the implementation of the change process as well.

Kotter and Heskett (1992) suggest that few leaders of major cultural change efforts are true insiders. Most take charge with 'outsider' perspectives, characterised by broader views, greater emotional detachment and significant experiences in other firms. Gabarro (1987) found that outsider CEOs were more effective when they could couple the outsider perspective with industry expertise. However, Gabarro (1987) noted that outsider CEOs generally experience a longer time 'taking charge' processes, as they must learn a firm's culture, discern potential allies and foes and gain credibility with internal stakeholders.

It appears there may be advantages to having a certain amount of external change agents when looking to implement change. Traditionally, the internal change agents were located in the Human Resources department and it is only recently that middle managers were tasked with taking on this role (Gilley, Quantro, loekstra, Whittle; 2001).

Buono & Subbiah (2014) states that "while organizations often hire external consultants to assist them with change initiatives, the use of internal change agents also offers many advantages and benefits. Although internal change agents have been characterized as the "poor cousin" of their external counterparts, they can be a vital organizational resource through their ability to play multiple roles."

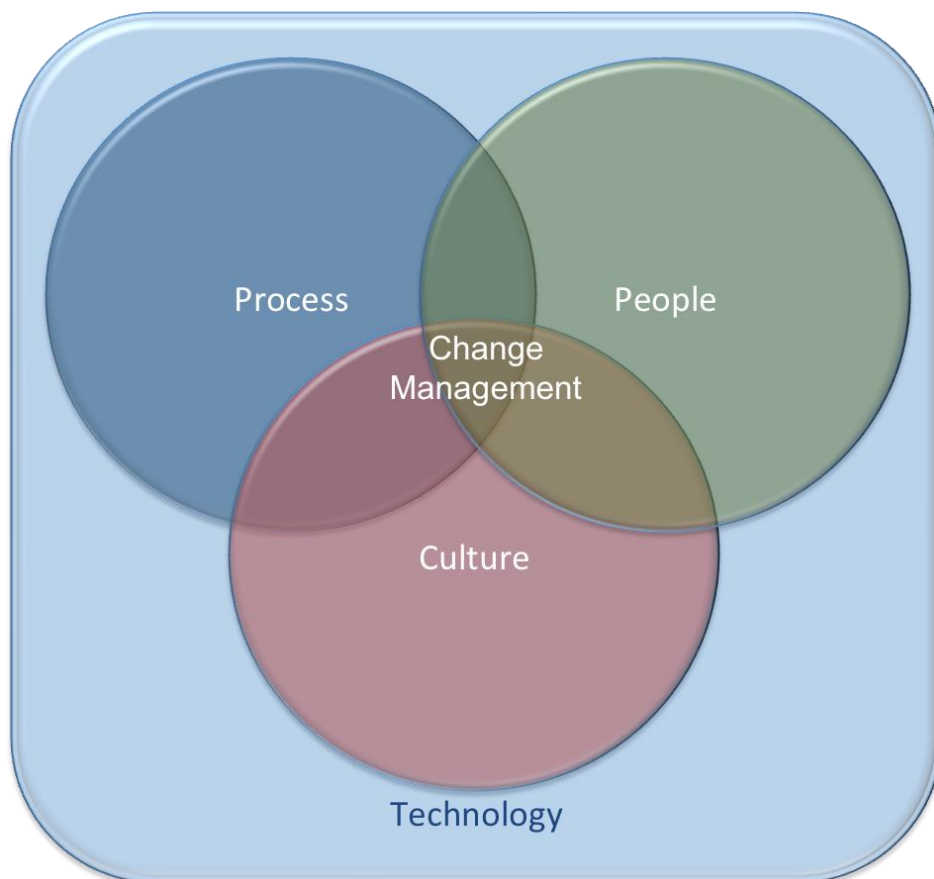
Sturdy & Wylie (2011) propose that the internal change agent can actually perform the 'insider/outsider' role. This is where they are embedded in the organisations hierarchy but they can also be detached from the operational or business as usual duties. It may sound like a paradox, but Sturdy & Wylie (2011) suggests that this dual status can allow them to be seen as more objective and able to implement the change policies easier, as they are viewed with having a broader sense of the organisation.

From the literature, it appears valuable contributions can be made by both the internal and external agent. The literature points to early engagement of external agents to assist in

shaping the change initiative. It also proposes that the internal agents play a vital role in securing success of the change programme.

2.7 – The theme of how culture affects the change process

Organizational culture refers to the philosophies, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and practices that define an organization (Schein 2010). Every organization develops and maintains a unique culture, which provides guidelines and boundaries for the behaviour of the members of the organization. Therefore it is essential that the culture supports the strategy of a company. It is the culture of the workplace which actually motivates the employees to perform.



It's easy to look at companies like Ryanair, Apple, Google, Virgin, Disney, or Nike and admire them for their passionate, engaged, and active cultures that are on display for the world to see. Building a strong culture takes hard work and true commitment. Any time there are negative attitudes or behaviours taking place in a business, they can have a disheartening

effect on the workforce and can even reduce productivity. A discouraging culture is one in which the workforce can feel unappreciated or unfairly treated, or where there is no robust or defined performance related culture. A workplace culture in which workers are uncertain of the stability of a firm can create a sense of insecurity, which can also lead to discouraged employees (McQuerry 2015).

Wilder (2014) believes that the reason change can fail, is that the culture of the organisation does not align with the change initiative. He says managers understand the importance of culture on the day to day activities, but neglect to include it in implementing a new change programme.

The approach to take to react to the pace of globalisation and changing consumer behaviours is to create a culture of constant change (Worley & Lawler III, 2006). The ability to benefit from 'second order' organisational capabilities, such as learning how to do new things well or understanding and adapting to the change in market conditions is the new sustainable competitive advantage (Reeves & Deimler 2011).

Middle managers are viewed by their team as being the very representation of the organisations culture, in the sense that their actions and behaviours are the barometer of the culture (Hartel et al 2013). This is a very powerful message. It suggests that if the organisations culture is not well anchored throughout all the management team, it may be a cause for failure.

The literature highlights the importance of culture on an organisation. It suggests that 'static' strategies are not the answer to delivering an effective change. There needs to be a flexibility and adaptability in the culture of a modern company. The view that the legacy culture has always worked is outdated and redundant. There should be constant focus to ensure that the culture does not restrict the company's ability to respond to market changes. Middle managers are the face of the company culture to their teams and must always demonstrate the values associated with the culture.

2.8 – The theme of why change may be resisted.

Large scale and unexpected change can deliver a shock to the workforce. Even after the initial shock, there can be further aftershocks. If the company is not used to change, this

change can feel like a build-up of Teutonic pressure, which eventually explodes (Burnes, 2004). The absence of small continual change may harm the success of a larger change. Although change will no discernible value or benefit can create unnecessary fatigue (Victor & Stephens, 1994).

Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) outline several reasons why stakeholders resist change and how communication efforts may counteract that resistance. People resist because of: Misunderstanding and lack of trust – the implications of the new direction are poorly understood, leading to perceptions that the new vision is irrelevant or damaging. Parochial Self-Interest – employees may believe they will lose something of value if they follow the new direction. This often results when what is in the best interests of one group is not in the best interests of the whole organisation. Differing Assessment – stakeholders may interpret information differently than the leaders of change effort. For example, organisational staff members who did not experience an ‘aggravated’ period, may be less likely to feel urgency. Low Tolerance of Change – Some stakeholders may worry that to go along with the change would be an admission that some of their previous decisions were wrong.

Paterson & Hartel (2002) advise that poor communication can contribute to resistance to change. If there are no adequate processes to receive communication timely and consistently, it can add to anxiety and introduce insecurity. It can decrease employee trust and support in the management. In contrast, Paterson & Hatel (2002) proposes that when communication is delivered with empathy and processes are open and trustworthy, it increases the likelihood of acceptance of the change.

Probst & Raisch (2005) argue that “push-back is frequently seen to be a problem rather than a source of valuable feedback that can be harnessed to fine-tune the implementation of change.” This is a powerful message. Human nature will naturally react to something with suspicion if they don’t fully understand it. Forcing change on people without clear and articulate reasoning along with inadequate communication introduces resistance. Probst & Raisch (2005) state that such poorly managed change initiatives can actually create organisational instability and crises.

2.9 - Perceptions of middle management in the change process

Now that the fundamental items of this proposal have been defined, it is important to examine the differing views towards middle management in a change process. Newton (2013) believes that traditionally middle management was perceived to be a major problem in change management. They were unable or unwilling to share the vision as presented by the executives and wanted to protect their 'turf'. According to a survey organised by the Lean Management Institute (LMI) in 2007, the resistance of middle management was the number one obstacle in implementing change. "The top three obstacles to implementation were middle management resistance (36.1 percent), lack of implementation know-how (31 percent) and employee resistance (27.7 percent)". Moore (2012) concurs with this view. She states that while executives sponsor the transformational changes and workers can be open to system changes, it is most often the middle management who worries most about these changes. They can be afraid of losing power or authority, having their role reduce in size or lose their job altogether. This can cause a negative impact across the whole business. Samuel (2010) contends middle management are seen as "Feeding territorial competition. Stifling information flow. Not developing or preparing employees for change. Unwilling to take initiatives as their contribution to improvement. Threatened by continuous improvement efforts". He believes these characteristics threaten the success of any change programme.

In contrast, Huy (2001) argues that middle managers can have innovative ideas and approaches to change. He also believes they have better formal and informal networks which can assist in implementing change. They have a high emotional intelligence towards their team and know how to motivate them through this time. Finally, they are able to manage between the chaos that can develop during an unstable period. Kanter (1982) proposes that middle management can provide an environment of trust in which fears can be openly discussed and through this transparency, difficult changes within an organisation may be easier to implement. Wai-Kwong (2001) argues that they have a unique place in the organisational structure, where they are able to integrate the new transformational changes alongside operational activities.

Regular organisational change has led to significant adjustment of the duties and behaviours of middle managers. Organisations are now being shaped to have flatter structures. The result is that middle managers are more than ever, having to behave like “risk-taking entrepreneurs” and to attempt to put measurement tools in place to understand the efficiency and effectiveness of the change (Dopson & Stewart, 2001).

2.10 – The paradox of middle management in the change process

There appears to be a paradox. On the one hand, many commentators suggest that middle management is an obstacle to change. However, there are also as many papers which highlight the crucial role middle management play in the change process. Trowbridge (2011) concurs with this view. He says that a “recent benchmarking study revealed that middle managers play several key roles that contribute to an organization’s success including: communicator, advocate, coach, liaison and change manager. However, the irony is that these same managers were also cited as the most resistant group to change. If middle management resists a change, their direct reports will follow, causing resistance to take on a viral quality as it spreads throughout the enterprise”. According to McKinney, McMahon & Walsh (2013), the paradox is although the importance of middle management has grown over the years, their own fear about the safety of their roles has grown too. They are considered the driving force behind operational functions as well as change responsibilities, but their lack of career opportunities due to company restructuring, absence of appropriate training and almost perpetual job insecurity had led to a reduction in morale, erosion of company loyalty and becoming disenfranchised from the firm. Prosci (2012) argues “Middle managers are crucial allies in times of change. They are the closest to the employees who are impacted by the change. A manager who is equipped to be a great change leader can positively influence the speed at which employees adopt the change, the amount of employees who buy into the change, and how proficient employees are in performing in their new roles. On the other hand, if a manager has not been provided with the tools and resources needed to become a great change leader, speed of adoption, ultimate utilization and proficiency will suffer, therefore directly compromising business objectives and ROI. It is undeniable that middle managers play a valuable role in the overall success of change initiatives”.

The Australian Institute of Management (2014) conducted research on the role of middle managers in a change programme. It concluded that senior managers viewed that middle managers lacked staff performance skills, leadership and the ability to influence and motivate other managers. What was striking about this research was the difference in perception. 64% of senior managers felt middle managers were below average in terms of leadership and influencing skill. However only 27% of middle managers felt they were below average in these competencies.

Stoker (2006) argues that middle managers see themselves as 'considerate' leaders. They focus more on the people affected rather than the company strategy. They do this through soft skills such as empathy and support. He continued by saying that this leadership style correlates to employee satisfaction and job commitment and suffer less burnout. Huy (2002) agrees by stating that the efforts made by middle management to support and empathise with the workforce does contribute to change initiative being successful.

2.11 – Middle management influence on change success

Tabrizi (2013) conducted a study on 56 randomly selected companies who have participated in transformational change. They were from a wide range of industries, including banking, automotive, retail, technology, pharmaceutical and insurance. Interestingly, 68% of these transformations failed, which corresponds with Kotter's original study (70% failed in his study). He discovered that middle management were the second most powerful influence on change success, after senior executives. He determined that on the successful changes, the middle management served as "levers of change, influencing those above and those below them in the corporate hierarchy". He argues that there were three underlying reasons that this group were able to support and deliver on the change initiatives. They were able to understand how the overall strategy aligned with their own personal and professional goals. The company was able to remove the departmental silos and encouraged cross border support amongst the middle management group. Finally, they were able to ensure "direct participation and authorship of individual contributors".

In contrast, in the change programs that failed, Tabrizi (2013) states the middle management were not able to be persuading change agents as they spent 60% of their time merely "devoted to sheer corporate survival". In fear of their job, they looked to gain favour

with their own managers, rather than perform their own roles. They were reluctant to take control of decisions, in dread of making a mistake and actually looked to blame others in order to be looked upon in a more favourable light. At the same time, they felt alienated by the senior executives and thought they were using them as tactical tools. Lawrence, Ruppel & Tworedger (2014) argues that management is not simply a rational set of activities. They conducted a study which determined that emotive feeling must not be suppressed and must be expressed. Middle managers experience large levels of emotional feeling. Without consistent support and training, to help them acknowledge and understand these feelings, the likelihood of transformational success diminishes. Ruppel & Tworedger (2014) also argue that there are sometimes opposite views in terms of how a major change is regarded. Middle managers look upon it as a process they and their team must go through. Executives consider it more of an objective or event which must be delivered at all costs. This differing view can create communication issues and resistance as a consequence.

2.12 – How to turn middle management into Change agents

Samuel (2010) proposes the belief that there are five steps to turn middle management into effective change agents. The first step is to empower them to make the changes necessary to support the overall transformation strategy, without fear for their jobs. Secondly he says to allow them to shape the larger strategy. It will be their vision that underpins the firm's transformational targets. Thirdly, bond the group together. This means breaking down inter departmental barriers and creating a shared goal, through interlocking accountability. This is where one manager's success is dependent on them supporting other manager's objectives and ultimately their success too. Fourthly, allow the middle management to choose their own projects in support of the change objective. This will give them further ownership and measurable ability. Finally, encourage succession planning. Include this as part of their own success and they will feel less threatened.

Trowbridge (2011) agrees with this analysis, "First, bring middle management into the conversation by enlisting their vast operational knowledge of the organization. Second, convey your value and trust in them. And third, set expectations and keep them well

informed about the change. Middle managers will serve as your messengers and ambassadors and influence other viewpoints within the organization.”

Regular and effective communication is crucial to enable middle managers drive through change. Wanous et al (2000) argues that as middle managers are communication receivers as well as givers, if they receive poor quality or insufficient information themselves, it can introduce problems such as cynicism and mistrust. Bordia et al (2004) agrees with this by stating that a lack of clear communication from the top can create a culture of rumour and negativity.

The findings of the Australian Institute of Management (2014) research on this topic promote early inclusion of the middle management in the shaping of the change initiative. It argues that communication from the senior level must ensure that the middle management feel valued and appreciated. It suggests introducing contextualised training on an ongoing basis throughout the change programme.

Ewenstein et al (2015) promote using digital technologies to support middle management in the change programme. They suggest utilising five areas that can enable change efforts be more effective and efficient. Provide just in time feedback – it give the middle managers the opportunity to adjust their behaviour and observe the results immediately. Personalise the experience – make information available that is unique to the user. This can assist the middle manager with understanding their contribution to the change initiative. Sidestep hierarchy – enable easier connections across the business which aligns with the earlier literature from Battilana & Casciaro (2013) who promoted non-linear structures to achieving success in change programmes. Build empathy, community and shared purpose – by providing clear information relating to tasks, it can create and sustain a team spirit within the group. Demonstrate progress – This can help the middle managers guide their team throughout the change process by providing real time view on progress.

It appears in the literature that there is a consistent view that middle managers are not trained to support major change. Perhaps their attempt to implement change is viewed by executives as a failure due to not supporting the transformation, rather than a lack of training and support. A report published by Tower Watson in 2012 found that companies that practiced effective change management are six times more likely to report that their

managers are equipped to assist their teams in adopting change. The use of utilising new technologies is an interesting one, which may benefit from reviewing success with early adopters. The lack of clarity and understanding of the reasons behind the change initiative are constant challenges for the middle manager, but the use of digital technologies may assist them in success.

2.13 – Summary of the literature

What appears to be a prominent theme throughout the literature is effective and regular communication between the organisation and the middle management is needed in order for them to fully support the change initiative and become an effective change agent. There appears to be a disconnection between senior executives and middle management on engagement. Senior executive make a strategic decision with the benefit of the company in mind. However, in examples where change has failed, they don't seem to have addressed the concerns of the group that they need to implement the change .. the middle management !

There is a feeling of isolation and mistrust between the two groups. The middle management become reactive and adopt a defensive approach to the change initiative, fearing for their own job safety. This can be a fatal mistake in the success of the change. As per Kotter (1996), there needs to be guiding coalitions that can make change happen. There needs to be trust and a common goal between the parties. Kotter (1996) states the plan must be "sensible to the head and appealing to the heart".

There appears to be an increase in change initiative as a result of the changing business environment, globalisation and consumer behaviours. The middle managers appear to be asked to take on more responsibility without the opportunity to influence what change may be taking place. It raises the question of whether senior management really view them as a key ally or a nuisance. They are expected to fully support the transformational programme without receiving vital continuous communication. There doesn't appear to be encouragement to provide feedback, which may also contribute to resistance.

There appears to be a lack of effective training. The middle management group are expected to bring their teams through the change, but for some of them, they may not have the experience or skills to manage this effectively. Even some of the training they do receive is suggested to be ineffectual.

There appears to be a lack of understanding of people in organisations, even with a lot of literature that promote the importance of middle managers. If there is mistrust between the groups in the business, the strategy is more likely to fail, no matter how good the change might be for the company. This would include the commentary around the soft skills required to deliver change. It appears there is a perception from middle managers that a transformational change is viewed by the senior management as an event. However, the middle managers look upon it as a mental, physical and emotional process. The senior leadership can either support it or ignore it, but this approach will have significant consequences on the likelihood of success.

The literature leads to hypotheses that there is not appropriate support in the form of training, leadership and inclusion with the middle managers from the senior executives. There appears there can be a breakdown in communication between these two groups which may breed resistance.

3 – Research Methodology

3.1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the different methodologies considered by the author. It will explore the advantages and disadvantages of each in relation to this research topic. It will describe how the question was investigated and why one particular method and technique was used. It will provide the rationale for selecting the chosen sample. It will present details about the how the data was collected and what was the research instrument. It will explain how the data was treated and advises on the ethical consideration with the data secured. It will also explain the limitations of the research methodology.

3.2 – Selection of methodology

Research is undertaken to further understand and increase the knowledge of a subject. It is done through a robust and systematic way (Samuel et al, 2008). However, the methodology is not just the theory of how to collect the data for the research, but also includes the “theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods applied.”(Samuel et al, 2008).

In order to understand the reason why the author chose one specific method, it is important to understand a brief summary of each of the methodologies considered. The research took into consideration the underlying philosophy of the way the author views the world.

3.2.1 – Research Philosophy

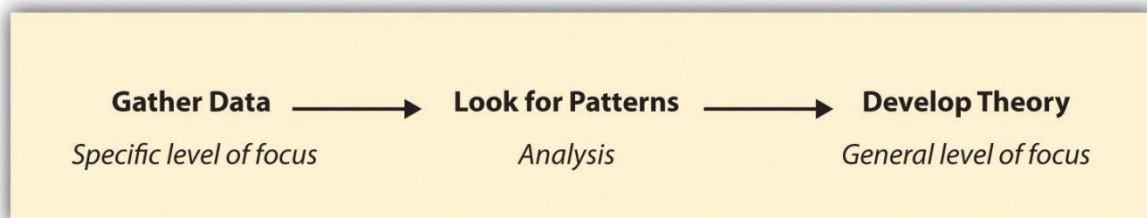
There are two aspects of research philosophy; Ontology and Epistemology. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and is either considered with the perception (subjectivism) or objective (objectivism) of what is the social construct (Bryman, 2008: 19). Epistemology is concerned with what is accepted as propositional knowledge in a particular field of study (Klein, 2005). It is split into two categories. Positivism, which considered only measureable knowledge as valid and Interpretivism, which focuses the subjective meaning of social action. The author chose the approach of subjectivism. Demirderick (2010) describes subjectivism in case studies as “a source of methodological strength and reflexivity and contributes to the building of theory itself”. Ratner (2002) notes that the

utilisation of subjectivism, can prompt answers to clarify psychological positions within the interviewee.

3.2.2 – Research approach

There are two approaches to research. Deductive and inductive theory. Gabriel (2013) describes the difference as inductive looks to generate new theories from research data, while deductive aims to test and validate existing theories. Saunders et al (2009) states that deductive emphasises the scientific element and moves from theory to data. It is a highly structured approach. Inductive attempts to secure an understanding of peoples experiences and is more flexible in terms of structure. The author decided to take an inductive approach as it was considered more appropriate to the research. The objective is not to evaluate existing theory but gather the data and extrapolate key themes which may be added to existing theory. The author wants a loose approach to the research as it can uncover unexpected data which may be more difficult to mine in a structured style.

Inductive approach



3.2.3 – Research measurement

There are two measurement approaches, Quantitative and Qualitative. Shaya'a Othman (2011) explains the differences between the two approached. He states that the purpose of quantitative is to test hypotheses through a measure and test approach. Data collection is in a structured manner and the results are objective. He argues that large samples are required to produce results. He states the purpose of qualitative is to discover new ideas or theories though observing and interpreting. Data collection is in an unstructured manner and the results are subjective. He argues that smaller samples are appropriate, which often

take place in an intimate setting. The author decided to take a qualitative approach as it was felt there was existing research on the subject through quantitative methods (Australian Institute of Management, 2014; Tower Watson, 2012). The author felt this research could contribute more to the existing data through a more in depth interview based examination. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) believe that a qualitative approach is the better approach to capture and interrogate non standardised information. Merriam (2009) agrees by stating that it is the ideal approach to secure and analyse data based on knowledge and experience. Yin (2012) also supports this approach as he believes it is the best method when the research is trying to uncover why something happened, how it happened and what was driving the change.

3.2.4 – Rationale for Case Study

The author decided to use a case study method to extract the required information. Rowley (2002) states that although some believe that case studies lacks objectivity and rigour, she argues that they can offer insights into why and how things happen that other approaches are unable to achieve. Eisenhardt (1989: 548) believes that case studies are “particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, whilst the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge.” Yin (2012) argues that this research requires fewer participants than surveys but the knowledge may be richer.

3.3 – Sample

3.3.1 - Rationale for chosen industry

The author targeted the telecoms industry as the backdrop to the research. The Irish mobile telecoms industry is just 20 years old, yet has seen a tremendous amount of change within that period. There have been operator acquisitions, such as BT purchasing Esat Digifone. Telefonica have purchased O2. Three have acquired O2 from Telefonica. Vodafone acquired Eircell. Eircom purchased Meteor. There has been the advancement of technology from analogue to digital and the evolution from 1G (1st generation) to 4G (4th generation). There

has been significant network consolidation between the operators. O2 and Meteor commenced a network share agreement. Three agreed a similar arrangement with Vodafone. As a consequence of the acquisition of O2, Three then entered with an agreement with Eircom. Thirdly, there has been a continuous renewal of equipment vendors that support the technology transformation. Finally, there has been a significant change in customer behaviours, particularly with the online applications and focus on broadband availability. All telecom organisations have had to adapt and change to secure sustainability. In summary, this industry is dynamic in nature and has a rich history of change.

3.3.2 - Sampling selection

Saunders et al (2009) describe that the best sample represents the group most likely to deliver telling insights on the research subject.

A sample of 8 individuals in middle management positions was chosen. Since the telecoms industry is relatively small, this was in essence a convenience sample. However there was an element of a judgement approach, which is a non-probabilistic method, as there were efforts to secure availability with managers from across the spectrum of operators, vendors and third party contractors. This ensured the participants had a wide range of experiences, management backgrounds and political relationships. Marshall (1996) explains that sampling has to “take into account not only the individuals characteristics but also temporal, spatial and situational influences.” The advantage of this approach was the access to the selected individuals and the ease at which the interview could be arranged.

3.3.3 – Selection criteria

The criteria used to select the individuals were very simple. The author didn't consider it necessary that the individuals had a certain academic background or specific bias related to the literature. The aim was to obtain a rich level of feedback and data from the main theme of the research, the experience of middle managers in the change environment. The criteria were as follows;

- Must have a minimum of 10 years' experience as a middle manager
- Must have a minimum of 10 years' experience within the telecom industry

3.3.4 – Process for recruitment of participants

In order to access the required individuals, an early engagement was arranged with each of the intended participants. Initially, a brief informal discussion took place to establish the interest and availability of the people. 10 individuals were requested to take part. All of them responded positively. The author decided to organise each of the interviews within a two week period. This was planned in this manner, as it was felt this would add to the richness of the interviews, though subtle adjustments in the interview process which may not have been possible if the interview were spread over a longer period of time. Formal emails were sent to confirm the appointment. All 10 accepted the invite. However, 2 subsequently had to be excused through illness and an unexpected leave of absence. Therefore 8 personnel became the contributors to the research. It was felt that these 8 individuals were representative of middle management in the telecoms industry. But also, it was felt there were representative of middle managers within any industry.

At the interview stage, all contributors were given a detailed breakdown on the subject of the research. They were advised that the interview would be recorded and later transcribed. They were informed that their interview would be anonymous and their answers would be treated with strict confidence. They were offered a copy of the transcript, of which one of them accepted. One interviewee also asked for the questions in advance. The author declined to give formal written questions, as it was felt it might cause deviation from the consistency of the other contributor's answers. However, the author did provide further oral explanation to insure this individual fully understood the context and reasons for this research. A meeting room was booked for one hour. The author had access to the participant's diary and could therefore plan an appropriate time. The interviews all took place between August 4th and August 14th 2015. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked whether they would like to ask the interview anything or add a contribution which the line of questioning failed to raise.

3.4 – Data collection

3.4.1 – Selection of research instrument

As mentioned in 3.2.3 the author decided to adopt the qualitative approach. There are a number of ways to utilise this method. It can range from ethnography, focus groups, action research, case studies or language based enquiries. For the purpose of this research, the author selected the case study approach through semi structured interviews. Gweyi (2014) advises that the advantages of the interview approach are that there is an opportunity probe and interrogate a specific point during the interview. It also enables clarity in responses while allowing descriptions to become rich in detail. It provides a super platform for thorough examination of theories and experiences. There is generally a high rate of acceptance from requested participants. However, Gweyi (2014) does highlight that there may be a bias in the response if the interviewee is concerned with the sensitivity of the questions. Also, if the interviewer is inexperienced, it may result in leading questions, which again may cause bias in the answers. Patton (1990) argues that semi structured interviews enables the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic being investigated. Saunders et al (2009) believes that these types of interviews allow a more open and honest discussion as long as the interviewer is able to guide the contributor through the themes of the research. The aim of this research is to uncover the reasons why middle management struggle to manage change effectively and the case study through semi structured interviews provide a clever instrument to achieve this.

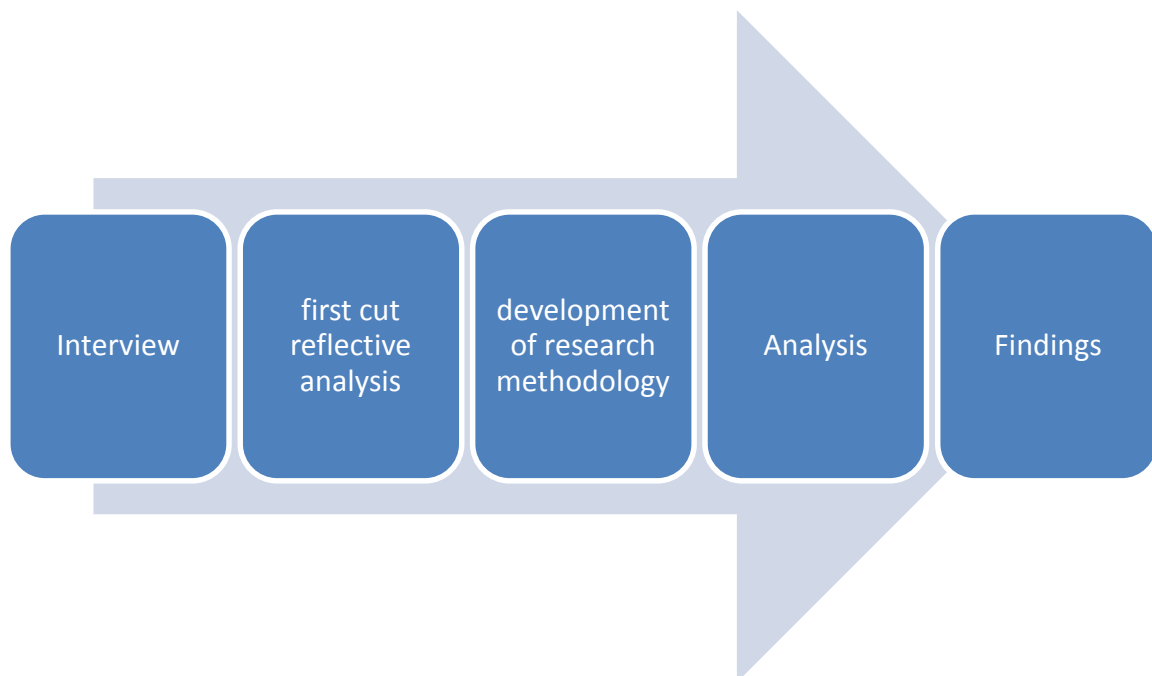
3.4.2 – Evolution of interview technique

The literature shaped the nature of the fundamental questions of this research. However, there was a need to have a pilot interview in order to test and refine the structure of the questions. Saunders et al (2009) concurs with this approach as he states once the questions have been adjusted correctly, it will enable the contributors to give full and informative answers to the questions. The author was conscious of not using leading or closed questioning and as such engaged with a pilot interview to test the technique. This was useful in terms of having a suitable set of questions. But, as the interviews were semi structured, there were further adjustments to the questions after each interview. The tone and sequential questioning tried to remain consistent to preclude any unintentional bias on the part of the researcher. However, this was not always possible as the interviewer wanted to allow the interviewee scope to explain their experiences in their own style and manner. The order of the questions changed with each interview, as each experiences narrated by

the contributor would lead to themes specific to the individual. The questions became more of a prompt to explore these themes rather than limited questioning.

3.5 – Data analysis

The author decided to develop a specific approach to analyse the data. The inductive and subjectivist position of the author required important and immediate reflective analysis of the interviews. Therefore straight after each interview, the author developed a reflective journal to capture vital emotive and sensory feelings that were displayed during the interview process. These notes included the reactions of the interviewee to particular lines of questioning, as well as impassioned recollection of their own experiences.

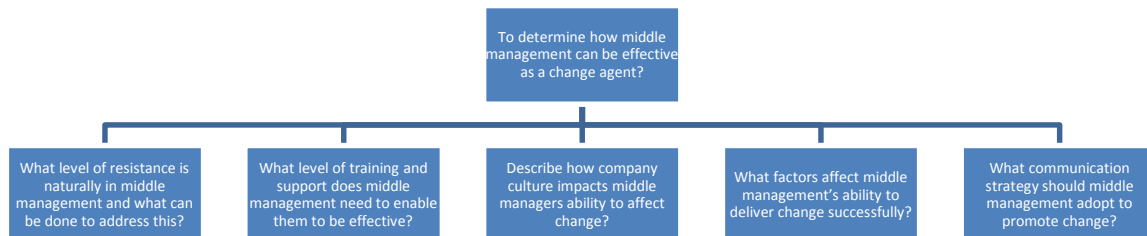


This first cut reflective analysis then helped shape the development of the methodology. Some questions were tweaked as a consequence of answers received throughout the interview process. Subsequently, final analysis was completed which led to establishing the findings of the research.

Each interview was recorded. They were later transcribed. The notes taken as part of the reflective journal were then corroborated with the recorded interviews to cultivate richer learnings.

The author designed the analysis under a themed approach, with reference to the main research question, “To determine how middle management can be effective as a change

agent?” It also shaped the analysis with reference to the sub-questions which enabled a more defined structure in the findings. The themes established should make a contribution to the main question raised by this research as well as the sub questions.



Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the phases of thematic analysis as initially becoming familiar with the data obtained. Then code thought-provoking features of the information generated. Identify themes running through the data. Reference these themes back to themes determined in existing literature. Adjust and refine these themes in relation to the research. Finally, deliver the research report.

3.6 – Ethics

The research conducted was performed under strict confidence. Each participant was briefed about the nature of the research and advised that nobody’s name would be mentioned in the report. Also, it was made clear that, even though the telecoms industry provided the backdrop to the research, no mention of explicit companies would be requested. Throughout the interview process, specific organisations were referred to by the contributors, but their names were deleted from the findings. This approach was greeted positively by the interviewees and contributed to fuller, more honest answers from the individuals. Each participant was offered a copy of their own transcribed conversation, post interview. This was also greeted favourably, although only one person took up the offer. Trust between the interviewer and interviewee is fundamental to the process and had to be maintained through respect and professionalism by all parties. A semi structured interview

relies on the honesty of the people involved to share their thoughts and feelings on a subject which would normally be very private. Each individual had a unique and valuable contribution to make and was reassured that this was of utmost importance to the author.

3.7 – Limitations

The limitations of this research were that it had to be submitted by September 2nd 2015. The maximum word count was 20,000 words. The availability of the interviewees meant that they all took place in an office environment, which may have influenced their answers. The interviewer had limited experience in conducting academic research interviews, which may have impacted the richness of the research.

4 – Findings

4.1 – Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the themes running through the interview research. Each of these themes will provide underlying data which will endeavour to develop an understanding as to why middle management may not be effective as change agents. It will point to areas where organisations should look to review and reflect on their strategies. It will provide data that will inform businesses where they may need to re-examine their approach to change. It will list reasons why change failure still exists and promotes behaviour that may enable middle managers to be more effective in their role as change agents.

4.2 – Success rate of change initiatives

There was an interesting perspective from the middle managers view on the rate of success. The majority of the interviewees believed that the rate of success was between 25%-40%. This aligns with the studies of Kotter (1995). However, since that research was conducted 20 years ago, it is perhaps disappointing that the rate of success is still considered to be this low. There were two middle managers interviewed who were more positive and thought the figure was between 60%-70%. Interestingly, these were the two most senior middle managers interviewed. It is unclear from the research if this was a coincidence but there is evidence to suggest that their experiences differed from the remainder of the participants.

4.3 – Middle managers perceptions of why change fails.

There were a number of consistent views from all the middle managers as to why change can fail. Principally, there was a view that the change initiatives were poorly planned. The suggestion put forward by the middle managers is that there is just not enough planning considered and some believe that they are making it up as they go along. This is a serious indictment of the perception of the senior executive's ability. It leads to resistance from the middle managers as they lose confidence in the message. One contributor compared the executives planning to "move around the deck chairs while the Titanic is sinking". That is an unfair analogy but it demonstrates the feeling a poorly planned change programme can generate.

The issue of poor communication was prevalent in all interviews. This may not be a surprise as it is always highlighted to improve communications. There was frustration with irregular communications and the quality of them. However, what was significant was the each of the interviewees raised the issue of not being able to provide feedback. On the occasion where constructive feedback was not entertained or encouraged, it introduced resistance to the middle management group. It was also mentioned that not all executives were effective communicators and this added to frustration if the message was unclear. This is a powerful

message, considering that Lipman (2013) referred to the impact of poor communication in section 2.4, citing that only 53% of the middle managers understood the message from the executives. The contributors can feel lost without clear communication.

There is a perception that executives are not involved in the implementation and don't want to hear about the challenges associated. This perceived lack of consideration for the middle managers introduces mistrust and impacts of the performance of the middle managers. There is a view that there are a lot of quick fixes and "band-aids". There is a feeling that there has only been a change and "we are entering a new initiative without fully closing out the previous one". This introduces the view that perhaps the previous change was a failure and adds to the negative view.

The reasons for the change are not always understood by the middle management. It appears that the middle managers are rarely involved early in the process and this introduces uncertainty. The fact that the middle managers are not encouraged to provide feedback turns this uncertainty into resistance. The benefits espoused by the executives can be a bit "wooly" and this can create a level of cynicism, if the middle managers don't believe in the strategy.

There appears to be a strong view about a lack of overall support to the middle manager from the executives and HR. They feel the executives don't take the time and effort to engage with them. This perceived insufficient support introduces a lack of authority given to the middle managers. The executives are also accused of not handling poor performers and actually accepting these poor performers. There appears to be the view that the business doesn't always have an accountable change owner and an absence of HR during the change period.

4.4 – Training

There were a lot of different experiences with regards to training. Most middle managers received some type of training. Some of the contributors advised they didn't understand the change process until it was shared with them during some of the training sessions. Some of them received specific change management courses, which were interactive and hypothetical. These were found to be beneficial. However, they must be catered towards the relative change. Other training included an introduction to the change cycle and how to understand emotions. There was also legal training which was felt to be helpful. There was also middle manager workshops developed to assist in the training. These were felt to be useful.

Some contributors had to do their own training as there was nothing facilitated. There was again a concern raised about the lack of HR support in this area. After enquiring about the possibility of receiving training, they were informed that it is up to the managers to manage.

There were a number of suggestions made by the contributors. These included the idea that all middle managers should receive formal training and formal support. This can either come from HR or an external change agent. There was a request that each middle manager should be equipped with soft skill and each of them should be coach if required. There was also the suggestion that the training could be extended to all people in the organisation to assist the middle managers in implementing the change initiative.

4.5 – Communications

Only about 50% of communications is fully understood by the middle management. They find the lack of clarity frustrating and they regularly seek out further explanation. These queries are not always received well, which adds to the frustration and creates resistance. The middle managers are perceived as part of the management team, by their own team, and being unable to describe the reasons for the change can create a sense of helplessness which in turn leads to anger and resentment. They middle management advises they have never seen a formal communications process. The process itself appears ad-hoc and there are very limited opportunities to provide feedback. On the occasions where they were able to give feedback, it really helped. They also said that they rarely received any extra communications, more than the general workforce. This can put them at a disadvantage when trying to help their teams through the change. They feel they don't receive enough data or slides to support their own understanding.

They suggest receiving lots of communications as not everybody gets the message immediately. They feel that communications is actually getting worse. There is a lack of appetite to drive the change if the message is unclear. What is also a concern to the middle managers is that the executives don't want to engage with any discussions and regularly give the ultimatum "there's the door". This is appalling behaviour, which not surprisingly breeds mistrust, which corresponds with Paterson and Hartel (2002) view in the literature.

There is rarely ever any communications post change initiative. The middle managers don't know if the previous project was a success or not. This creates resistance as the middle managers are unable to support their own team and answer their questions. They don't know if they performed well during the change process and are unsure if they need to adjust their own soft skills or leadership skills in future change programmes.

They viewed regular communications as being the best approach for delivering success in a change project. They advise that good communications is varied. It should be a combination of townhall meeting, regular emails, 1-1 meeting with individuals and attendance at team meetings if required. The local communication should be at least once a week, whereas global communication can be fortnightly. There has to be interaction between the executives and the middle management. Group emails on their own could lead to a failure in the message getting out as some people believe that "someone else will tell me". Silence is the worst thing the business can do. This can lead to rumour and can lead to resistance.

4.6 – Change planning and objectives.

Only 50% of the middle managers understand the reasons and objectives for any change programme. There is a perception the plan is done “on the fly”. The change appears to just plug the gaps and there is a belief amongst the middle managers that it is a lot of “seat of your pants stuff”. They think there is a lot of poorly thought through ideas. They think the executives just see something, have an idea and just do it, without spending time examining the benefits and consequences. There is even a suggestion that these ideas are formulated on a Sunday afternoon, as the executives are too busy during working hours to spend time planning the change initiative. This is their perception and may not be true, but it is what they perceive to be true and affects the confidence the middle managers have for the executives.

The consequence of poorly thought out ideas leads to further change programmes, believes some of the middle management. It can create a confusion of roles and sometimes the roles are often undefined which can lead to further resistance. The belief is change is implemented too quick and timelines which are too aggressive are generally unsuccessful. Change must be managed in a controlled manner. A scope document was suggested to give confidence to the middle managers. It would demonstrate this was a well thought out plan.

4.7 – Fragmented coalition of management group

What is becoming apparent is that there is lack of a coalition between the various management teams. This can have a devastating effect on the success of a change programme. There is a suggestion that the executives are condescending to the middle managers, the executives don't give the middle managers time to plan the implementation of the change and don't follow up after announcing the plan. Generally they don't encourage feedback and there is a lack of consideration given to middle managers' ideas. The middle managers feel disenfranchised and lose passion and engagement with the plan.

It depends on who the executive is, as to whether you can give feedback, but the overwhelming feeling from the middle managers is that feedback is looked upon as a “dissenting voice”. The irony is that all the middle managers interviewed were passionate about delivering any change for the company. As they are closer to the workforce than the executives, they felt they might be able to give a better steer in how to communicate and sell the initiative.

The middle managers state they never get any extra communications to help them answer questions they may get from their own teams. Any early engagement with the executives is usually a “cover your ass” meeting, where the executives just want to test their presentation, rather than offer extra information. They don't encourage discussion and can take offence to questions.

The middle managers receive a mixed level of support from the executives. They rarely receive empathy from the executives but are expected to display this soft skill to their own teams. These poor soft skills from the executives can lead to resistance from the middle managers. They also feel the message can be disingenuous. It comes back to the point about a patronizing attitude felt by the middle managers. They feel they are intelligent, well educated people and are well able to comprehend difficult strategic decisions. They want to know the real reasons why change is taking place and not be fobbed off with the promises of “opportunities”.

4.8 – Culture of the organisation

There was a unanimous view that the culture of the company is critical to the success of any change initiative. There is a belief amongst the middle managers that a poor culture is the prime reason for the failure of any initiative. It is the single most important item that influences change. The culture needs to come from the top and if the organisation is swift and agile, then the middle managers need to be the same.

The middle management believe that if the culture supports people, then change success is more likely. It is a stressful time for people and they need help and assistance. Engagement with the middle managers will help embed the change. A culture that dictates inclusion and is open is considered positive. A “just do it or there’s the door” attitude will create resistance, whereas an environment that encourages feedback is considered progressive and fundamental to delivering a change success. A suggestion was made to document the change in order for it to be anchored in the culture.

HR will again be perceived to be absent from the cultural support in the business. If true, this would be very dangerous; this affects the ability of the middle management to deliver change. HR should be central to the strategic delivery of a change project.

4.9 – Middle manager peer groups

There appears to be a lack of formal team meetings with the middle managers. When they do take place, they appear beneficial. The more experienced managers can help their peers through the process, as they may have been through it before. There can be a realisation that other managers are going through the same issues and may help reduce anxiety. There may be an opportunity to discuss processes at a formal meeting as well. Structured meetings are considered positive as it gives the occasion to share ideas. Some middle managers contend that 1-1 meeting may be even better to help coach other middle managers through the process if they have a lack of experience.

In the absence of these formal meetings, it is inevitable that informal meetings take place. These informal meetings tend to be negative. They can just be a “bitching session”. They may take place at the water cooler or at lunch, and can lead to cynicism taking hold. This leads to resistance and can also breed rumour. The business does not want this to happen,

as middle managers who may be on the fence about believing in the new initiative can be permanently persuaded that the new change is a negative one.

4.10 – Relationship dynamics

There appears an interesting dynamic that is uncovered in the research. The majority have a loyalty to their own team in times of change. This is because the middle managers feel as if their team's performance reflects their own ability as a manager. They have more day to day interaction with their team and this adds to their feeling of loyalty. If the middle managers don't fully understand the reasons for the change, they become less loyal to the company.

However, what was interesting was that the more senior middle managers were more loyal to the company. This is a powerful insight into the changing nature of loyalty dynamics as an individual progress through the company. It could be a coincidence that the two senior middle managers felt a different loyalty to the others interviewed. But the feelings generated during the discussions would prompt the author to believe that it was not a coincidence. The senior individuals said they seen more change and are fully believe that change is necessary. It could be a powerful tool to understand this change in loyalty dynamics and for the business to be able to harness the individuals who have a transformed company loyalty. This phenomenon didn't feature in any of the literature reviewed and would be worth researching further.

4.11 – Driving change within the team

What was very clear during the interview, was the passion and genuine commitment all the middle managers had when trying to implement change to their own team. They all consistently espoused the willingness to look for the positives and park personal reservations when conducting the change programme. This is a powerful message. The middle management appear to try to make the change successful no matter the circumstances.

They advise that they try to be as open as possible with their team. They explain the context with the information they have been given. They do not push discussions, but enable the information to be digested. They allow everyone a say and believe "small issues can become big issues" without support and empathy. They don't isolate or embarrass resisters and try to look for individual reasons why a person may have reluctance to support the change. They understand that everyone reacts differently. Some may get emotional, while other just needs an arm around the shoulder. Others will look for opportunities and the middle manager will endeavour to support each scenario.

They do advise that not all people will accept and endorse change. There was a general agreement that they usually focus on the people who are open to change or are undecided. They believe there is only so much you can do with the hard-core resisters.

4.12 – Skills of a change agent

There appears to be broad agreement on what is required from a change agent. They middle managers believe they must be skilful with people and have terrific listening skill and empathy. They should demonstrate good leadership and be diplomatic and open. They should be receptive to feedback and follow up with the team on any queries or concerns they may have. They should have a common sense approach and be as honest as possible. For example, if they don't have the information to answer the question, they should say they don't have that information and commit to follow up to secure the answer. They then must fulfil their promise to ensure trust is maintained with the team. They should have influencing and coaching skills to support the team through the change. There was a general belief that all middle managers can be change agents, but some are naturally better than others.

4.13 – Internal vs external change agents

Not all middle managers had experience with external change agents. However, they were all open to the idea of utilising their experience. It was suggested they could be beneficial as they no bias or prejudice. There was a belief that internal agents could be insular without a broader perspective. In general there was a positive attitude to the idea of external agents, adding that could provide crucial expertise. Also, there was a view that not all middle management are effective change agents and therefore an external agent may be better for the business.

In general, the view was that there should be a mix of external and internal agents to support a change initiative. The external agent can provide a fresh perspective but may encounter resistance, whereas the internal agent would have established relationships. One contributor suggested the business needs both as “when you're playing the game the spectator sees more”. This view corresponds with Buono & Subbiah (2014) in the earlier literature.

It was interesting to note that these external agents operate in the vacuum left by the absence of HR in the process. They appear to provide training and support to the middle managers and bring experience to the initiative. It would be unusual that HR would have had no input into the change programme, but their lack of presence in the implementation phase of the project is intriguing. Perhaps the organisations, in which the middle managers are employed in this research, do not have a robust HR policy on change strategy, and it could contribute to the change failure rate. This would require further research to determine.

4.14 – How to know if change is succeeding

There is a general view that the middle managers feel they know how well a change programme is progressing. However, they return to one of their frustrations which are

common throughout the research. That is the lack of clear measurement on what success looks like. In spite of that, they get a sense from the team how things are going, although some still feel they won't know for certain. Some point to the KPI (Key Performance Indicators) figures to giving an account of how the change is being managed. A drop in this measurement may suggest resistance. Other views include looking at people's well-being. Some will have regular temperature check with the team to listen to their issues and concerns. Other will ask their team directly and discuss with their peers and direct boss to get a sense of it.

It appears there is no consistent measurement tool to gauge the ongoing acceptance and success of a change programme. This is not surprising as it is very subjective. What is apparent is that the middle managers are likely to have a better understanding of the mood in the organisation. The executives need to leverage off this to examine the success of the overall strategy.

4.15 – Specific change groups

There was a varied opinion on the value of a specific change team being employed to manage a change initiative. Some individuals had never encountered one and were wary of its impact. Others had been involved with this approach and were favourable towards it. Some suggested it may be risky to introduce a specific team as it may be perceived change is being introduced for change sake. Some specialised teams may lack credibility if they are not given the proper authority.

However, there were some positive views towards this approach as in their experience it helped deliver a successful change. There was a belief that middle managers should be a change agent by default, however, there was also an acceptance that some middle managers were better at influencing change than others. Some recalled change agents being hand-picked and this policy being successful. What was also interesting was that not all change agents picked were middle managers which correspond with Battilana & Casciaro (2013) and their literature about informal hierarchy.

4.16 – Measurement of success

As referred to in 4.14, a lack of measurement of success can bring frustration to the middle management group. During the interview process, it was clear that no one knew exactly what success looked like. In the majority of cases there had never been a lesson learnt after the change had been introduced. This was an enormous frustration to the interviewees. There was no communication to say whether it had been a success. In some cases there was never even an acknowledgement that the change process was complete. This brought a lot of anxiety and concern to the middle management group. In particular, when another change initiative was announced, it was a "tough sell to the team", when the perception was that this was more of the same. Also, there was the perception that the previous

change must have been a failure since there was little or no communication to recognise or thank the workforce for implementing the change. Both Garbarro (1987) and Kotter (1996) propose creating measurable successes in the literature, but in reality it appears to be missing in many cases. There is an acceptance from the middle managers that the business must look ahead, but not at the expense of measuring the success of the previous change project. What is also interesting is that in almost all work related projects, there is a culture of delivering a lessons learnt report, post project implementation. This would include measurement principles. The question it raises is why is it missing from a change project? This would require further research to establish.

4.17 – Succession planning

Not one company appears to have this idea in their strategy. When this concept was introduced to the interview discussion, it was unanimously greeted positively. Each of them thought it was a good idea, but referred that this would require HR support. They suggested including change ability in the selection and recruitment of future employees.

It is surprising that no adequate succession planning appears to be in place. Kotter (1996) refers to in the literature that these new values should be part of any new recruitment or training initiatives.

4.18 – Extra workload

There was a general consensus that the introduction of a new change initiative added a lot of extra work for the middle managers. This can consist of 1-1's with members of the team, formal team meetings, informal discussions which can take place at any time and lunchtime chats. There is a lot of personal pressure to keep positive. The team may require a lot of support and listening to during the change period. The middle managers became regularly overloaded with this extra work. They confessed that things inevitable get dropped. In their experience, the business as usual activities would normally take priority. They acknowledge that sometimes it doesn't leave them enough time to drive the changes.

This is a salient point, which is missing for the literature reviewed. The middle managers are already stretched during a normal working week. When a change is introduced, it requires a significant extra amount of work for it to be thoroughly implemented and driven through. The middle managers appear to struggle with this extra workload and by default, ensure the day to day activities are prioritised. This is not a lack of effort on behalf of the middle managers but perhaps it adds to the perception the executives have that the middle management group do not do enough to ensure change success.

4.19 – Change has changed

There is broad agreement that change is evolving. It is becoming bigger, deeper, faster and more frequent. The middle managers say they are feeling it more than ever. The frequency

of change can be quite de-energising. Some contributors suggest that a change takes place every four months. One interviewee stated that a change should take no longer than three months to deliver. Anything longer would be considered a failure.

The executive strategy has changed over the years. In the early careers of the interviewees, the majority were in companies which had a top down mentality. This changed to a more early engagement approach. However, more recently, it has reverted to the top down approach. The perception is that it is driven by external forces, and it is always about reducing money rather than improving service to the customer. The middle management feel that they are becoming less involved with the strategic decisions.

This level of change causes doubts and insecurities amongst the middle managers. A large level of change programmes with aggressive target can introduce resistance to this group. There is a perception that the changes are constantly evolving as they didn't get it right the first time. This is not necessarily true that previous changes have failed. The businesses may be constantly adjusting their model to consumer behaviours. The literature states that adaptability could be the new competitive advantage and companies should consider designing their business that are built to change (Worley and Lawler III, 2006; Reeves and Deimler, 2011). The issue may come back to a lack of communication between the executives and the middle management, as to why the change is required.

4.20 – How to enable middle managers be effective as a change agent

The middle managers must feel part of the change. They need to be given the authority on how the change should be implemented. There should be formal training, which may be supported by either HR or an external agent. They need to receive more regular and informed communications. The timelines associated with the change must be achievable. The senior executives must be totally behind the change and be seen to be totally behind the change. They must display leadership and passion for the change. This gives the middle manager the confidence to drive the change through. Even a failing change can recover and succeed with good leadership from the executives.

The middle management need to be engaged early in the planning process. They believe that it is critical for the success of the initiative. The opportunity to provide constructive feedback and the ability to query helps to accept change. Middle management should in fact be sought out to submit honest feedback, as this will help adjust and tweak the message and following implementation strategy. Clear display of benefits, why it is taking place, what the change is and what each person needs to do is of great support to the middle management when attempting to implement change.

Post change completion, there should be communication at some level. The executives should share KPI's for an extended period to demonstrate the success that the change project had. This will eventually become business as usual and become anchored in the

culture. There must be lessons learnt. It should advise what the impacts were and if the targets were met. This sets up the subsequent change programme for success.

4.21 – Conclusion

The findings suggest that the middle management group are capable of implementing change given the appropriate tools to do so. They are passionate about the company and loyal to the workforce. They are generally positive about change and try hard to make it succeed. They can get overloaded with regular and swift changes in the organisation, but appear isolated from the senior executives and HR in terms of receiving support. They appear to be an asset in a company that has a culture of inclusion. Otherwise they struggle to implement change successfully.

5 – Discussion

5.1 – Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the findings made in section 4 and establish links back to the literature and objectives of the research. It will endeavour to highlight the leading points in the findings and relate it back to previous theories and studies on this topic. It will present practical consequences and implications. It will consider the limitations of the study with the methodology employed.

5.2 – Resistance in middle management

The findings suggest the majority of middle managers are clever, passionate and trusted individuals. They have a natural positive disposition and claim to be able to overcome changes that they may not agree with, and drive through the initiative. This challenges the study of Lean Management Institute (LMI) who reported in 2007 that middle management were the biggest obstacle to change, as referred to in section 2.9. It appears that resistance can develop through frustration with a lack of communication, unclear objectives and a lack of inclusion in the process. It is perhaps telling that the middle manager who reported the highest level of change success, 70%, highlighted the reasons that contributed to this success was effective and regular communication and being involved early in the process. This research also contradicts Samuels (2010) assertion that middle managers are unwilling to take initiatives as their contribution to improvement and are threatened by continuous improvement efforts, as referred to in section 2.9. What appears clearly in the findings is that the middle managers become burdened with an enormous workload and are genuinely unable to generate sufficient focus and attention on the new change project without it impacting their day to day activities, as referred to in section 4.18. Add to this, the lack of authority and opportunity to submit feedback to the executives and it can create a feeling of helplessness within the middle management group. This, of course, can develop into resistance, but it is easily avoidable with early engagement and better support from the executives and HR.

5.3 – Training and support

There is a consistent theme throughout the findings that refer to a lack of support from HR and the executives. In general the training appeared adequate, but the lack of engagement from HR raises a concern about their influence on the change model. The experiences of some middle managers who were told it was their job to manage by their HR colleague are astonishing. There appears to be a lack of a coherent strategic HR plan. According to Schwind, Das & Wager (2010) Strategic HR management is defined as ‘Integrating human resource management strategies and systems to achieve the overall mission, strategies, and success of the firm while meeting the needs of employees and other stakeholders.’ A strategic HR plan develops a roadmap that underpins the firm’s objectives, vision, mission,

core values and goals. There appears to be a lack of HR involvement at a senior level. According to Nixon & Penfold (2011), no HR director sits on any FTSE100 company board. Perhaps this suggests a need for HR to have a stronger voice at the top table. The telecoms industry has a history of change and is considered hugely dynamic, yet the middle management are not trained or coached to expect regular and rapid change. This is an issue which must be addressed by this industry and should really be tackled by all businesses in this time of swift and constant transformation.

There is no strong coalition created to support the change. This notion is proposed by Kotter (1995) in section 2.5, however the findings indicate a fragmented alliance of managers. The middle managers do not feel they are receiving enough support citing a lack of interest in their ideas and not encouraging feedback. What is unusual is that organisations appear to be moving away from the inclusive approach, even though the literature suggests the opposite. It is not clear why that is. Perhaps it is the business cycle, where the industry is in a consolidation mode. But surely, this would need the support of the middle management group more than ever. Firms need to cherish their middle managers and include them in the planning process. Not only will this assist in developing an effective programme, it will give the middle managers a sense of ownership and added authority to drive the programme towards success.

In the absence of formal middle management meetings, it encourages informal meetings which can lead to cynicism and resistance. This can be rectified with better support and engagement through a more structured approach from the executives.

5.4 – Culture of a company

Culture is correctly recognised by the middle managers as crucial to the success to any change programme. It is very surprising to discover an absence of a robust succession planning strategy at any of the organisations. This is a central theme in Kotter's (1995) literature, where this supports the changes becoming anchored in the culture of an organisation. There is a new environment of regular and rapid change. Selection and recruitment of individuals should take this competency into account during the hiring process and training courses to ensure adaptability is part of the new culture. The consequence is bringing people into the business that may be adverse to change and may future success in change initiative more challenging.

A fascinating theme was uncovered during the research. The findings pointed to a change in loyalty dynamics throughout the lifetime of a middle manager. It appears that middle managers early in their career have an innate loyalty to their team which can supersede their loyalty to the company. This may introduce a natural resistance as they have more empathy towards their direct team. However, the more senior middle managers had a loyalty to the company primarily. This shift in position is not reflected in any literature examined. However, it is a powerful insight into the minds of the middle managers. What

company would not want their middle managers to have an inherent loyalty towards them? How does this change take place? When does this change take place? More importantly, how can an organisation expedite this change? These are all fascinating questions that further research may uncover.

5.5 – Factors affecting Middle management ability to deliver change

A key theme that arrives through the findings is the perception of poor planning. This is another one of Kotter's (1995) recommendations which appears to be underutilised. It is not clear why the executives are reluctant to include the middle management in the planning process. The research points to change initiatives being more likely successful with early engagement. The middle managers perception is that the planning is not well thought out. This, of course, may not be true. The executives may have held lengthy internal discussions on the change plan. However, the consequences of not including the middle managers are that there is a feeling of mistrust and loss of confidence in the leadership. This loss of executive credibility can easily be avoided with sincere engagement. This approach can lead to an "us and them" culture, which can contribute to change failure. The findings of the Australian Institute of Management (2014) research on this topic promote early inclusion of the middle management in the shaping of the change initiative.

The apparent lack of effective communications is prevalent in the findings. Wanous et al (2000) argues that as middle managers are communication receivers as well as givers, if they receive poor quality or insufficient information themselves, it can introduce problems such as cynicism and mistrust. The decision by many executives not to encourage feedback is both myopic and damaging to the overall success of the change project. Trowbridge (2011) concurs with this view endorsing the need to include and value the middle managers input. It is therefore perplexing as to why this strategy is employed by the executives. It appears an organisation will have a better chance of change success, with well informed and engaged middle managers.

A vital discovery was the lack of a "lessons learnt" in nearly all cases. This was a surprising discovery as there is a culture in all organisations, of presenting this on technology projects, post project delivery. A change is also a project, but it appears it doesn't follow the same process as normal project. This can lead to future change failure. The business should adopt a mandatory approach to delivering a document which describes what went well, what could have been done better and how the organisation adjust future change programmes to set it up for success. What is revealing is that the one middle manager who stated that his company does perform lesson learnt reflections has the highest success rate of change success, 70%. Both the literature and the findings point to an increase in changes due to shifting industry environments and changing customer behaviours. Therefore it is essential that the firms are adjusting, evolving and fine-tuning their change implementation strategies to create an environment for change success.

5.6 – Limitations & further research

The nature of this research was thematic and had a subjectivism philosophy. This could lead to an atmosphere where the interviewees were venting. The author attempted to steer the contributors away from that, but it may have created a one sided argument at times. The research was conducted through the lens of the middle managers only. Further research could be carried out with the executives to contrast the findings in this paper and establish where their opinions are aligned and where they are divided.

The sample group was small, but the findings were rich in detail. With an extended period of research, the paper could have delved deeper into the changing loyalty dynamics and attempt to articulate how these changes take place and what influences the middle management to transform from loyal team leaders to loyal company exponents. This is an area which would benefit from further research as the company wants to know who is naturally loyal to the organisation and perhaps how other middle management can be transformed into company advocates earlier.

6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to establish how middle management can be effective change agents. It drew together the key themes from a middle manager point of view. It uncovered some new data relating to how the relationship and loyalty dynamics can evolve over time. It highlighted the enormous workload middle managers are expected to overcome in order to drive a successful change. It presented the frustrations middle management had, which impacted on their ability to implement successful change.

The qualitative approach was a successful one, which uncovered some experiences, feelings and behaviours which a quantitative approach may not have. There were a number of research papers, which took the quantitative method (AIM 2014, Tower Watson 2012). They were able to articulate the issues, but lacked a certain depth which this research paper has added.

The data accumulated was through both the transcripts from the interviews and the notes taken by the authors as part of reflective journals. This gave the findings a richer feel for the frustrations and challenges faced by the middle management.

This research was one-sided as it interrogated the middle management experience in the change environment. This paper can add to the ongoing research in this area and can challenge certain perceptions that may have been thrust upon the middle managers. They appear to be passionate, veracious and determined to support change. They do need to be cherished and engaged at the early stages of change and throughout the process in order to utilise them effectively.

It is recommended to further research the relationship dynamics of middle managers within the change environment. The scope could be increased to understand if it is just this group which evolves over time or are the executives and general workforce transforming over time as well. All organisations require loyalty and further research may uncover an appropriate architecture to encourage and express loyalty within the organisational structure.

It would be intriguing to complete analysis and research on this subject purely from the executive's perspective. The use of this research may test and even educate legacy beliefs, some executives may display. There is a challenge set for the executives to confront these old beliefs and embrace working with the middle management group.

The middle management perform a critical role in the change process. They are closer to the workforce than the executives. They perform a number of extra roles on top of their day to day duties. They want change to succeed. They have a positive outlook and have the most influencing effect on the workforce. They can provide key learnings and feedback to the architects of change. They need to be engaged and given the tools and support to enable

them to be effective change agents. In this era of perpetual and rapid change, it is vital for businesses to implement change successfully. Their future may depend on it.

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