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Change Management in the Irish Public Sector: A Managers Perspective

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Award

Master of Science in Management

College

National College of Ireland

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, July 2021.

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Management

Title of Thesis: Change Management in the Irish Public Sector: A

Managers Perspective

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1 Abstract

Popa (2017) states that change in an organisation is inevitable. According to Sirkin, Keenan and Jackson (2014) academics and researchers have been dissecting the area of change management to gain an in-depth view as to why this area of management is difficult. A number of areas that cause challenges in the change management process includes resistance to change, lack of knowledge and training in change management, communication, organisational culture and the dynamic capabilities of an organisation. For example, Basu (2015) states that managers may face resistance to change from employees and further explains why employees resist change.

There is evidence from many academic articles that challenges exist in the change process and also studies on how these challenges can be resolved. What seems to be limited from this dissection is an analysis in to change management in the Irish public sector. Although there is an extensive amount of research on change management challenges across a broad range of sectors covering various types of businesses and institutions, the research on change management in the Irish public sector is more sparse.

For this reason this study will undertake interviews with managers in an Irish public sector organisation in order to gain insight into change management in the Irish public and if these managers are experiencing the widely reported challenges of change management. These interviews will be analysed, discussed and compared with literature reviewed on the topic of change management.

2 Introduction

Change is a transformation in a company's strategy as a result of a shift in the internal or external environment, new technologies in the sector or a fluctuation in the company's structure, (Parachiv, Nitu, and Savin, 2019). Reacting to these shifts and making changes within an organisation in line with these shifts helps a company to sustain competitive advantage against their competitors, (Bojesson and Fundin, 2020). Organisations are frequently involved in change processes, the management of change involves the planning and implementation of changes and also reviewing changes when new information emerges, (Cummings and Worley, 2015).

Kotter (2012) notes that managers within an organisation are a key component of the change process but in order for change to be successful they must be a competent leader and have the ability to manage change successfully. Within the change process managers must take on certain roles, they are the communicators, supporters, trainers and also play a key role in managing any resistance the change process may face, (Ionescu, Merut, and Dragomiroiu, 2014). Cohen (2019) states that resistance to change can hinder the change process, resistance can make the process extremely difficult for the organisation. This resistance may occur when employees feel intimated by the change, and see change as a threat to their position in the company i.e. a threat to the security of their job, (Cohen, 2019). It is also noted that changes in technology can ignite a resistance to change as employees fear the technology could replace them or monitor them, (Basu, 2015).

The dynamic capabilities of an organisation is also an important factor in the change process. The dynamic capabilities refers to the company's ability to understand and acknowledge the conditions within the organisation which may affect the company's ability to respond to changes in the market environment, (Bojesson and Fundin, 2020). This ability to change and exploit opportunities depends on a combination of organisational and managerial capabilities that would allow a company to quickly and effectively react and adapt to changing situations, (Bojesson and Fundin, 2020).

As it can be seen from the research mentioned above there are many challenges which may affect a company's ability to effectively implement change. Although there is a vast amount of

research on this topic there appears to be limited research on change management within the Irish public sector. The majority of the research is focused on private organisations or public sector organisations in other countries. As a result of the limited literature available, there is clear scope and reason for a study to investigate why change is a challenge and investigate what challenges managers are facing in the change process.. Are these challenges similar to what the private sector or other countries public sector organisations face or do the challenges of change management differ within the Irish public sector. The hypothesis of the study is that: Managers in the Irish public sector experience challenges in the change process. This will either be refuted or confirmed through the following research question: Do managers in the Irish public sector face challenges when implementing change?

The following topics will be researched in order to gain an in-depth view into change management and appropriately examine this topic within the Irish public sector: change management theories, and change management challenges/ barriers.

Throughout this paper, the research aims, methodology, and findings will be documented along with a discission of the findings. The methodology used will be qualitative. This type of methodology is interested in the subjective views and human experience of the proposed research topic, (Silverman, 2013). As the research is interested in managers experiences of change management this methodology is best suited. The research instrument will be semi structured interviews. The findings from these interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis.

2.1 The Irish Public Sector

The Irish public service sector employees over 300,000 people across the country, (Public Jobs, 2021). This accounts for 13% of the total Irish work force (Ibec for Irish Business, 2021). The sectors within the public service consist of the civil service, defence sector, education sector, health sector, justice sector, local authorities, and non-commercial state agencies, (Public Jobs, 2021). There are many different career fields which are employed across the public sector, for example there are nurses, doctors, administrative staff, an Garda Siochana, civil servants, teachers, army guards, firefighters, paramedics, accountants, business managers and many more.

According to Public Jobs (2021) the aim of the Irish public sector is provide service to the Irish public that are responsive, efficient, diverse, innovative, inclusive and flexible. The public service is a significant part of the social, cultural and economic life in Ireland, (Public Jobs, 2021).

2.2 The Irish Public sector and change

The Irish public sector is not a stranger to change in its organisations. There have been many agreements that have affected the Irish public sector and its employees, agreements such as the Croke park agreement and the Haddington road agreement. Irish public sector organisations also have their own change initiatives within the organisation. For example the HSE have their change guide, An Garda Siochana have the modernisation and renewal programme, and the Electric Supply Board (ESB) have the dimensions of a solution report.

The above have created change in the Irish public sector organisations in a number of ways. The HSE's change guide's slogan of 'People's needs, defining change', (HSE, 2021) ,reflects that unlike private company's whose needs for change is related to gaining and keeping competitive advantage, this Irish public sector organisations need for change is based on the people of Ireland's needs.

The Croke park agreement (2010-2014) aim was to change the conduction of business within the public service to reduce both costs and the number of people working within the sector while still aiming to meet the needs for the services within the sector, (Government of Ireland, 2010). It had a number of effects on pay rates and reviews on the rates, redundancies, and pensions, (Government of Ireland, 2010).

Another agreement which has brought change to the Irish public sector was the Haddington road agreement. Also known as the public service stability agreement (2013-2014), this agreement was based on the requirement of the government to reduce the public pay and pensions bill by 1 Billion EUR, (Government of Ireland, 2013). The agreement brought a number of changes to the Irish public sector, changes involved increment freezes, introduced

a longer working week without compensation, and changes to overtime and flexi time, (Government, 2013).

As it can be seen both these agreements have significant effect on the employees within the Irish public sector in terms of pay, pay increment entitlement's, hours worked and their pensions.

In line with government agreements which affect the Irish public sector there are also change initiatives and plans within each organisation in the public sector. These change plans/guides are tailored to the service that is being provided and the structure of the organisation. For example An Garda Siochana's modernisation and renewal programme initiatives are based on the need to deliver the national policing and security service in an effective and efficient manner, some examples of the initiatives are to introduce advanced IT systems, increased visibility, community policing teams across all districts , and specialist units to be set up in order to meet the challenges within cyber security, (An Garda Siochana, 2021). The HSEs change guide as mentioned above was based on the people's needs defining change, some of the initiatives include the practice of collective leadership, model shared values, deliver public value and be accountable, invest in teams and people and engage and communicate, levering e-health and technology (Health Service executive, 2021). As it can be seen, both of these public sector organisations, although there to serve to public, have very different needs to serve and their change initiatives are not based on competitive advantage but rather what they need to do in order to serve the Irish public.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Change Management theory

In order to gain an understanding of what barriers and challenges a manager may face during change and how they affect this process, it is crucial to understand the theoretical underpinnings of change management and what models are available for managers to utilize when implementing change.

Kotter (2012) states that change in organisations is often met with challenges and as a result has failed, leaving companies with wasted resources and a frustrated workforce. Studies surrounding planned change in an organisation show that roughly 70% of change initiatives fail, (Bojesson and Fundin, 2020). Similarly, Applebaum, Habashy, Malo, and Shafiq (2012) not that from one third to 80% of change initiatives have failed. This is as a result of a lack of knowledge and understanding of conditions within the organisation, (Bojesson and Fundin, 2020). With this in mind in order to evaluate the challenges of change management within the Irish public sector, firstly an understanding of change management theory must be developed.

Organisational change management is described as being a combination of the tools, techniques and models that an organisation can use to implement change in a business, (Cummings and Worley, 2015). Change management theorists such as John Kotter have given organisations tools and techniques to use when planning for change. Kotter (2012) model creates an 8 step process to implementing change in an organisation. The process is as follows: 1) establishing a sense of urgency, 2) creating a powerful guiding coalition, 3) developing a vision, 4) communicating the change vision to the people within the organisation, 5) empowering a broad based action, 6) generating and celebrating the short term wins, 7) consolidating gains and building on the change, 8) anchoring new approaches in the organisational culture, (Kotter, 2012). It is reported that if an organisations does not take all of the steps above during the change process, there is serious consequences on the success of the change being implemented (Kotter, 2012). Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson and Singleton (2008) praised Kotter's 8 steps in a number of areas, in particular the step regarding the guiding coalition. Managers cannot deal with resistance by themselves, therefore building a powerful guiding coalition with a number of managers within it can help managers to come together and

deal with resistance as a team, (Pryor *et al.* 2008). This may be linked more to a change initiative that is organisation wide for example introducing a new technological system to be used throughout the organisation. This model is also praised for its simplistic step by step break down in implementing change initiatives and provides mangers with direction on how to implement this model (Galli, 2018).

Kotter's leading change steps model is mentioned in a large bulk of the change management theory articles however it is criticised for a number of reasons. Galli (2018) praises the concept of the step by step guide but also notes that this is a weakness of the model as well as a strength. The step by step model may fail if all steps are not implemented as not implementing each will have a knock on effect on other steps, (Galli, 2018). Appelbaum *et al.* (2012) also reports that there are a number limitations to Kotter's model. Firstly, there is no scientific consensus on this model by Kotter, rather research is based around it's practicality, usable format and its popularity, (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, it is also noted that there should be further study based on Kotter's model, and that this model has been questioned as a result of Kotter taking his own personal experience in his business and uses minimal outside sources to inform this model.(Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). Applebaum *et al.* (2012) report that there are limited studies which have validated all 8 steps of Kotter's model and that most evidence found validating Kotter's 8 steps is in his own book – The Heart of Change.

Kurt Lewin, another theorist of change management, also developed a popular change management model. Lewin's model is an older model developed in the 1940s, (Ronnenberg, Graham, and Mahmoodi, 2011). Lewin's model consists of three steps that must be undertaken 1) unfreeze the existing situation within the company, 2) once current models, cultures and behaviours are unfrozen then a company can move to introducing new change or movement and 3) a company must re-freeze these changes in order to secure them within the company, (Levasseur, 2001). This model takes into account peoples uncertainty of change and is aware that in order to ensure people are certain and comfortable with the change, behaviours need to change. Pryor *et al.* (2008) states that people resist change because they do not trust it, uncertainty makes people uncomfortable. Therefore it will make change more difficult if people are not certain of it and what it entails, it does not go into detail regarding the human part of change, (Galli, 2018). Galli (2018) also states that Lewin's model is popular for its simplicity in the three step system. However, a number of academics have critiqued this model. Levasseur (2001) argues the above and states it does not give a step by step guide for managers

to implement change although it does give clarity to the most important steps of change. Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, Hussain and Ali (2016) also state that there are limitations to Lewin's change theory. It is noted that change effectiveness is also highly effected by the style of leadership in place and that effective change correlates positively with the transformational leadership style, which is not referenced in Lewin's model,(Hussain et al. 2016). Pryor *et al.* (2008) promotes the transformational style organisation and states that they recognize resistance and change and plan to help remove this barrier.

As it can be seen Lewin's model, much like Kotter's has been criticised by academics. Although criticised they are also praised for sections of their models and are still widely spoken about in up to date literature .

Although these models are available to managers, do they help managers to implement change? Are they applicable to the Irish public sector when managing change? This will be further researched through interviews with managers in the Irish public sector. Research has shown that managers still deal with a lot of challenges in the change management process. This will be further explored in the next section and literature will be drawn upon to link to the research question.

3.2 Challenges of Change Management

It is stated in literature that change in organisations is inevitable, it cannot be avoided and a large factor related to constant changes is in relation to the technological advances that are happening across all sectors, (Applebaum *et al.,* 2012 and Parachiv, Nitu and Savin, 2019). The change process is a difficult and complex process that can cause distress and concern within a company, (Popa, 2017). The challenges in change management are widely spoken about as a result of change being a critical factor within organisations. The themes emerging in literature in relation to change management challenges include a resistance to change, management training and style, the dynamic capabilities of the organisation and the effect organisational culture can have on the change process. These themes will be discussed and critically analysed below.

3.2.1 Resistance to change

During the change process managers are often faced with resistance from their employees (Popa, 2017). Basu (2015) concurs that managers may face resistance to change from employees and further explains why employees resist change. Change can be resisted by employees as a result of a lack of awareness (what will happen, when will it happen, and what are the possible outcomes), fear of the unknown, and employees being comfortable within the organisations current structure and running, (Basu, 2015). Employees are also reported as resisting change if they see cost cutting activities taking place, as this is viewed with the mindset that further cost cutting will take place within the organisation, (Graamans, Aij, Vonk and Have, 2019). This correlates with Basu (2015) stating that employees fear the unknown of change.

Employees appreciate hearing directly from managers what these changes will entail, how it will affect them and also why the change is taking place, (Ionescu et. Al 2014). Ionescu et al. (2014) also notes that a resistance to change is human nature and that it is a normal reaction to uncertainty. When managers are open and honest with employees it can give them chance to be open and honest with their managers. They may feel more comfortable to ask questions and take interest in the change process if they are being told exactly what, how and when things will be changing. Paton and McCalman (2008) states that employees are more willing to except changes if they understand what is the cause of the change, the need for the change, and what has triggered this change. As it can be seen from above, employee's attitudes are of paramount importance when implementing change. Chaudhry (2018) has stated that successful implementation of change is powered by employees willingness and openness to commit to the change.

If employees are not ready to accept the change initiative it will be at risk of failing which would also put any investment in the change initiative (i.e. information technology systems) at risk, (Chaudrhy, 2018). This could incur a significant cost to the organisation. Another reason for resistance to change is based on new technology introduced within a change, this can cause fear as employees feel they may be replaced by new technologies, (Basu, 2015).

Basu (2015) states that technology can create a barrier to change at it is often resisted. It is stated that technology can cause resistance because employees feel that new technologies may impose more work, this is in terms their work being measured by the technology or new performance requirements, (Basu, 2015). Furthermore, Basu (2015) goes on to say that technology may change an employee's job and a lack of knowledge or motivation to the revised job roles can cause a barrier. According to Chaudhry (2018) the most common occurring change in organisations currently is information systems. With this in mind it is important to reduce employees resistance to new technology and work together with employees to input the new systems. Todosijevic (2015), notes that although technology is a challenge within the change process, it is also a reason as to why change is initiated in an organisation.

There are two types of resistance to change that employees can take part in, 1) open or explicit resistance: this can be done through strikes, negligence, sabotage, and a decline in employee productivity and 2) hidden or implicit resistance: this can be done through employee resignations, delays in work, low morale and low motivation in the work force, (Parachiv *et al.* 2019). Each of which pose significant risk to the change initiative and also the overall success and possible longevity of the organisation.

It can be seen throughout the literature review that resistance to change causes a significant barrier in the management of change initiatives, throughout research it is can be see that it is a significant factor in change management. Although it may not be avoidable it is something that should be planned for, and each organisation should have a mitigation and contingency plan in place to deal with resistance from employees.

As stated above there is a significant need to plan for dealing with resistance to change. A number of ways to do this has been discussed by academics. Cummings and Worley (2015) report that there are three ways to deal with employees resistance to change, 1) empathy and support, 2) communication, and 3) participation and involvement.

Empathy and support is named as one of the ways that managers can deal with resistance to change or lower that resistance to change. This step involves managers discovering how their employees may be dealing with the change, it demands managers to disregard their own judgements of the process and see it from other people's perspectives, (Cummings and Worley,

2015). If managers are listening to their employees they may discover that employees are willing to share their feelings if the managers are open to listening to them. It would create a good channel of communication between management and employees. Supporting the employees to deal with this change is also a crucial role in tackling resistance to change. Supporting employees can include providing them with training and giving them time off after this change period which may have caused distress to employees, (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008). The training will help them to feel ready to take on this new change and confident in their role in the change. While the time off after the change period may help them to feel supported, listened to, and appreciated. This is crucial in breaking down the resistance to change, however Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) reports that these initiatives although have worked in the past have also failed and cost the organisation a lot of time and money.

The second method to deal with resistance to change is communication. The breakdown of communication is referenced above as a key role in the resistance to change by employees. A lack of communication has lead employees to become anxious and uncertain of changes, (Cummings and Worley, 2015). Paton and McCalman (2008) report that it is important for employees to firstly understand what has triggered this change. Mentioned above, if employees understand why the change is needed they may be more willing to except it. Another aspect which is important in communication is the language in how the change is being communicated. Change at times can be triggered by a potential crisis, (Paton and McCalman, 2008). This crisis could include recession, a pandemic, or a new competitor gaining market share. Crisis can often be seen as a threat. Exploiting this threat as an opportunity may assist managers in the change process, (Paton and McCalman, 2008). Once employees are persuaded on the need for change, they are often more willing to partake in change but like the above (empathy and support) it is very time consuming especially if there are a large number of employees resisting change, (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008).

The final method to deal with resistance to change is through participation and involvement (Cummings and Worley, 2015). Participation and involvement for an individual in most circumstances is important. It can help an employee to feel a part of something and connected to a team. This is reported as being one of the oldest and most effective strategies for managers attempting to overcome resistance to change, (Cummings and Worley, 2015). This could be linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs step of identity and belongingness. Lussier (2019)

compares this step to the respect an employee receives from their manager, co-workers and customers.

3.2.2 Management style and training

Similar to employees, managers themselves can also pose challenges in the successful implementation of change within an organisation. Managers have contributed to failed change management as a result of a lack of knowledge in the project, lack of project management and change management skills and a lack of follow through by senior management (Cohen, 2019). Popa (2017) concurs that it is as a result of management failings challenges can arise in the change process, stating that organisational change is dependent on how a manager carries out the change and if they are equipped with the necessary skills to successfully implement change. It is reported that in order for a company to successfully change is dependent on a number of factors: human resources, skills, attitude and the knowledge held by managers and employees, (Parachiv *et al.,* 2019).

Anand and Barsoux (2017) state that it is the organisations duty to create these leaders that can successfully transform and implement change in an organisation, noting that transformation and change in an organisation can often run out of steam if the development of leadership skills is neglected. This points to a strong need to train managers to lead change. Paton and McCalman (2008) state that in order for a manager to facilitate change they must have knowledge and the ability to influence employees. If managers are without knowledge of how to manage change this could significantly impact on the success of the initiative. Managers should be aware of change models and theory available to them such as Lewin and Kotter's model mentioned above and be aware of what can happen during the change process in order to be prepared and act proactively within the implementation process. Without knowledge managers are going in completely unprepared for what they may face. Schaafsma (1997) states that managers must investigate change models and change literature, they must learn how to learn about change. Without this knowledge they cannot implement the change successfully or assess the change process after its implementation, (Schaafsma, 1997). This could be considered a important specification for managers in order to implement change.

The change process is of significant importance for the stability and growth of a company, (Parachiv *et al.* 2019). Therefore, managers and leaders must understand what change needs to be under taken and have the mindset and behaviours to take a company to where it needs to be, (Anand and Barsoux, 2017). Furthermore Ionestu *et al.* (2014) states that the key role of managers within the change process is communication. Communication early in the change process, i.e. in the planning stage, will get people interested in the change that is happening, get them more involved and allows them to prepare for this change (Ionestu *et al.* 2014). Not only is it important to communicate this change with employees it is also important to communicate to anyone that will be effected by this change, for example customers, suppliers, or investors (Ionestu *et al*. 2014). The importance of communication is also referenced above in relation to manging the resistance to change.

Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018) has stated that change success is dependent on the type of leadership style a manager exhibits. There are three leadership styles referenced in relation to the change process: laissez faire, transactional, and transformational, (Akinbode and Shuhumi, 2018). Each of which have their own attributes and may be more favourable to certain situations over another leadership style.

The transformational leadership style has shown to be favourable in the change process, (Raja and Palanichamy, 2011). The transformational leader is believed to transform employees attitudes, and develop a vision for change that provides the organisation with a leader that focuses on the strategic plan of the company and motivates employees towards this, (Raja and Palanichamy, 2011). Akinbode and Shuhumi (2018) also favour the transformational leadership style in the change process as opposed to a style such as transactional leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on giving guidance, plan for short term gains, share the change vision with employees and give employees jurisdiction to act in line with the change vision, where as transactional leadership styles is reported as focusing on planning and the supervision of employees, (Akinbode and Shuhumi , 2018).

These leadership styles can be found across organisations, and may benefit the organisation in different areas. However, it is clear that the transformational leadership style is more favourable for change management initiatives and could result in a number of change initiatives succeeding. If the Irish public sector had a transformational leader at the fore front of the change initiative it could help deal with any challenges that may arise in the change process.

3.2.3 Dynamic capabilities of an organisation

Changes in an organisations external environment requires a company to make a number of strategic decisions in order to sustain competitive advantage, (Bojessan and Fundin, 2020). Strategic change can be defined as a company's ability to change the content of their strategy in order for the organisation to align its strategy with the external environment, (Wu, He, Duan, and O'Regan, 2012). Furthermore the performance of the organisation depends on how well their strategy fits in with the external environment, (Wu *et al.* 2012)

The dynamic capabilities of a company is an approach which can help an organisation to strategically change in line with the environmental shocks the organisation is exposed to, and failure to address these changes can have a significant effect on a company's performance, (Barretto, 2010). Dynamic capabilities is broken down into a multi-dimensional construct: 1) an organisations ability to closely observe the ever changing environment a company is operating in and take hold of opportunities which can positively affect the organisation and 2) the organisations ability to create and generate value added strategies through alteration of how resources available to them are deployed, (Wu *et al.* 2012).

As mentioned above, Applebaum *et al.*(2012) have stated that change initiatives are likely to fail between one third and 80% percent of the time. Bojessan and Fundin (2020) state that change initiative failure correlates highly with an organisations ability and responsiveness to changes in the external environment. This capacity to change is based on a number of factors. These factors include a combination of both managerial capabilities and an organisations capabilities that allow the company to adapt effectively and quickly to changing environments, (Bojessan and Fundin, 2020). This is referenced above in relation to leadership style and how this correlates with successful change initiative. Paton and McCalman (2008) state that some organisations are not willing to adapt to changing environments and follow the method of- if it's not broken don't fix it. This could be detrimental to an organisations longevity if their strategic plan is not aligned with external environments, as stated above, and it could pose a threat to the company's success. Bojessan and Fundin (2020) state that there are five enablers in an organisation that help to create change: 1) sense of positivity, 2) dedicated resources and commitment, 3) co-operation and combining competencies, 4) previous lessons learned, and

5) communication of the vision and goals of the organisation. The ability to enable change will help an organisation to gain more success in change initiatives. Baretto (2010) also states that a firms dynamic capabilities is related to the ability to combine internal and external competences to assist them in implementing change in a rapidly changing environment. This implies that organisations should work together across departments and teams to build on each other's knowledge and help the organisation to implement change.

According to Wu *et al.* (2012) dynamic capabilities consist of three aspects- 1) scanning- analysing the needs emerging from various stakeholders throughout the organisation, 2) identification- the ability to pinpoint opportunities or threats the organisation is exposed to through the rapidly changing environment and 3) reconfiguration- reconfiguring the current functional capabilities of the organisation to adapt to the change. Reconfiguration is an important aspect of the capabilities. Bojessan and Fundin (2020) states that in order to make use of the various functional capabilities departments within an organisation, they should break down their segregated roles and responsibilities and combine knowledge and resources to create new and purposeful interactions across departments. The organisational design of a company has a significant effect on how interactions are either enabled or hindered, and many studies have magnified the significant importance that organisational design has on the dynamic capabilities of an organisation, (Bojessan and Fund, 2020).

Although from literature referenced above it is apparent that focusing on the dynamic capabilities of an organisation can have a positive effect in order to quickly and effectively deal with a changing environment, there has been criticisms of the dynamic capability approach. Wu *et al.* (2012) state that although there is a number of research articles around the dynamic capability construct it still lacks a grounded theory, as it does not have a consolidated definition. According to Wu *et al.* (2012) there have been many attempts by academics to define dynamic capabilities which can be seen in the below image.

Main Definitions of Dynamic Capabilities

Study	Definition
Teece & Pisano (1994)	The subset of the competences and capabilities that allow the firm to create new products and processes and respond to changing market circumstances
Teece, Pisano, & Shuen (1997)	The firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments
Eisenhardt & Martin (2000)	The firm's processes that use resources—specifically the processes to integrate, reconfigure, gain, and release resources—to match and even create market change; dynamic capabilities thus are the organizational and strategic routines by which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve, and die
Teece (2000)	The ability to sense and then seize opportunities quickly and proficiently
Zollo & Winter (2002)	A dynamic capability is a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organization systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness
Winter (2003)	Those (capabilities) that operate to extend, modify, or create ordinary capabilities
Zahra, Sapienza, & Davidsson (2006)	The abilities to reconfigure a firm's resources and routines in the manner envisioned and deemed appropriate by its principal decision maker(s)
Helfat et al. (2007)	The capacity of an organization to purposefully create, extend, or modify its resource base
Teece (2007)	Dynamic capabilities can be disaggregated into the capacity (a) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (b) to seize opportunities, and (c) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and, when necessary, reconfiguring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets

Figure 1: Dynamic capabilities definitions, (Wu *et al.* 2012)

This uncertainty in the literature around a company's dynamic capabilities could pose a threat to organisations wanting to exploit this construct but being unaware of how to do this as a result of its many definitions and conceptualisations.

3.3 Organisational Culture and Change

Organisational culture can be described as all existing relationships in a company both internally and externally, which largely shapes and guides the actions of employees without employees being aware of its influence, (Al-Ali, Singh, Al-Nahyan, and Sohal, 2017). Furthermore, Rashid, Sambasivan and Rahman (2004) describe it as being the value, beliefs and the appropriate behaviour by the organisational members. CIPD (2012) also mentioned that the Barclays chief executive explained organisational culture as how people behave when nobody is watching.

Taking into account that organisational culture is based on the values, beliefs and relationships, organisational change could have effect on the culture of a company. Organisational change that transforms the current values and beliefs of a company's culture can expect a backlash from employees and they may resist the change, (Lucas and Cline, 2008). Academics and researchers have noted the importance of the relationship between organisational culture and its effect on successful organisational change, (Lucas and Cline, 2008).

O'Riordan (2012) notes that it has been indicated that failings of the public sector in Ireland centre around organisational culture. The Irish public sector consists of many different organisations each of which have their own individual core values, beliefs and identity, (Our Public Service, 2020). For example core values of the Health Service Executive (HSE) are-compassion, care, trust and learning (Health Service Executive, 2021). In order to effectively apply a change initiative within any of the Irish public sector organisations it is imperative to understand the organisational culture of each so that the impact of the change initiative on the organisation can be understood entirely, (O'Riordan, 2012). This is not surprising considering evidence of the importance of organisational structure and the strategic objectives of an organisation, (O'Riordan, 2012).

Mbeda (2014) notes that in order to adapt to change effectively, organisations need to embrace a flexible culture which allows the organisations to produce higher levels of creativity and innovation which is needed in the current climate of change. Al-Ali *et al.* (2017) also states that in order to effectively manage change an organisation must be capable of instilling a culture that is receptive to change, but this has proven to be a challenge for organisations. By building an organisational culture that is receptive and flexible to change it allows an organisation to accept change quicker and seek out the opportunities involved with change initiatives that could benefit the organisation in the long term, (Mbeda, 2014). Given that the culture of an organisation is connected to and effects all internal and external relationships as stated above, this would be a significant challenge for an organisation in the change process. A change initiative could completely alter the culture which may cause distress. Not only that, as mentioned in the introduction, change is happening rapidly and constantly, therefore this could cause even further challenges as there may be constant changes to values and beliefs and the culture of the organisation may become unclear to all stakeholders.

As it can be seen from research the organisational culture is a critical element in effective change management, and a flexible and receptive organisational culture is imperative in securing change in the organisation and ensuring the process is as smooth as possible, (Mbeda, 2014).

3.4 Literature Review Conclusion

The literature review has provided a vast amount of information on change management and the challenges that effect the change process. Change was noted as being inevitable in organisations, partially due to a technological boom which organisations internationally are dealing with, (Applebaum, *et al.* 2012)

Change management theory was explored in which two theorists that had impacts on this topic of management were discussed. First John P Kotter's eight steps to leading change was analysed. One particular step of Kotter's model was praised: creating a powerful guiding coalition (Step 2). This step was praised for its ability to recognise that managers cannot fight off and reduce resistance to change by themselves and that it is helpful to have a group of managers involved in the change process, (Pryor *et al.* 2008). Although, Kotter's model was also criticised for its lack of research in outside organisations, Kotter's model is based on research in his own private company, (Applebaum *et al.* 2012). Secondly, Kurt Lewin's model was analysed, and similar to Kotter's model it was also subject to both praise and criticisms by academics. It was praised for its simplistic method which made it easy for managers to understand, (Galli. 2018). Although on the other hand it was criticised for completely disregarding the type of leadership needed within a change process for it to be successful, i.e. a transformational leader, (Hussain *et al.* 2016).

Through further exploration of literature the challenges of change management became apparent. It was noted that the change process was a complex one that caused distress within organisations, (Popa, 2017). The challenges emerging through the literature included the following: resistance to change, management style and training, the dynamic capabilities of the organisation and the organisational culture. In order to avoid or eliminate some of these challenges a number of recommendations were made in the research articles discussed. It was

noted that although some of these challenges cannot be avoided, they can be anticipated plans can be put in place to defuse some of the challenges.

In conclusion, the themes emerging from the literature review are 1) culture in an organisation has a considerable impact on change management, 2) the dynamic capabilities of an organization are imperative in the ability to adapt to a changing environment, 3) managers face numerous challenges when implementing change, and 4) managers should have the knowledge to implement change. The challenges within change management have been established above, and although there is some literature on change management challenges within the Irish public sector the bulk of the literature was based around private organisations or public sector organisations within other countries. For this reason interviews will be conducted with managers in the Irish public sector organisations to investigate if managers face challenges within the change process and if so, what are the challenges they face when initiating change in the organisation. The themes stated above will be useful in informing the methodology section of this research.

4 Research Aims and Objectives

4.1 Research Aim

The aim of this research project is to review and critically analyse change management theory and collect information from various articles on the challenges that arise within change management. During the collection and reading of articles it became apparent that the majority of research articles were based around private organisations or public sector organisations in countries across the globe and a number of them pointed to change management challenges that have been experienced by managers in these organisations.. There was a limited number of research articles on the Irish public sector and change management.

Based on this evidence of a gap in the literature, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with managers of the Irish public sector (across different departments) to discover if change is experienced in the Irish public sector similarly to that of other organisations, in particular if they are experiencing the widely reported challenges that appear within the change process. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the views of a small sample sizes' opinions and experiences of the change process. The proposed research will not generalise views and knowledge but aims to gain an insight into the topic of change management and managers experiences in managing change in the Irish public sector. Through these interviews it is anticipated that the researcher will gain information on the change process, in particular managers experiences of the change process.

4.2 Research Objectives

In order to conduct the named research project there are a number of objectives set out for the study. The objectives of this study is to understand if the managers in the Irish public sector are experiencing the widely reported change management difficulties. The objectives and sub objectives of this study are ; managers experiences of managing change in the Irish public section, change management in the Irish public sector, and investigating if there are challenges when implementing change in the Irish public sector..

Data will be gathered from literature in the following areas- change management theory, change management challenges, background on the Irish public sector, and change initiatives in the Irish public sector.

Interviews will be conducted with managers in the Irish public sector. Interviews will be conducted with a sample of managers across different departments within one Irish public sector organisation. These interviews will be semi structured, in order for open ended questions to be used which allows for managers to express ideas, experiences and opinions on the topic, and managers across different departments may have different experiences of change and the semi structured interview allows for these to be discussed.

The objectives will be achieved by interviewing managers across a number of departments in order to gain a broad view of change in the Irish public sector. These findings will then be analysed and discussed, comparing similarities and differences between the findings from the interviews with the literature reviewed. The researched will then discuss the findings in-depth and conclude the research question: Do managers in the Irish public sector face challenges when implementing change?

5 Methodology

5.1 Research Approach

The methodological approach to be used for this research piece is a qualitative approach. The reason this approach is most suitable for this study is because the study is interested in the subjective views and human experience of the proposed research topic, (Silverman, 2013). The quantitative approach was disregarded as this method tends to show 'that' factors are related rather than 'how',(Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly, 2009). Another reason this method was chosen was that when the literature was reviewed on the topic of change management, it was apparent that a number of the articles used a qualitative approach to gather information. For example, Graamans *et al.* (2019) conducted 17 in-depth interviews to examine the failures in change management and Bojesson and Fundin (2020) conducted nine in-depth interviews to examine the micro foundations of dynamic capabilities as an enabler of organisational change. Although neither of these articles claim to generalise the findings to a wide population, they do give good insight into the topics and provide the reader with in-depth knowledge on change management. This is the aim of the proposed research, not to generalise but to gain an in-depth view into the topic of change management and managers experiences in managing change in the Irish public sector. In order to understand if the difficulties faced by managers in the change management process mentioned within the literature review are seen and experienced by managers within the Irish public sector.

It is important to gain insight in to their experiences, which are subjective to them and what they have experienced in a change process. Some of which may vary depending on what area/ department the participant works in, and some may have more experience dealing with change than others. Throughout the research the organisation will remain anonymous.

5.2 Sample

The sample chosen for this study will consist of seven managers within an organisation in the Irish public sector. The sample will be from different departments of the organisation, for example finance, medical, administration and human resources. This sample was chosen as it

will give different points of view and a wide variety of opinions on the research topic. This sampling method is referred to as purposive sampling, it refers to the sample being chosen specifically by the researcher as a result of specific characteristics of interest that a participant may have that relate to the study being undertaken, (Hogan *et al.* 2009). The researcher aims to gain a broader view on change in the Irish public sector by having managers in different departments as participants. The reason for this is that these managers may have experienced change differently to each other. The selection criteria for this research included a number of as aspects- 1) the participant had to be a manager managing teams or departments, and 2) ideally the manager had been in a management position for 3+ years across their careers, whether this was 3 years consecutively was not an issue.

5.3 Research Tool

As seen from the research question posed the research is interested in the views and opinions of each participant. This is because the approach is that of ontological, meaning that the participants knowledge, interpretations, experiences, understandings, perceptions and so on are important to the social reality in which the research aims to explore, (Mason, 2018). For this reason the epistemology approach was disregarded, as this studies the nature of knowledge, (Hogan *et al.* 2009), rather than the nature of reality. The participants are being invited to share their experiences and understanding of the change process. The aim of the research is to gain insight in to managers experience within change management, and if public sector managers in an Irish perspective are experiencing the widely reported challenges of change management. An analysis into this area is needed to complete this research and the researcher aims to gain an understanding of managers previous and current perspectives and experience in change management. For this reason, the research instrument chosen to research the topic is interviews.

The type of interview that will be used is semi structured. This is also known as a qualitative interview (Mason, 2018). This entails the researcher preparing a set of questions that will cover core topics and themes as a starting point for participants but also invites participants to express points of views and perspectives which may not be directly asked within the set of questions prepared, (Silverman, 2015). Interviews were chosen over questionnaires because the

researchers aim is to gain in-sight into the management of change and questionnaires may not give the researcher the opportunity to explore the topic in-depth with managers.

A set of questions will be prepared that will act as a schedule or check list of items that need to be covered but also allows for the participant to express opinions on the research topic or to express that they have not seen or experienced some of the issues that have been raised in the literature review.. The interview schedule for each participant will be the same although various follow up questions within the schedule may be posed to the participant depending on their input to previous questions and may also be posed to clarify information the participant is providing. According to Mason (2018) a common structure for semi structured interviews consists of a fluid and flexible structure, so that it allows the participant and interviewer to address and develop on unexpected topics which may arise. Alsaawi (2014) reports that researchers use this type interview as it they believe a structured interview could hinder the responses from participants in terms of the depth of the answers to interview questions that usually take an open ended form in semi structured interviews. As a result of the flexible interview schedule, these interviews also tend to take on a more informal style of conversation, often referred to as conversations with a purpose, (Mason, 2018).

Due to the researcher using open ending questions it is recommended that a pilot study be undertaken, (Alsaawi, 2014). Subsequently, before the interviews are conducted a pilot study will be tested. This is to establish that the interview schedule/ questions are clear and understandable. This will also help to anticipate how the interview will be conducted and what possible challenges could arise.

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data Microsoft teams will be used. A meeting will be hosted and organised by the researcher, working togethering with each participant on scheduling a time that suits both. The Microsoft teams meeting will be recorded and each interview will be dictated by the Microsoft teams application. Although when meetings are recorded on Microsoft teams the application dictates them, the researcher will listen to each interview and review the dictation to ensure all correct data is collected. Each interview will be around 20-30 minutes long. The

data collected will be stored on a password protected document. The interview schedule can be found in appendix 1.

In order to analyse the data collected throughout the interviews a thematic analysis will be adopted. A thematic analysis is described as the identification of themes which are recurring throughout various interviews, and also one of the most common approaches of data analysis in qualitative research, (Freeman, 2009). Therefore, the thematic analysis in this instance will be used in order to explore the data gained from the participants interviews and when dictated the researcher will compare themes, similarities or patterns occurring across the interviews. Coding of interviews will be used in order to highlight themes throughout interviews. Coding is the method of devising a system which helps the researcher to identify common themes, so that they can be easily identified and compared to data from other interviews or literature, (Mason, 2018). Coding is also useful for the researcher as it allows them to keep track of what data they have gained from interviews and analyse what to do with the data, (Mason, 2018).

The interview questions being posed to the participant are not validated interview questions from previous research. This is as a result of the gap in the research identified above in research aims. As a result of this gap it was difficult to find published interview questions in the area of research.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations in terms of qualitative interviews. Mason (2018) lists a number: what an interviewer asks, how they ask it, what the interviewers allows the participant to tell them (are they revealing more than they should), and if confidentially and anonymity can be protected. Although, Mason (2018) reports that it is not possible to anticipate all possible ethical issues, thinking about the 4 points mentioned above can help a researcher prepare for some of the issues that can be anticipated.

Ethical considerations for this study include the storing of data and consent from participants. In order to conduct interviews consent will be gotten from each participant, they will also be informed that the interview will be recorded. Participants will be made aware that they are

under no obligation to answer all questions and can refuse to answer if they wish and that at any point they can withdraw from the research. Participants will be made aware of the data being stored safely on a password protected document, and that they can access the data from their own interview if they wish to do so at any point. Due to the interviews taking place over Microsoft teams and being online, the consent forms will be emailed to them and the researcher will request it to be signed, either with an e-signature if the participant has one, scanned back with a written signature or if this is not possible the consent can be sent by post. All details of the study will be given on an information sheer and consent forms will include the researchers email in the event that the participants have any other queries for the researcher. Please see appendix 2 for the information sheet given to participants and appendix 3 for a sample consent form. .

5.6 Limitations of study

The limitations of this study are as a result of choosing a qualitative methodological approach. Typically this infers a smaller sample size and therefore findings cannot be generalised, (Silverman, 2015). Thus, findings of the proposed research topic cannot be generalised across the entire Irish public sector but are subjective opinions and perspectives on change management. As a result of the small sample size, further research should be done in this area to establish if managers experience change management challenges in the Irish public sector.

According to Alwaasi (2014) using interviews as a research tool has its limitations. Researchers face a very time consuming process when they choose interviews, they have a number of steps in the process 1) access, 2) making contact with chosen participants, 3) conducting the interview, 4)transcribing interviews, and 5) making use of the data i.e. data analysis. Alshenqeeti (2014) concurs that the limitations of interviewing is that the research tool is very time consuming in both the data collection process and analysis process. As a result of this limitation researchers need to carefully plan and manage their time well in order to conduct all interviews in the time available to them.

Another limitation of this study is that due to a worldwide pandemic the interviews will all take place online using Microsoft teams. If the research was taking part in another time, face to face

interviews would be preferrable to the researcher. The online aspect of research has created difficulties for researchers. Madge and O'Connor (2017) outline a number of them; the distance between a researcher and interviewee can affect the commitment of the interviewee and make it easier for them to drop out of the study, technological issues can lead to quality in the sound or video making it difficult to record the interview or transcribe from the recording, connection could drop off at any moment if the internet connection is not stable, and participants may not feel comfortable being recorded online. All of these limitations must be taken into account when planning the interview to limit the possibilities of such incidences occurring.

6 Findings

In order to analyse the findings of this study the interviews were coded to allow the researcher to see the emerging themes across the interviews, as stated above in the methodology section. The themes identified in the interviews conducted are as follows: the culture of the organisation, communication and change, training and knowledge of change management, types of employees, managers and change, and the organisations ability to adapt to change

6.1 The culture of the organisation

Every participant in the study stated that the culture of the organisation had an impact on effective change management in the organisation. The importance of the organisational culture for effective change management can be seen in Al-Ali *et al.* (2017) stating that organisations must instil a culture that is receptive to change in order for that organisation to manage change effectively. It is evident from the findings that managers in this organisation found that the culture of an organisation was imperative in order to achieve effective change management. Lucas and Cline (2008) also noted the relationship between organisational culture and successful organisational change.

Although it became apparent throughout the interviews that there was mixed views regarding the culture toward change in this organisation. A number of the participants stated that this varied from employee to employee and department to department.

For example participant C stated that :'Some do and some don't, but regardless this is going to get that anywhere'.

Through this statement It could be seen that this manager had encountered a culture of openness to change but also a culture resistant to change in the organisation.

Whereas participant A stated that the culture of this organisation was more often positive towards change than not: 'I think it's quite open. I. think most people are very open to it;.

It seems from the findings that although one participant found there was a positive culture towards change most managers found there to be a mixed culture and attitude towards change in the organisation.

Whilst participant B noted that the culture towards change was varied across departments: 'Departments like this are certainly more flexible to change and a lot more driven to change and react and plan for the future. There are different driving forces too'.

The department this participant worked in was a service user department stating that they had certain standards to meet that were always being updated, and they reckoned that other departments may not have as much professional responsibility therefore creating less of a drive for change. The culture toward change varying from department to department has damaged some departments ability to change according to this participant. The importance of the organisations or parts of the organisation being receptable towards change can be seen in literature review. Mbeda (2014) notes that a receptive and flexible organisational culture allows an organisation to accept change quicker and to also seek out opportunities to be involved with change initiatives that benefit the organisation.

6.2 Communication and change

In all interviews undertaken communication during the change process was mentioned in a number of contexts. It was mentioned 1) as a challenge and 2) as a resolution.

Throughout the interviews it became apparent that communication was a challenge in successful change management. Participants noted that a lack of communication created a resistance to change form employees.

Participant B in particular stated that- 'People need to understand why things are getting looked at or changed. Here in our organisation there is a huge resistance to change because people don't understand why'.

This statement was in reply to the question regarding challenges when implementing change. It is clear from this statement that the lack of communication has created challenges in managing change.

Similarly participant A and D agreed that communication needs to be a factor in the change process. Participant A stated that not having good communication has created challenges in the change process: 'If people don't know what's happening, and they're certainly not brought into the loop early enough, they will feel as though change is being done to them and not with them'. Whilst participant D stated that: 'For change to be successful, you have to have a really good information flow stream….. it needs to be targeted to that worker whatever level they're at, and there needs to be a you know it's an openness and transparency and accountability'.

This links to Basu (2015) view of communication being noted as a challenge in the change process, it is stated that resistance to change is as a result of a lack of awareness by employees. If they do not understand what will happen, when it will happen or what the outcomes of the change will be the employees will resist the change being implemented, (Basu, 2015).

Although a challenge of change management it was also noted as a resolution to challenges in the change process by every participant in the study. Participants stated numerous times that communication was key for successful change.

Participant E stated that: 'How you need to deal with it (change) is that you know you use you really need to finely tune your people skills and you need to try and work with them'.

Participant F also agreed that communication was key to overcoming challenges in the change process: 'By sitting down with them, having a meeting and explaining the reasons for the changes, why we needed them and how it was actually going to make their working lives easier'.

Using communication as a resolution to some of the challenges faced in the change process is also noted in the literature review. Cummings and Worley (2015) state that when employees become anxious or uncertain of changes it is because of a lack or breakdown of communication in the organisation. Paton and McCalman (2008) also report that in order for change to be accepted by employees it is important for them to understand why the change is happening and what has happened that has triggered the change to be implemented.

Participant A also mentioned the use and advocation of new change approaches should be used for effective change management: 'So the newer approaches would very much advocate for co designing approaches to change. It's really important you bring about the people that you work with and the people who are going to be impacted by the change. In some cases that's staff and in some cases that might be service users in your particular service. So co design approaches and collaboration. Really building the idea what a shared purpose is'.

6.3 Training and Knowledge of Change Management

Training and knowledge of change management was an area in the interview that was quite varied across the participants. Some had no knowledge or training before having to manage change and now would describe their knowledge of this area as experiential knowledge. This group of participants felt that they would have benefitted greatly from some training in this area before having to embark on the change management process.

Other participants stated that although they had no direct or specific training in the area of change management, their other training was linked in some way to change management.

For example participant E stated that: ' With my bachelor's degree I would have picked up a little bit of it through the HR module that we did, in the masters that I'm doing now, we're doing a lot of innovation and leadership and how people and how you manage people'.

Similarly participant A stated: 'So the work that I do is called organizational development. Really what happens with that as you bring a collection of skills to the table so I have a background in operational HR or of a background in physco therapy I've background in coaching and training and development. Then that experience of the organization as well that kind of lived professional experience in the organization. So the whole lot of that combined together is what brings the skills for, I suppose, bringing others through the skills of change and bringing about people and culture change. And then also I have a qualification as an organizational development practitioner. But in terms of an actual change management course in itself, no. It's a collection of other skills coming together'.

The importance of managers training in change management is evident from both the findings of the study and the literature reviewed. As stated above some of the participants concurred that training in this area would have greatly affected how they managed the change process. It is also stated in the literature review that managers often contribute to failed change management as a result of their lack of knowledge in the change project, and a lack of project management or change management skills, (Cohen, 2019). Popa (2017) also states that failings in the change process is as a result of managers not being equipped with the necessary skills to carry out and successfully implement change. In order for organisations to have successful change implementation their managers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitude to so, (Parachiv, *et al.* 2019).

6.4 Employees Length of Service

This topic came up in a number of interviews. Although not apparent in the literature review above, a number of participants stated that when implementing change the employees length of service played a crucial role.

When speaking about barriers or challenges faced in the change process, a number of the participants stated that employees that have been employed in the organisation for a long time created challenges for management when implementing change.

Participant A noted that: 'There are people who maybe 15-20 years in the same room, so they're not as used to change'

Participant F noted that they had also experienced challenges in terms of an employee's length of service: 'So I suppose when I started here we had some members of staff who are working here very very very long-time and we're very reluctant for anything to change and there was an attitude of we've always done it this way. So why? Why would you change? and equally we have some employees who were very open to change and were welcoming of change'.

Participant C stated similar and also added a note on newer employees: 'We would have had some long standing employees and then say new employees who are new to the organization

who are who are adaptable to change and then say the longstanding they can be quite set in their ways, and they're used to doing it certain way. '

From the above it can be seen that three participants had some difficulties with longer standing employees.

6.5 Managers and Change

It is evident from both the literature review and the interviews undertaken that managers play a critical role in the success of change management.

Throughout the interviews it was mentioned that managers play a key role in communicating and helping employees though the change process. One participant in particular raised the view that middle managers in particular are very important to the successful implementation of change.

Participant A stated: 'Middle managers in particular, are key to the success because they sit in a space where they are working with the frontline and then they're also navigating and the corporate aspect of the organization. So they're linking in with maybe an executive management team and then frontline service managers or teams. So particularly middle managers are very much a catalyst for change'.

Participant E similarly stated that managers were a key to the success of change: ' It's all about people you know. It's all about how people relate and collaboration and it comes down to getting input from the people who actually know what's going on so technically, from the ground up. If you don't ask the people who are actually doing the job, what changes they think would work. You're not going to get by in from them. If you want it, you can't impose change on people. It will never work. You have to collaborate'.

This was also discussed in the literature review above. Ionestu *et al.* (2014) noted that the managers role of communication is incremental to the change process. It is the managers role to communicate as early as possible in the change process to allow for employees to get

involved in the change, get employees interested in the change and also to allow them to prepare for this change that could affect them in numerous ways, (Ionestu *et al.* (2014)

When speaking about managers being a key to the success participant D stated that although managers are the key to success they have also been the source of failure of change initiatives and believes that the failures are as a result of managers not applying the appropriate position in managing these changes. This could relate back to the varying views in the literature review surrounding management styles, and what types of managers manage change best.

6.6 The organisations ability to adapt

This is another area in the interview that was varied across the participants. Two participants felt that the organisation did not have the ability to adapt quickly and effectively. Another two participants felt the organisation did have the ability to do this if needed and it became apparent particularly when Covid-19 caused a huge shift in the organisation and the last two had mixed views on this topic.

The participants that had the view the organisation was not able to quickly and effectively change if the need was raised stated that due to the historical structure of this organisation, a breakdown of communication causes this organisation to not have the ability to be dynamic.

For example participant B stated: 'I think one of the drawbacks of this particular organization is probably it's historical in structures. When pulling together there's a lot of silo, not just silo workers but silo departments and there are organisations within this organisation which don't necessarily communicate with other departments. So there is a breakdown of communication'.

This can be linked back to Bojessan and Fundin (2020) recommendation of breaking down the segregated roles and departments across the organisation to create purposeful interactions and allow departments to combine their knowledge and skills.

Participant F had a similar view point: 'so many obstacles you know to get anything done and you need you need to justify and I suppose rightly so. We need to justify big spends and that

kind of thing. But a lot of time can be wasted doing that and we still get a no. Again, because there's so many things to jump through, it takes months and months to get anything done'.

Two of the participants had a different view to the above and stated that the organisation is very adaptable to change and can do so quickly and effectively if needed.

Participant A stated: 'I think for short term changes very much so built like that. I think again, Covid19 really brought that to the floor. Teams were mobilized, the resources were mobilized and that that was the that was one of hopefully one of the learning pieces around responding to Covid is that actually when you free up resources and you reduce hierarchical structures, you can mobilize an awful lot more much quicker'.

Participant E also agreed that the organisation was adaptable to change: 'I think certainly with the reaction to Covid, Obviously there was a lot of mistakes made along the way, but I think 99.9% of people want to do something. Wanted to React, wanted to bring in whatever needed to be done. Whatever you say bad about the organisation, they've turned it around …. You know, I mean, you don't get everything right. That's, but that's in every environment that's in every organization. But you know, I think I think we've done pretty well in that respect'.

Both of these participants gave evidence on how the organisation quickly and effectively changed when the need came about.

Two other participants took on a different stance. Stating that the ability to be dynamic was based on the employees.

Participant D stated: 'Look the staff responded wonderfully across all spectrums. But the organisation itself, it looks like the emperor had no clothes. It was found to be severely wanting in many areas'.

This section of the interview provided the research with extremely varied views and opinions on the dynamic capabilities of the organisation. Although there is a link between the varying views. Those that had the view the organisation did not have the ability to change effectively and quickly if the need was risen worked in service user departments and those that disagreed stating the organisation did have the ability to do so did not work in service user departments.

According to a number of the interviews the adaptability of the organisation was damaged by financial concerns and the hierarchical structure of the organisation.

Participant F mentioned: 'What tends to happen in my experience is you get new people in with ideas and enthusiasm and wanting to change and make things better and they're just hit with brick wall after brick wall after brick wall and eventually they give up and say what's the point. They slip into the 9-5, I'm doing my day's work and getting out here and that seems to happen quite a lot here'.

This was a common theme a cross a number of interviews. It was found that as a result of the hierarchical structure of this organisation and the need to justify investing in change, it often deterred employees or managers in the organisation to try to bring about change.

Participant B had pointed out that this was not only this particular organisation but it was across the Irish public sector: 'large public sector organisations, the desire to do that might be there, but it's actually getting all the cogs in place and getting them moving seems to take a lot more negotiation and stake holder involvement'. This comment was in comparison to this participants time working in a privately owned company.

Interestingly participant A mentioned that the covid-19 pandemic caused the organisation to free up resources and create a flatter structure in order to help the quick transition that was needed to adapt to new roles that emerged as a result of the pandemic: 'when you free up resources and you reduce hierarchical structures, you can mobilize an awful lot more much quicker. So there certainly desire and there is certainly a desire with chief officer to hold onto that and that you know that those boundaries that have broken down the hierarchy structures that have been reduced, that some of that can be retained. It isn't going to be realistic to retain all of that, I don't think. Because there's still quite a an older hierarchical structure in the organization'.

The way in which the organisation was forced to break down structure in the organisation to deal with the covid-19 pandemic is similar to a point discussed in the literature review. Baretto (2010) states that a firms dynamic capabilities are dependent on the organisations ability to

combine both internal and external abilities to assist them in implementing change in an environment that is rapidly changing.

6.7 Conclusion

As it can be seen form the findings above the themes emerging from the interviews conducted include the culture of change, the ability for the organisation to adapt, the role on communication in the change process, the managers role in the change process, the impact of the types of employees and the managers knowledge and training in change management. All of these themes had both participants that had similar views and opposing views on these themes. These views seemed to vary across managers but a theme occurred throughout these views. It appears that the managers in the corporate side of the organisation had similar views to each other and the managers in the departments that delivered a service to the public had similar views on some topics. It was also apparent these views in which the corporate managers held versus the managers in departments delivering a service differentiated from each other in certain areas. The themes emerging will be discussed in the following section along with a comparison to the information in the literature review, along with some themes that were not discussed or found in the literature review.

7 Discussion

The findings above have provided the research with some interesting data about change management in the Irish public sector. Some of the findings offered new data that was not found in the literature. For example, in the findings it became apparent that three managers found difficulties with long standing employees when implementing change. On the other hand some of the data had similarities. Specifically around the importance of communication throughout the change process.

The research question identified in the introduction of this paper is: Do managers in the Irish public sector face challenges when implementing change? It is evident from the semi structured interviews undertaken with this group of managers in the Irish public sector that they have faced difficulties in the change process. In the above section the themes that emerged from the interviews are as follows: the culture of the organisation, communication and change, training and knowledge of change management, length of service of employees and change, and the organisations ability to adapt. Each of which provide the research with evidence that managers in the Irish public sector have faced challenges when managing change. The themes will be discussed under the objectives and sub objectives of this study; managers experiences of managing change in the Irish public section, change management in the Irish public sector, and challenges when implementing change.

7.1 Managers experiences of managing change in the Irish Public Sector

Throughout the interviews undertaken managers disclosed their experiences of change management within this public sector organisation. The participants had varying experiences in this area.

For example, three participants felt that the employees who had been employed with this organisation for a significant number of years appeared to have an effect on the change process. Although this was not found as a challenge for managers when implementing change in the literature review, it was apparent in the findings section of this study. Three participants mentioned that longer standing employees at times created difficulties when managers were

implementing change. These participants thought that some of the employees who had served a long period of time in the organisation found change to be difficult. This was as a result of a number of things. Participant F felt that these employees were reluctant to change as a result of being comfortable doing what they were doing and had an attitude of if it's not broken why fix it. In order to overcome this challenge in the change process this participant said that they had to take a lot of time out of implementing the change to sit down and talk to these employees, to help them to understand why this was happening, how it would affect them and also how it would fit in to their work and although at the start of the change it may seem like extra or more work on top of their workload it would hopefully, in the long term, set up the department to run more smoothly.

From the above it can be seen that communication can be used to resolve such challenges, Communication and its importance in the change process will be discussed in more detail below. Particularly in relation to the significant impact that good communication or bad communication can have on the change process and how managers can use communication when difficulties arise such as resistance to change. It must also be noted that participants did not state that they faced this difficulty with all long standing employees but they have faced it with some.

Whilst other participants had more positive experiences when dealing with change. For example, one participant felt that there was an open attitude towards change in the organisation and stated that the organisations ability to adapt and change to the needs of the Covid-19 pandemic reflected this. Considering what some participants referenced as 'a historical structure' this participant noted that the organisation adapted to this rapid and emergent change but stated that the organisation will have to work on sustaining long term changes. The importance of organisational culture and its effect on change management is referenced un the literature review. Al- Ali *et al.* (2017) states that in order to effectively manage change the organisation must have a culture that is receptive to change.

By analysing both of these views it is apparent that these managers have had different experience's when dealing with change. Some maybe facing more challenges than others. This could be dependent on what area of the organisation the participants are working in. For example, Participant B noted that certain areas of the organisation were more adaptable than others, and this could be dependent on certain driving forces within departments. Therefore,

some departments, managers and employees may be more familiar to change and as a result of this familiarity more adaptable to changes as they have more experiences of change implementation.

7.2 Change Management in the Irish Public Sector

Change management in the Irish public sector was explored in the interviews, in particular the culture towards change in this Irish public sector organisation, and the organisations ability to adapt to change quickly and effectively. Participants gave differing views on the culture towards change in the organisation. Two participants felt that the organisation was open to change whilst others found it was not. Similarly there was opposing views on the organisation ability to adapt quickly and effectively.

The literature reviewed and interviews undertaken showed similarities surrounding the importance of having a positive culture towards change in the organisation. It is stated in the literature that the culture of an organisation has a significant impact on how change happens in an organisation. Mbeda (2014) states that organisations must adapt and embrace a flexible culture in order for effective change management. Throughout the literature the importance of a positive culture towards change is flagged as a tool for effective change management. Taking this into account, O'Riordain (2012) states that there is findings that link change failing in the Irish public sector to the culture of an organisation. Throughout the interviews undertaken it became apparent that there were differing views surrounding the culture of change in this organisation. Two of the participants stated that they believed that the culture towards change in this public sector organisation was quite open, whilst one participant believed there was a mix of positive and negative attitudes towards change, but noted that this can be found in most organisations. From analysing the interviews it can be seen that managers had mixed views on the topic of the culture towards change, implying that some participants may have found the negative culture towards change difficult to manage during the change process and others may not have had to deal with this challenge in the change process.

Although the importance of having a positive culture towards change is not directly mentioned in the interviews it is spoken about in terms of this organisations culture towards change. Each participant noted that the culture of the organisation has a significant impact of successful change management. As stated in the findings section, Participant B noted that the service using departments had more of a drive for change as a result of criteria and standards those departments have to meet, and as a result may have more of a culture of change.

Another area which differing views and opinions come to light is around the organisations ability to adapt to change. One participant stated that they faced difficulties when implementing change, they felt they and their employees were often met with obstacles in the change process. Two participants had the view that the organisation was not built to change effectively or quickly due to its historical structures. Participant F stated that when a department or manager is trying to implement change the process is held up by the need to justify big spends. Although this participant agreed that some justification is needed in this area, it had a knock on effect on the change process and slowed the process down and therefore often deterred people from initiating change process'.

In contrast two participants felt that the organisation did have the ability to adapt to change quickly and effectively. Referencing its ability to adapt well to short term changes .In particular, how the organisation adapted well to the changes caused as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is stated that change initiatives are likely to fail between one third and 80% of the time, (Applebaum *et al.* 2012). Failures in change initiatives and the organisations ability to adapt to change and be responsive to changes in the external environment have a high correlation, (Bojessan and Fundin, 2020). The differing views of these participants indicates that they have either experienced different scenarios of how the organisation adapts to change or have differing views on this matter. However, it could also be that different parts of this public sector organisation adapt to change differently considering that these two participants work in different areas of the organisation. Taking the varying data form the interviews into account it can be seen that the organisations ability to adapt to change has been a challenge for a number of the participants.

7.3 Challenges when implementing change

Throughout the interviews it can be seen that there are challenges when implementing change in the Irish public service. These challenges include resistance to change, the length of service of an employee, communication and the training/ knowledge that managers have in relation to change management.

An aspect of the interviews which was also apparent throughout the literature review is that communication plays a key role in managing change. It was found to be a challenge in managing change for the managers interviewed and it was also found to be a resolution to facing difficulties in the process. Participants stated that difficulties in the change process came to the fore front when there was no communication or poor communication. This is concurred in the literature review. Cummings and Worley (2015) mention communication as a method for dealing with the resistance to change. Furthermore, Ionestu *et al.* (2014) states that the key role of managers within the change process is communication Through a number of the interviews it can be seen that managers found that when employees were not communicated with either before the change or during the change, it created a challenge in the change process. Much like Paton and McCalman (2008) stating that employees need understand why the change was happening, participant B had similar view, as stated above. This aspect of the interviews had similarities with the literature reviewed. It should also be noted that within a significant number of the interviews issues that arose or how managers dealt with change circled back to communication and its key role in the change process. It was a common theme throughout all interviews, and was noted as the main reason for resistance to change by Participant B. It became apparent throughout the interviews that participants felt that communication was key to successful change management and without communication challenges arose.

Resistance to change was one of the first challenges noted in the literature review. A number of articles reference resistance as a challenge in the change management process. Basu (2015) states that employees resistance to change can be a factor in the change process and is based on the employees lack of awareness about the change, what it entails, and a fear of the unknown. A resistance to change is also noted as a challenge in the change process by some of the participants in this study. Participant C noted that the resistance to change can take up time

in order to support these employees that are resistant to change. Similarly Participant B noted that there is always some form of resistance to change in this organisation and this resistance is caused by employees not understanding why the change is happening. This Participants views are very similar to what Basu (2015) states, which is mentioned above. It is mentioned in the literature review that communication, along with other strategies, is an effective resolution to minimising this challenge. Cummings and Worley (2015) state that a breakdown or lack of communication can cause employees to become anxious of change. To help with the resistance to change, employees must first be involved in the communication of why the changes are being made, (Paton and McCalman, 2008). Having undertaken interviews it would appear that this group of participants in the Irish public sector have experienced resistance to change, creating a challenge in managing change.

Training and knowledge in the area of change management was a factor in both the interviews and the literature review. The importance of having knowledge of managing change and training in it, and how it can affect the change process was expressed by participants. The participants that did not have any training or knowledge in change management felt that some training would have greatly benefitted them when managing training. Although now they have picked up skills in managing change, it would have been beneficial when having to implement change for the first time as managers. The participants who had knowledge of change management were not directly trained in this but had studied courses that had modules that linked into change management which gave them skills to implement change. Overall the view was that managers need knowledge or training to help them to implement change. This point is also noted in the literature review. It is stated that without knowledge of change management managers cannot implement change successfully or address the change process post implementation, (Schaafsma, 1997). Although not mentioned as a difficulty in the change process by these participants it was clear from them that some form of training in this area would assist them in implementing change successfully. The importance of knowledge of change management and knowing when change needs to happen is reiterated in the literature review above. Anand and Barsoux (2017) state that managers in an organisation must understand what changes need to happen and have the mindset and behaviours to take a company to where it needs to be. This could be an area of training the organisation could invest in. To focus on training managers to implement change which may help to minimise the challenges, or give the managers skills to deal with these challenges.

7.4 Discussion Conclusion

The hypothesis of this study stated that managers in the Irish public sector face challenges in the change process. Throughout the interviews it became obvious that this group of managers have faced challenges in the change process. Some challenges differing from the literature found such as the length of service of the employee having an impact on the change process and some having similarities such as resistance to change.

Although from the literature it can be seen that there was limited information on the challenges of managing change in the Irish public sector, the interviews undertaken give some clarity on the change process in the Irish public sector and the challenges some managers have encountered. The challenges of change management reported in the literature review were concurred by participants and there was also evidence of challenges these participants faced that were not found in the literature review. These interviews provided the research with evidence that managers in the Irish public sector have faced challenges when implementing change.

However, this cannot be generalised to all managers in the Irish public sector and the challenges they face, but an insight into a group of managers experiences and views on change management in the Irish public sector.

8 Conclusion

Throughout this study there have a number of aspects discussed and analysed surrounding change management in the Irish public sector. In the early stages of this study literature was reviewed on change management theory and challenges. It was clear that there was limited literature on change management in the Irish public sector. For this reason, the researcher undertook this study with the view of gaining insight into change management in the Irish public sector and if the managers in this sector faced similar challenges to those reported in the literature review. Throughout these interviews it was found that this group of participants have faced challenges in the change process. A number of these challenges reported in the literature review such as resistance to change, were found to be a challenges for this group of participants. Other challenges, such as an employee's length of service, that were not found in the literature review, emerged in the interviews undertaken.

The findings from the interviews gave insight into a number of areas in which participants were facing challenges in the implementation of change. These include the importance of a positive culture towards change, resistance to change, the importance of communication in the change process, the length of service of an employee, the organisations ability to adapt to change and a managers training and knowledge of change management.

The culture of the organisation was found to have a big impact on the change process. The findings here show that whilst the participants were in agreement that a positive culture towards change was needed to successfully implement change, there was varying views on if this organisation had a positive or negative culture towards change management.

Resistance to change was seen by a number of participants in the study. This resistance to change was mainly linking to a lack of communication. Interestingly, communication seemed to be linked to the challenges of change management at a number of points throughout the interviews. Either as a challenge itself or as a resolution to a challenge. For example, it is seen as a resolution to dealing with resistance to change, but also a factor in causing resistance to change. It is also seen as a resolution when dealing with long standing employees not wanting or disagreeing with change. The findings in both these sections show how important communication is in the change process. The importance of communication is also backed up

numerous times in the literature review. For example, Paton and McCalman (2008) state that employees need understand why the change was happening. Paton and McCalman (2008) also state that employees are more willing to except changes if they understand what is the cause of the change, the need of the change, and what has triggered this change. In order for employees to understand why change is taking place they must be communicated with by management.

Another area of the interviews that gave insight into change management in the Irish public sector was the lack of training on change management provided to managers in this organisation. This was an aspect in which managers felt some training in managing change would have been beneficial to them. Supporting staff in this area could help managers to be better prepared for the challenges they may face or could help them to avoid them. This is an area in which this public sector organisation could invest in to help managers feel more confident in managing change, give them the skills to implement change and help them to help their employees throughout the change process and in the aftermath of the change.

The objectives and sub objectives of this study was to gain insight into managers experiences of managing change in the Irish public sector, learning about change management in the Irish public sector and if there are any challenges that arise when implementing change in the Irish public sector. It can be seen from this research that these participants have faced numerous challenges when managing change. Proving that this hypothesis of the study- ' Managers in the Irish public sector experience challenges in the change process' , is true with this group of participants. This study is not to generalise challenges in change for managers across the Irish public sector but to give insight into a small number of managers experiences when managing change.

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10 Appendix

10.1 Appendix 1

<u>Interview Schedule</u>

<u>Interviewee Introduction</u>

- How long have you been employed with this organisation?

- How long have you been in your current role for?

<u>Management knowledge of managing change</u>

- What experience do you have in the area of managing change?

- Is change management an area you have been trained in or have knowledge in?

- When implementing changes would you consider managers a key to the success?

<u>Change Management and employees</u>

- Do employees welcome change in the organisation?

- Have you faced any difficulties/challenges with employees when managing change?

- If so, what challenges have you faced?

- How have you dealt with these challenges?

- How have these challenges effected the change process?

<u>Culture of Change</u>

- Do you think the culture of an organisation impacts on effective change management?

- In your opinion, what is the attitude/culture towards change in the organisation?

- Is the organisation built to change effectively and quickly if the need arises?

<u>Change Management in the Irish Public Sector</u>

- Are you aware of any change initiatives currently taking place in the organisation?

- If so, what will these changes entail?

Change Management in the Irish Public Sector: A managers Perspective

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

I am a final year student study a MSc in Management at the national college of Ireland. This research is being undertaken as part of my studies . The aim of the research is to gain insight in to managers experience with managing change within the Irish public sector

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

This study will cover a number of topics across the topic of change management including: managers knowledge about managing change, change management and employees, culture of change, and change management in the Irish public sector. The interview will take 20-30 minutes and will be facilitated on Microsoft teams.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You have been invited to take part in this study as your role involves the element of managing employees and you have a number of years' experience in management.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation in the study is voluntary. The participant has the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any point.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

This aim of this study is to explore a gap in the literature around the Irish public sector and change management. Although there is data and articles on this topic, it is limited. This study

will help to gain insight into the managers in the Irish public sectors' experience in managing change

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

The organisation and individuals will remain anonymous. The recordings will be stored and kept on a password protected computer that only the researcher has access to. The researcher may have to break confidentiality agreements if there is a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm or danger to either the participant or another individual or if a serious crime has been committed. Non-anonymised data will be kept in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings and kept as part of the research data. These will be stored safely on a password protected computer.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained using Microsoft teams/ streams on a password protected computer that only the researcher has access to until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

This research will only be used in the submission for my dissertation.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

email-

THANK YOU

<u>Change management in the Irish public sector- Consent to take part in research</u>

- • I.. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- • I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- • I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- • I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- • I understand that participation involves being interviewed by the researcher, and contributing to the study.
- • I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- • I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- • I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- • I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. The organisation I work for will also remain anonymous.
- • I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in this dissertation
- • I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- • I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected file that only the researcher has access to.
- • I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

<u>Researcher Information</u>

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Signature of research participant

-------------------------------------- Date ----------------

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

--------------------------------------- Date ----------------------