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Perceived Causes of Change Fatigue on an Insurance Company in South Africa

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A research article submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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DECLARATION

I, **Kelebogile Mokoka**, declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Kelebogile Mokoka

(Type your name in full here, and sign in the space above)

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 20…..

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my source of strength, my pillars of strength, and my biggest fans: my mother Margret Mokoka; my sister Kamogelo Mokoka; and my partner Bonginkosi Dlamini.

Thank you not only for your patience and support and for pushing me towards the end goal when it did not seem near but also for providing the support and encouragement when it did not seem to be possible. Thank you for putting up with my moods and my bad hair days.

The last months of this process were extremely challenging physically and emotionally, but – with your love and encouragement – I was able to see the process through.

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ABSTRACT

Change in today's world has become increasingly inevitable as a result of various factors but particularly as a result of the current industrial revolution. Companies will be forced to undergo changes, which may occur frequently and/or simultaneously, in order to ensure survival. As a result, employees may experience intense feelings contributing to change fatigue. Change fatigue is defined as the overwhelming feelings that are associated with emotions such as stress, exhaustion, and burnout caused by an organisation undergoing excessive change. The purpose of this study is to identify the drivers of change fatigue and to assess the impact thereof on employees at an insurance company within the South African context. Semi-structured interviews were the primary measurement tools that were utilised in the data collection. Data was coded and themed in accordance with the study. In the research conducted the drivers of change identified were: tiredness and burnout, exhaustion, stress, the frequency of change, and conflicting and overlapping change, as a result of changes relating to management, systems, business growth and building facility changes. The significance or impact of the changes appeared to be a contributing factor towards the feelings related to change fatigue. The data illustrated that those who understood the rationale of change and had already experienced some degree of change expressed fewer drivers of change fatigue. Some changes (such as business growth) went unnoticed and when unpacked was the ultimate driver for all the changes presented. The impact of the change resulted in uncertainty, withdrawal, intentions to resign or resignation. However, a minority of the respondents reported having gained a competency to adapt to change as a result.

Keywords:

Change, fatigue, causes, driver, excessiveness, impact, frequency, significance, stress, burnout, exhaustion, uncertainty.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of change management in organisations has been widely explored in management literature. One of the leading causes of the failure of change management initiatives occurs when employees do not adapt to change in an organisation (McMillan & Perron, 2013). McMillan and Perron (2013) prove that resistance to change is a major cause for this failure to adapt. Recently change has become increasingly inevitable. Employees are forced to undergo changes, which may occur frequently and/or simultaneously, required by the organisation. As a result, employees may experience change fatigue (McMillan & Perron, 2013). Bernerth, Walker, and Harris (2011) define change fatigue as overwhelming feelings and behaviours associated with change that go unnoticed and that result in fatigue.

The key challenge for management today is how to predict and respond to different and multiple changes that are happening concurrently (Stensaker & Meyer, 2012). Change is not as linear as it used to be in the past, and organisations cannot afford to employ the typical 'unfreeze-freeze-refreeze' model proposed by Lewin (1974) because change is no longer a simple start-stop episode (Todnem By, 2005).

Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) show that studies by the American Management Association reveal that more than 80% of companies in the United States are embarking on major changes, and approximately 46% of these companies have been undergoing multiple changes within their organisations. These changes can be as small as a process change or as major as a merger and acquisition (Antony, 2004).

Change is inevitable in the 21st century; however, with all the noise and fuss about change management, employers need to consider the impact of change on employees. Johnson (2016) has shown that inappropriate change management is increasingly causing change fatigue in employees. Factors such as excessive changes relating to concepts result in uncertainty, and the extent, size and impact of the change induce stress (Johnson, 2016).

1.1 The aim of the research

The aims of this study are two-fold:

- To explore the perceived drivers of change fatigue in relation to change management in a particular organisation.
- To explore the possible impact of change fatigue on employees.

1.2 Problem statement

The theory of organisational change management and the importance of the ability of an organisation to adapt to change within the 21st century have been widely explored within management literature. Yet limited research has probed the drivers of change fatigue and the impact thereof on employees within the South African context. Insights derived from this study could be useful to organisations that wish to understand why particular change interventions are not easily adopted by employees though the change management process/intervention has been conducted correctly.

1.3 Research question

What are the perceived drivers of change and causes of change fatigue in change management interventions?

2. Literature Review

This section explores and explains literature that relates to change management and change fatigue. This section focuses on identifying the causes of change fatigue, based on previous studies in change management and change fatigue.

2.1 Change management

The change management theory explains the concept as a continuous process whereby organisations review and renew their strategic direction, structure, processes, systems and capabilities that are required to meet the ever-changing needs of their employees, the market and the consumer (Antony, 2004). Thus, it is safe to conclude that organisational change has a direct link to organisational strategy and vice versa (Todnem By, 2005).

Todnem By (2005) states that there have been varied ways and recommendations on how organisations and their managers implement change. These recommendations are in the form of two change implementation methods:

2.1.1 Unilateral method

This method is prescriptive in nature and in terms of control and authority. It tends to take a procedural top-down approach. Organisations tend to use this approach in modification. Advocates of this approach usually believe that the change efforts focus purely on the work, and the workforce naturally follows over time.

2.1.2 Shared method

This method emphasises participation, and it makes use of consultative methods that directly drive the attitudes of people involved in the change. This type of change will generally include a change committee and emphasises creating support for the change, as employees are part of the change.

Todnem By (2005) further formulated that an organisation can undergo three types of changes: technical (changes in the physical routine of how jobs are done); social (changes in the previously established relationships in an organisation); and structural (enhancing and improving the performance of an organisation and could include redesigning the degree of responsibility and authority). The structural approach to change management is generally associated with a top-down approach. This researcher asserts that the type of change that is implemented in an organisation is largely based on the values and objectives of the organisation.

Organisational change has increasingly moved to a focus on customer needs, improving the current way of doing things, and by reinforcing the involvement of employees (Antony, 2004). Literature reveals that success in one type of change management project tends to trigger and initiate the need for additional initiatives (Johnson, 2016).

Changes that are abandoned or halted are not necessarily seen as failures by organisations, but rather as a sign of the need to refocus and reprioritise initiatives in another area (Antony, 2004). However, employees tend to react to change management practices with cynicism when previous change plans were not executed. This set of attitudes is complex in nature and consists of cognitive behaviour that may lead employees to distrust, or to experience a feeling of unfairness (Stensaker & Meyer, 2012).

The pace of change in today's era has been greater than at any other time in the history of business (Antony, 2004). Organisational change requires organisations and employees to constantly change and believes that change is necessary for organisations to be competitive and to stay relevant in the marketplace. Change is necessary for the efficiency of businesses, the improvement of business processes, and for external forces such as legislation to ensure compliance (McMillan & Perron, 2013).

Previous research by Schein (1996) focused on the theory of change, why change management is necessary, and the various models that enable the success of change implementation. Management research has provided extensive literature on the failure

of change management initiatives with emphasis on resistance to change from an employee's perspective (McMillan & Perron, 2013). This research will explore the implications of organisational change management initiatives on employees by specifically focusing on the causes of change fatigue in organisational change and the various coping mechanisms that management should put in place to assist with or to avoid change fatigue in employees.

2.2 Towards a working definition of change fatigue

The theory of change fatigue has been conceived by various researchers to understand and further interrogate the concept of change fatigue. Change fatigue is described by Brown and Cregan (2008) as the overwhelming feelings or emotions such as stress, exhaustion and burnout that are influenced by the continuous changes and pressures in an organisational context. Bernerth et al. (2011) define the term as overwhelming feelings and behaviours associated with change that go unnoticed and result in fatigue. Stensaker and Meyer (2012) maintain that the pursuit of multiple changes creates change fatigue. Bernerth et al. (2011) echo that change fatigue is as a result of numerous organisational changes that have become excessive. In the context of this study, change fatigue will be defined as the overwhelming feelings that are associated with emotions such as stress, exhaustion, and burnout caused by an organisation undergoing excessive change.

Studies in the health care sector provide a practical example of how change fatigue has impacted employees (Dibben & Davies, 2004; McMillan & Perron, 2013). Their research further articulates that it is a popularly researched industry in relation to the change management theory, as there have been various changes identified in the sector, for instance: scope of practice, roles and responsibilities and the introduction of technology (Dibben & Davies, 2004; McMillan & Perron, 2013). Anderzen, Arnetz, Hasson, and Vingard (2008) identified that such organisational changes have had an impact on the work-life of nurses because changes have been attributed to increased workload pressures, stress, exhaustion and anxiety; these often lead to the overpowering feeling of change fatigue.

Furthermore, Dibben and Davies (2004) claim that clinicians perceive change initiatives as endless and many of them fail and reappear with different naming conventions and multiple change implementation initiatives that are conflicting. Clinicians experience a number of conflicting change initiatives that hinder the overall change intervention and their ability to see the purpose of the change.

McMillan and Perron (2013) further indicate that the concept of change has increasingly evolved from management literature as a result of the quest of researchers and scholars to gain insight into the causes of change failures that are different to concepts such as change resistance that are currently well-researched. The phenomenon of change fatigue provides understanding beyond those that have established change resistance at work. When further explored, it can aid organisations to understand the root cause of the failure of change initiatives in their organisations (McMillan & Perron, 2013).

Organisational changes are necessary for the efficiency of businesses, the improvement of business processes, and external forces such as legislation and technological advancements. However, the increased pressures created by implementing the changes rapidly is a major cause of change fatigue. It is worth noting that employees who experience change fatigue tend to participate and accept the change submissively, and this has resulted in uncertainty and powerlessness about the change process, and it has impacted the quality of work negatively (McMillan & Perron, 2013).

2.3 Drivers of change fatigue

2.3.1 Change excessiveness

One of the biggest causes of change fatigue is change excessiveness (Bernerth et al., 2011; Smollan, 2015). The demand-resource theory states that an individual's well-being may be threatened in situations where the organisational demands and/or pressures exceed the employee's resources (Smollan, 2015). Organisational change management can become excessive when the demands of the company outweigh the

resources required by employees to produce, leading to employees experiencing feelings of exhaustion and fatigue (Johnson, 2016).

Johnson, Bareil, Giraud, and Autissier (2016) define change excessiveness as a set of unrelated changes that are sometimes conflicting and made simultaneously with little time spent on enjoying the benefits of the previous change. They further expound that excessive change refers to changes occurring simultaneously and/or when new changes are introduced without the completion of the previous ones; as a result, little or no time is spent on benefitting from those changes or their completion.

Johnson (2016) classifies change excessiveness into sub-dimensions such as change frequency, change impact and change extent.

2.3.2 Change frequency

Change frequency is defined as the occurrence of change management initiatives in a work environment (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Johnson (2016) further emphasises that this definition is not only limited to the occurrences of change initiatives but also to the frequency of multiple changes.

Johnson (2016) states that changes may be discrete (isolated), beginning to end intervention, or a continuous intervention (a series of changes that may be occurring at the same time). Discrete changes allow employees to calculate and adjust their behaviour accordingly; however, in continuous changes, employees may find it harder to adjust and align their expectations with the organisation (Johnson et al., 2016).

The more changes that occur in an organisation (change frequency), the greater the chance for the changes to overlap and potentially lead to change overload, burnout, and chaos (Johnson, 2016). Johnson (2016) further argues that multiple change initiatives are a major challenge in the implementation of change management as they may unintentionally have a negative impact on the performance of the organisation, creating and contributing to employees experiencing feelings of change fatigue.

2.3.3 Change uncertainty

Uncertainty related to change is as important as change frequency because it relates to exhaustion due to excessive workload or a workload that varies unpredictably, which may cause stress and anxiety to employees and have an impact on their well-being (Johnson et al., 2016). In addition to change uncertainty relating to exhaustion, employee engagement, emotional fatigue, and the control employees may have may be compromised.

When employees believe that their degree of control is limited in change initiatives, they tend to develop strain and feelings of exhaustion. More importantly, the impact of the change on their socio-economic environment (i.e. reduced income due to potential retrenchment) is a significant stress trigger (Smollan, 2015). Bernerth et al. (2011) believe that there is a considerable amount of psychological uncertainty – caused by the inability of an employee to predict what may occur – that employees experience during change implementation initiatives. Bernerth et al. (2011) further emphasise the significance of this concept, as it may have a negative influence on the way employees handle unfamiliar environments.

2.3.4 Change impact/significance

Johnson (2016) describes change impact as the possible extent that the change may reach, and the perceived effects of the change, specifically towards the organisational climate, job performance and procedures that are known to be core to an employee's working routine. Employees tend to perceive such changes as harmful and threatening, leading to feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fatigue (Johnson, 2016).

2.3.5 Exhaustion

Bernerth et al. (2011) suggest that employees have a limited number of resources – knowledge, time, energy, and effort – to provide to an organisation. Employees are generally motivated to keep, protect and gain new skills as resources. Any loss of such resources could be the result of excessive organisational change that causes strain on employees. This issue is addressed by Johnson (2016), who states that exhaustion

is the primary result of excessive change, and it can be defined as constant stress and burdens with a combination of emotional strain and the physical exhaustion of an employee.

Bernerth et al. (2011) define exhaustion as a feeling of being depleted beyond one's ability, resulting in the loss of energy to perform basic work and experiencing feelings of strain. Exhaustion is central to the concept of change fatigue, as it drives the emotional reactions of employees.

2.3.6 Burnout

The concept of burnout is closely linked to exhaustion, but it is defined as the overextension of an employee's physical and psychological resources, which is usually experienced during the implementation of change (Johnson et al., 2016). Smollan (2015) identified five important factors as sources of burnout: increased workload, lack of control, low reward, unfairness, and inappropriate values.

McMillan and Perron (2013) explain that there tends to be a decrease in employee optimism in terms of the change itself because of burnout. Bernerth et al. (2011) state that the constant change makes it ultimately difficult for employees to adapt to change, leading to exhaustion and change fatigue.

2.3.7 Stress

Organisational studies relating to change management have previously focused on the individual's psychology that relates to change management. Studies have found that these changes are often stressful to employees undergoing these changes, due to the anticipated negative consequences that are associated with change in an organisation. These could be changes such as an increase in workload, the reduction of independence that an employee previously had, and the potential loss of a job. Specifically the transition phase where new processes are introduced may be viewed as extra work and cause stress that can also result in anxiety (Smollan, 2015).

Furthermore, Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) confirm that emotions related to organisational change can become so tense and traumatic that they have been

compared to death and grief. Employees will experience stress during change and the stress experienced is not one dimensional; employees may experience stress before, during, and after change initiatives that may cause employees to burn out and experience change fatigue (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

2.3.8 Summary of the causes of change fatigue

Cause of change fatigue	Literature review	Definition
Change excessiveness	Johnson, 2016 Johnson et al., 2016 Bernerth et al., 2011 Smollan, 2015	A set of unrelated changes that are sometimes conflicting because they are made simultaneously with little time spent on enjoying the benefits of the previous change.
Change frequency	Smollan, 2015 Rafferty & Griffin, 2006 Johnson, 2016 Johnson et al., 2016	The more changes occur in an organisation, the greater the chance for the changes to overlap and potentially lead to change overload, burnout, and chaos.
Change uncertainty	Smollan, 2015 Bernerth et al., 2011 Johnson et al., 2016	Uncertainty related to change is as important as change frequency because it has also been said to relate to exhaustion, due to excessive workload or a workload that varies unpredictably, which may cause stress and anxiety to employees and have an impact on their well-being.

Cause of change fatigue	Literature review	Definition
Change impact/ significance	Johnson, 2016	The extent the change can reach and the perceived effects of the change that employees see as harmful and threatening, leading to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety that cause fatigue.
Exhaustion	Bernerth et al., 2011 Johnson et al., 2016	A feeling of being depleted beyond one's ability, resulting in loss of energy to perform basic work. Experiencing feelings of strain may drive employees' emotional reactions.
Burnout	Johnson et al., 2016 Smollan, 2015 Bernerth et al., 2011 McMillan & Perron, 2013	Burnout is closely linked to exhaustion, but it is defined as the overextension of an employee's physical and psychological resources, which is usually experienced during the implementation of change.
Stress	Nikolaou & Vakola, 2005 Smollan, 2015	Emotions related to organisational change can become tense and traumatic, leading employees to experience stress, which may cause burnout and create change fatigue.

2.3.9 Impact of change fatigue

Employees who are experiencing change fatigue demonstrate passive behaviour, where they become disengaged, indifferent, and unsure (McMillan & Perron, 2013). Employees merely accept change and do not indicate any sign of resistance. Furthermore, concerns about the change tend not to be communicated openly, even though the effects of the changes are explicitly felt (McMillan & Perron, 2013).

Beil-Hildebrand (2005) contends that there is no apparent increase in grievance cases by employees experiencing change fatigue in their organisations. Employees who experience feelings of change fatigue tend to withdraw, taking no reasonable steps to address issues related to change initiatives in the organisation. Change fatigue has a direct impact on the increase in sick leave that employees take during phases of organisational change (Anderzen et al., 2008).

Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) add that stress caused by change fatigue is said to have contributed to low levels of motivation and the decline in morale within an organisation and is a factor that contributes to high levels of turnover and low job satisfaction as a result. In addition, Johnson (2016) adds that the uncertainty related to change leads to the decrease in commitment to the organisation and prompts an employee's intention to resign.

However, not all literature has stated that the impact of changes in an organisation may lead to negative outcomes for the organisation. Stensaker and Meyer (2012) state that employees who have undergone multiple changes can become accustomed to change and develop capabilities such as adapting to change and use it as an opportunity to upskill themselves technically and so reduce any uncertainties.

Literature has reiterated that the pace of change in today's world is increasing exponentially; however, very little information is provided about how the various changes affect employees and their reactions to it (Stensaker & Meyer, 2012). According to Vakola and Nikolaou (2005), the attitudes of employees regarding change overall are attributed to their cognitions and perceptions about the change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research methodology/paradigm

Given that the study seeks insights about individuals within the field of change management, the exploratory research method will be employed in the design of the study to understand the causes of change fatigue within organisations during the implementation of change management. In so doing, the method will assist the researcher to establish insights into the concept of change fatigue and to determine whether employees have an awareness of change fatigue. Thus, the research will employ elements of descriptive and exploratory research designs.

This study will adopt the qualitative research technique, which employs the interpretivist philosophy to understand the context of the organisational environment. Saunders and Lewis (2000) maintain that the concept of interpretivism concentrates on organisational complexities that focus directly on participants' points of view to gain an understanding of the context and environment in which they operate.

Given that research on change fatigue is increasingly developing in literature and further insights are required on this topic, this research will make use of an inductive approach in order to find patterns and meanings in the field of change fatigue, which is immensely reliant on the participants' standpoints and experiences to gain a richer understanding of the literature review (Creswell, 2005).The focus of the study will be to understand if employees are change fatigued and to determine the causes of the symptoms.

3.2 Research design

The semi-structured interview methodology will be employed in this study. Research illustrated that this specific form of research has been particularly popular in data collection for research that employs the qualitative methodology (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

This research design is suitable for the study as it provides insights and contextualises the concept of change fatigue from employees' perspectives. Moreover, it also implies that employees are the experts on their own experiences, so they are suitable participants to provide information on the concept of change fatigue in their environment as they account for it from their judgement. The interviews will include female and male employees working at a similar level or within the same department at an insurance company in South Africa.

3.3 Case site

The organisation in which the research will be conducted will be a medium-sized insurance company within the short-term insurance field, offering short-term products including motor, household, homeowners, and business insurance, as well as liability cover.

3.4 Population and sample

Saunders and Lewis (2000) explain that a population includes everyone who stands a chance of being selected, which gives the researcher the ability to select a subset that is representative of the population (the sample). The population of this research will include employees from a medium-sized company in the insurance industry, where changes have been (and are currently) occurring in the organisation. In addition, the population comprises employees at similar levels within the organisation, who have been employed in the organisation for more than a year. Some further criteria that will be used to determine the sample include employees who have experienced excessive change or multiple changes occurring at the same time.

3.5 Sampling method and size

The non-probability sampling method will be used for the study. Non-probability sampling approaches require a researcher to use one or more of the various techniques that do not require the entire population to be reached (Saunders & Lewis,

2000). In this research, the purposive and the snowballing approach will be employed. Purposive sampling is generally used when selecting a small sample, whilst the snowballing technique assists researchers to find other potential participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2000).

Given that management staff are generally difficult to get hold of, the snowballing method will be used. The purposive sample will be employed to define change fatigue in relation to change management for employees who have experienced excessive change.

Darlington and Scott (2002) further established that qualitative research methods consider the number of people to include and who not to include in a study. Because it is not always practical to include the entire population in the study, a sample of employees at different levels in the organisation will be considered. To sum up, a total of 14 interviews will be conducted for the study.

3.6 Measurement instrument

Interviews will be the primary measurement instrument that will be used for this study. The interview guide will serve as a useful tool during the semi-structured interviews. The design of the questions will focus on the theory of change fatigue. Darlington and Scott (2002) affirm that making use of an interview guide assists researchers by reminding them of the crucial elements to be discussed. Therefore, the interview guide for this study will comprise open-ended questions that will incorporate the theory of change management and the causes of change fatigue.

Moreover, to ensure that the most appropriate participants are selected for the study, a background scope of the organisational context (in terms of the number of changes and the degree to which the changes have impacted the participants) will be conducted, thereby guaranteeing the validity of the study. Finally, to ensure the consistency and reliability of the study, the researcher will ask comprehensive interview questions and those that will be accessible to all participants.

3.7 Data gathering process

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes each will be used to collect data. Participants will be contacted to secure a time and a place that is suitable. Darlington and Scott (2002) agree that fruitful interviews with participants are better conducted in an environment with which they are familiar, and participants should be given the choice to decide where the interview should be conducted.

Furthermore, the researcher will ensure that each participant will receive a letter of invitation containing a description of the purpose of the research, outlining the importance of their participation and explaining and guaranteeing their anonymity. The invitation letter will be sent with a consent form.

The interviews will all be recorded with an audio device (a tape recorder) to ensure that the interviewer (researcher) gains the most out of the interview by limiting the distractions associated with scribing during the actual interview. Darlington and Scott (2002) recommend the recording of interviews for the following reasons:

a. The interviewer can focus on interviewing the participant and on gaining further insights.
b. Recordings assist the researcher to complete a thorough analysis after the interview once the recordings have been transcribed.
c. The researcher can establish a rapport without the distraction of taking notes.

3.8 Data analysis approach

Darlington and Scott (2002) confirm that qualitative data can be analysed in various ways. This study will, however, employ a thematic enquiry of the recorded data that originates from the transcribed recordings. Thereafter, the researcher will seek to connect all the comments and responses from participants. The data will be collected in the following manner:

a. Data collection from the different respondents.

b. Organising the data into a structure: removing duplication and irrelevant information.
c. Summarising and presenting the results.
d. Data interpretation of the results to find meaning in the results.

It is worth mentioning that the data will not be analysed later than two days after the interviews have been completed. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advise, for the researcher to generate focused results in a qualitative assignment, immediate analysis is recommended.

3.9 Limitations

The research was conducted within a South African medium-sized organisation in existence for 11 years with changes having occurred within a period of four years. The sample selected may have been a limiting factor as it may not be a true reflection of the population presented. Furthermore, the research was conducted in one organisation, in a particular industry and more insights could be gained by expanding the population and the scope of industries.

3.10 Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the research presents acceptable data and information derived from the original data/information provided by the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this research, credibility will be ensured by selecting a sample that is most appropriate and employing a research instrument in the form of semi-structured interviews on a one-on-one basis, and eliminating any power differences by allowing for the free flow of information that could otherwise be limited in a focus group.

3.10.2 Transferability

Transferability described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) is the ability of research to enable the researcher and the reader to deduce data from the immediate environment and other environments, therefore implying that the results can be transferred to other contexts. In ensuring transferability, careful attention will be taken in the selection of the sample to ensure that the sample includes relevant members of the organisation who have undergone change interventions within the organisation.

3.10.3 Dependability

Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that dependability acknowledges that research is constantly changing and that research cannot be merely understood in a particular time alone. These authors further added that the researcher should be cognisant of the context and track any changes that may have occurred (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Dependability will be ensured by means of tracking any changes and where necessary increasing the number of participants and documenting any non-verbal cues that might be presented.

3.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is often compared to reliability in quantitative research, as it aims to measure the accuracy and the truth of the information being conveyed in the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Moreover, the concept of confirmability is rooted in the ability of the researcher to interpret the information provided by the respondents as well as to formulate the findings indicative of this (Guba & Lincoln,1989). The research will ensure confirmability by describing the research process as transparently as possible and providing examples of the coding process. Furthermore, an audit trail will be kept.

4. Results and Discussion

This section of the research reports the findings and presents a detailed discussion based on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews presented. The results and discussion sections are combined in order to avoid repetition in the discussion of the

findings.Additionally, an overarching insight pertaining to the research questions posed in the study is provided.

Each question was analysed and provided insight into the concept of change fatigue in this organisation. Thereafter, a comparative analysis of the themes translated from the interviews and literature that supports the concept of change fatigue within an organisational context was conducted. The primary objective of the research questions was to determine the perceived drivers of change fatigue and the impact on employees in this organisation.

4.1 Description of participants and context

All the names of the participants remained undisclosed and, where mentioned, were changed from their original names to ensure their anonymity. Table 1 below lists the participants who were interviewed, their job level, as well as the length they had been employed in the organisation.

Number of Participants	Job Level/Title	Length in Company
1	Manager A	9
2	Team Leader	9
3	Team Leader	10
4	Team Leader	11
5	Team Leader	8
6	Team Leader	8
7	Team Leader	6
8	Technical Agent	8
9	Technical Agent	7
10	Technical Agent	8
11	Technical Agent	4
12	Technical Agent	5
13	Technical Agent	6

Number of Participants	Job Level/Title	Length in Company
14	Technical Agent	6

Table 1: Detailed List of Participants Interviewed

It was not possible to choose participants from one particular job level and therefore each participant fell into one of three different categories (see Table 1). This information is particularly important to note, as respondents were asked if they understood the rationale for the changes that the organisation had undertaken, and the degree of control they may have had in terms of the changes themselves. The responses varied depending on the job level. All of the technical agents responded and said that they had no control nor did they understand why there were changes or the rationale for them. Two team leaders stated that they understood the changes and had a degree of input in the changes from a user perspective. Lastly, the manager articulated clearly his understanding of the changes as quoted in his response below:

> ***Manager A:*** *So in management basically everyone has an opinion. But you sit at a table and our head tells is this what's new, this is what's gonna happen. She always asks; what do you guys think. Because she has to go give feedback to MANCO and EXCO, all those other people. So if there's a process that needs to be implemented we go through that process together. There are certain processes obviously as a business we cannot have an input in because the business needs to decide that this is a business decision.*

4.2 Introduction to the results and discussion

This research question was aimed at understanding the causes of change fatigue and their impact on employees in an organisation. However, in the process of unpacking this, the basic requirement was to understand the different changes that had occurred in the organisation in order to determine change fatigue and the impact it had on employees.

In order to place change fatigue in context, the following changes to which employees were exposed and which occurred in a four-year period were considered. All respondents experienced all the changes. Below are the themes generated from all the responses of the 14 respondents.

4.2.1 Types of changes

In the process of determining the types of changes that had occurred in the organisation over a period of four years, four themes were identified.

4.2.1.1 Management changes

The department head who was responsible for Division A moved into a new role as he was promoted into another position within the organisation. He had headed the division for nine years and when he left the division, the appointed incumbent was a successor whom he had identified. The stature of the leader was much higher than the person who took over and therefore people felt that they were being short-changed.

The successor Divisional Manager B was identified and trained by the previous head. This made a lot of people uncomfortable and unsettled and created some resistance from the team, as they were accustomed to a certain management style. Below are some comments that respondents voiced about the change:

> ***Team Leader 2:*** *But with the agent, there was resistance because Manager A was more of a friend to them. So they were pulling away from the change. They were questioning a lot of things.*
>
> ***Technical Agent 8:*** *And management, one manager was promoted to a different position so someone had to fill the gap. That was a sad time for our organisation*.

The team was concerned that the new manager did not have the ability to guide them. They felt that he could not develop them nor could they rely on him.

Team Leader 3: *So just in terms of management. So when I started here obviously I was in sales for a year and then I moved to Division A. I was under Manager X who was our manager back then. Now he's been promoted to HOD another department and, funny enough I got promoted with Manager Z from agent level to junior manager level and now he is our manager/HOD, he's an introvert and I don't know.*

4.2.1.2 System changes

A system change was noted by all participants as a change that had occurred in the organisation as the company introduced three systems in a four-year period. The first two systems were off-the-shelf products and the third one was a custom-made system that was being developed for the company and was then in various phases of implementation.

Team Leader 7: *Ja, there have been a couple that we had to adapt to. Our systems, I mean I think I'm on my third system since I've worked here. They are trying to perfect it but it's an ongoing process I guess.*

Technical Agent 14: *Ok, there's a lot. The system itself has changed 3 times. We used to work on a system called XX and then XZ web and now the company has developed its own system.*

Furthermore, the frustration expressed by the technical agents was not in the change of the systems themselves, but in the change of the names of the systems. When a system was no longer suitable for the business, they changed it into a new project with a new name. However, the project itself stayed the same, and all that changed was the name of the system.

Technical Agent 13: *I think I was more mad that the organisation was not honest with me; it's the same thing, just a different name.*

Technical Agent 11: *The name changes were just annoying. Especially when it was obvious that it's the same thing.*

However, not all respondents saw the system changes as negative, as it ensured an overall positive change to the environment. Nevertheless, the different name changes led to apprehension in the beginning as the manager expressed below:

> ***Manager 1:*** *Obviously the agents and everyone was a bit sceptical about it and it was a bit of a slower start, but I think after a while when we got used to it we actually noticed that it does more things than the older system used to do and it worked for us.*

4.2.1.3 Business growth

Only 14% (one manager and one team leader) of the participants noted the business growth of the company to be a driver of change within the organisation. However, this percentage formed part of management. They noted that the company acquired more clients and expanded the business into business insurance and life insurance, and as a result structures and targets changed. In addition, the company slogan had changed and was a big shift from the previous one. The rest of the participants did not mention or note any business-related changes.

4.2.1.4 Facility changes

It was noted that the employees moved from one building to another over the period. That change was perceived as positive by all participants as they understood that the previous building had been old and the company had kept on renovating it until they had no choice but to move due to the increase in staff numbers. They also noted that although they were enjoying the current building, it was also too small to comfortably house the staff.

4.2.2 Causes of change fatigue

Once the types of changes in the organisation had been determined, the drivers of change fatigue were then identified and categorised into five themes. The themes below are illustrated by order of importance as articulated by the respondents.

4.2.2.1 Frequency of change

All respondents stated that they understood they were employed in an organisation where changes were occurring because of the competitive nature of the industry. However, the frequency of the changes that occurred was seen to be too many in a short time span, and that even if all changes were good and for their benefit they were too fatigued to see the benefit of the change as it required too much of them. One of the respondents stated:

> ***Technical Agent 12:*** *If it was one change here and there we would happily embrace it. But now it's this and then it's this. It's like; oh guys, we need consistency. Something that's stable. Because now we don't know if there's gonna be another change that's gonna happen. It too much, we haven't even soaked up the current changes.*

In addition, the respondents stated that the number of changes currently occurring was becoming overly excessive. The various types of changes became cumulatively too much. However, a minority, who happened to hold management positions, stated that change is good and although the changes seemed many, they were for the benefit of the organisation.

Stensaker and Meyer (2012) maintain that the pursuit of multiple changes creates change fatigue. This claim was apparent in this study too. It is evident in the research that the organisation in question had undergone multiple changes, such as changes in management, systems, business growth and building facilities.

Furthermore, Johnson (2016) states that organisational change management can become excessive when the demands of the company outweigh the resources for employees to produce, leading to employees experiencing feelings of exhaustion and fatigue. Respondents in this study articulated that the excessive number of changes required a lot from them and presented as a driver of change. Moreover, some changes had "sub-changes" and therefore one change may have appeared to have multiple changes and thus the combination of all these changes presented as excessive change.

Johnson et al., (2016) define change excessiveness as a set of unrelated changes that are sometimes conflicting and made simultaneously with little time spent on enjoying the benefits of the previous change. They further expound that excessive change refers to changes occurring simultaneously and/or when new changes are introduced without the completion of the previous ones; as a result, little or no time is spent on benefitting from those changes or their completion. This can be seen as evident in the system changes that occurred.

In addition, Johnson (2016) states that the more changes that occur in an organisation (change frequency), the greater the chance for the changes to overlap and potentially lead to change overload, burnout, and chaos, which has been apparent in this study.

Change is unavoidable because of the competitive nature of the business and having said that, the organisation in question did not have a programme or a test to determine the effects of change or to identify change fatigue that resulted from changes to management, systems, business growth and facilities.

4.2.2.2 Stress

All of the respondents stated that they experienced some stress as a result of all the changes that were occurring in the organisation. However, 65% of the respondents stated that the stress had started to take on a traumatic nature, as there were changes also linked to their pay thus increasing the intensity of the change. Moreover, most of the respondents expressed feelings of being overwhelmed, self-doubt, nervousness and being scared of what the day may hold. All these feelings contributed to employees' stress levels and created some form of anxiety. One of the respondents stated:

> ***Technical Agent 11:*** *I cried a lot. System wise you know targets and everything. Management wise new thing, process. Even moving to this beautiful building got me anxious. So a lot of changes have come about. I'm just here. I'm just working. But now I need to focus on this and then on that. If you slack on this it's gonna affect your pay, it got to me. It still does every day.*

All the respondents stated that the changes became overwhelming. Even when it appeared to be a good change, they felt that they had no choice but to accept the change regardless of their feelings towards it. Interestingly enough, one of the respondents stated that he was particularly stressed because one of the changes went against his belief:

> ***Team Leader 5:*** *There are changes where you actually feel like they're against your morals basically. But at the end of the day, I guess we just did them. I think for me personally were the most stressful situation which caused my anxiety.*

Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) explain that emotions related to organisational change can become so tense and traumatic that they have been compared to death and grief. Employees tend to experience stress during change and the stress experienced is not one dimensional. Employees may experience stress before, during, and after change initiatives that may cause employees to burnout and experience change fatigue (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005).

It is evident in this study that respondents experienced emotions related to stress as a result of the change. In particular the uncertainty of what the day might bring, and whether they had the capabilities to perform led to feelings of self-doubt and anxiousness. Smollan (2015) adds that studies have found that these changes are often stressful to employees undergoing changes, due to the anticipated negative consequences that are associated with the changes in an organisation.

Moreover, even when change was viewed as good or helpful, because of the number of changes that had occurred previously, respondents experienced feelings of stress. Some respondents stated that the changes that conflicted with their morals and views added to their stress levels.

4.2.2.3 Exhaustion

Exhaustion was a loose term utilised by the respondents in terms of the feelings/emotions they attributed to being a driver of change fatigue. Furthermore,

there were respondents who stated that the exhaustion led to their physical over-extension which caused burnout.

Additionally, respondents indicated that they felt as if the changes depleted their ability to do more, or to consume further changes as they felt strained, and this also led to further frustration.

> ***Technical Agent 12:*** *To be honest, I was mad. I was just like; guys, we don't need this. It's too much to now have to program yourself with this new thing and ja, I was just mad. I am exhausted, I am only human… I was like; I feel that we don't need it. We've been doing fine all along so why do we need this.*

Again not everyone shared the same sentiments. Some respondents stated that at some point the changes were exhausting and were too many, but the emphasis was that there were too many in the beginning, and then when the changes were occurring and were implemented it became better. Specifically when the changes made their job a lot easier, they warmed up to the changes and they started changing their views on what was going on.

> **Technical Agent 11:** You can see I'm exhausted already. At some point, ja. I felt like everything was fine, why did you have to change it. But then the more you use the systems the more you get used to everything that is now happening and understand how easier it makes life now.

Bernerth et al. (2011) suggest that employees have a limited number of resources – knowledge, time, energy, and effort – to provide to an organisation. Employees are generally motivated to keep, protect and gain new skills as a resource, and any loss of those resources could be a result of excessive organisational change that causes strain on employees. This issue is addressed by Johnson (2016) who states that exhaustion is the primary result of excessive change. It can be defined as constant stress and burdens with a combination of emotional strain and the physical exhaustion of an employee.

Bernerth et al. (2011) define exhaustion as a feeling of being depleted beyond one's ability, resulting in the loss of energy to perform basic work and experiencing feelings

of strain. Exhaustion is central to the concept of change fatigue, as it drives employees' emotional reactions. The respondents in this study indicated that they felt as if the changes depleted their ability to do more or to assimilate further changes as they felt strained which is in line with the views of Bernerth et al. (2011).

4.2.2.4 Tiredness leading to burnout

The majority of respondents stated that the changes that had occurred over the period left them with feelings of tiredness but presented as burnout. One respondent in particular summarised this clearly when stating the following:

> ***Technical Agent 9:*** *I was tired emotionally because I was fighting things that were bigger than me. At some point, I was discouraged. It was like; you know what, this is not gonna happen for me. I'm just gonna resign. I'm gonna go. It was challenging. It was emotionally draining, honestly. And I wouldn't say I was physically tired but mentally and emotionally I was very tired.*

The concept of burnout is closely linked to exhaustion, but it is defined as the overextension of an employee's physical and psychological resources and it is usually experienced during the implementation of change (Johnson et al., 2016). This is how the respondents described their experience of change. Smollan (2015) identified five important factors as sources of burnout: increased workload, lack of control, low reward, unfairness, and inappropriate values.

In the study, three factors were identified relating to the sources of burnout, namely increase in workload, lack of control and inappropriate or conflicting values.

McMillan and Perron (2013) state that there tends to be a decrease in employee optimism in terms of the change itself because of burnout. Bernerth et al. (2011) state that the constant change makes it ultimately difficult for employees to adapt to change and leads to exhaustion and change fatigue.

However, there were respondents who had maintained that although they experienced emotions related to tiredness, the constant change brought some form of excitement as they had been in the employ of the company since its inception and the business

was making progress. The changes that were occurring were allowing the business to make strides within the industry as the following respondent claimed:

> ***Team Leader 7:*** *More excited than tired. Because we've been tired. We were here in 2008. 2008 we captured everything manually. Even documents. Some you had to type. So ja, for us it was exciting because yeah we are moving.*

4.2.2.5 Conflicting and overlapping changes

The majority of the respondents reported that there were not many overlapping changes and that changes were completed in a phased approach.

> ***Team Leader 2:*** *They came in stages. So they would introduce this part of change and then [pause]. At least it wasn't like everything at one go. They introduced change on this particular thing. Allow you to make your mistakes, to learn from it.*

However, the dissatisfaction came for the majority of the respondents, because of their having to go through particular phases. If they had been consulted initially, there would not have been the need for alterations. Furthermore, if the changes did not go as planned, they would have to revert to the old ways of doing things and relearn those skills until the process was completed. This led to their fatigue.

Only 30% of respondents – the senior members of the team – stated that there were conflicting changes. In business sales are needed, so not only did targets change, but the process and the way clients were serviced also had to change. Either the sale was made and the customer neglected, or the customer was prioritised and the allocated targets were not achieved.

4.2.3 Impact of change fatigue

Once the drivers of change fatigue had been identified, it was then important to determine the impact of those drivers on the respondents in the company. Five themes were identified as central to the impact of the drivers of change fatigue.

4.2.3.1 Increase in workload

Only 55% of the respondents stated that an increase in workload was a driver to change fatigue. This was described in cases where workload had increased. Not only did they need to continue doing their daily functions, but there was now an added element of having to learn something new, which also decreased the pace and output they would generally produce.

> ***Team leader 5:*** *At a point, it felt like it increased because one has to learn how to use this new system. So learning how to do it and you know how that can slow down because when you know something you know; ok, point A – Z we start and we end here. And you sort of know how much time it should take to do that. But now because you're learning the system and you're trying to do your work at the same time and there's someone else on the other side who's like putting you under pressure like; I'm rushing.*

Smollan (2015) states that changes such as the increase in workload, the reduction in independence that an employee previously had, and the potential loss of a job, specifically in the transition phase where new processes are introduced may be viewed as extra work and may cause stress that can also result in anxiety (Smollan, 2015).

The rest of the respondents acknowledged that there was a perceived increase in the workload initially, but the work only appeared to increase due to having to adjust to the new management style or the new processes in place. The learning of a new skill was deemed to be an increase in workload. However, in hindsight the workload was still the same.

> ***Manager 1:*** *Not really an increase. I think everything is still as is. It's just it seemed like it was more work because you had to adjust to working differently. But if you look at it now, it's the same.*

4.2.3.2 Uncertainty

During the discussion on change fatigue and the causes thereof, many respondents stated that one of the primary causes of their fatigue was the uncertainty relating to the change, irrespective of whether it was change in management, processes, or systems. The respondents noted that there was a lack of communication regarding the changes and that they were only notified upon implementation. One of the respondents stated:

> ***Team Leader 3:*** *I think no one was actually anticipating the changes and we were not given the opportunity to digest, so we were scared of what was coming. It was like change…and then bam. This is what's gonna happen. This is what you're gonna do. It's not like it's something that was in the pipelines soon soon soon, so ja. I was...no I am always on edge.*

Others stated that because of the uncertainty and the fact that the change was unpredictable, the change felt as if they had lost a friend; they had lost something that they had known for a long time. Others, however, stated that unpredictable change taught them valuable lessons and that they were able to develop their adaptability skills.

> ***Technical Agent 9:*** *You know don't know, but you get to see yourself develop and everything. And you now learn new flicks and tricks along the way; guys listen, we have to say goodbye to people and things.*

Bernerth et al. (2011) add that uncertainty relating to change is as important as change frequency because it has also been said to relate to exhaustion, due to excessive workload or workload that varies unpredictably, which may cause stress and anxiety to employees and have an impact on their well-being.

4.2.3.3 Resignations

The majority of the respondents stated that because of the changes that had occurred, some of their colleagues had resigned. Management stated that people resigned because all the changes had become "too much" for some and as a result they had tendered their resignations.

> ***Technical Agent 14:*** *You know we've gotten a lot of resignations but at the end of the day what business wants business gets, it's been a difficult time, I still think about resigning every day – it's become too much now, it puts food on the table so we stay.*

The technical agents shared similar sentiments stating that they understood why their colleagues had left and that people shared their reasons for leaving as described below:

> ***Technical Agent 11:*** *This company is not for me, I can't do this anymore. You want us to change this today, then that, then go back to this. It's not healthy.*

Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) state that stress caused by change fatigue is said to have contributed to low levels of motivation and the decline in morale within an organisation and is a factor that contributes to high levels of turnover and low job satisfaction as a result.

4.2.3.4 Withdrawal

Management stated that as a result of the changes their employees had started to show symptoms of withdrawal and did not engage. They expressed it as such:

> ***Technical Agent 10:*** *People started doing things for the sake of it; you could see that they were just keeping alive.*

Employees who are experiencing change fatigue – where they have become disengaged, indifferent, and unsure – demonstrate passive behaviour (McMillan & Perron, 2013). Employees merely accept change and do not indicate any signs of resistance. In addition, concerns about the change tend not to be communicated openly, even though the effects of the change are explicitly felt (McMillan & Perron, 2013).

Team leaders stated that they were not even sure how to motivate some team members when they could see them disengaging from the process and contributing as little as possible. Some even resisted the changes. The technical agent respondents echoed similar sentiments, but added that the result of the fatigue increased the amount of sick leave, and said that at times they had even taken unauthorised leave to regroup.

Beil-Hildebrand (2005) contends that there is no apparent increase in grievance cases by employees experiencing change fatigue in their organisations; employees who experienced feelings of change fatigue tended to withdraw, taking no reasonable steps to address issues related to change initiatives in the organisation. Change fatigue has a direct impact on the increase in sick leave that employees take during the phases of organisational change (Anderzen et al., 2008).

4.2.3.5 Change competency

The minority of respondents stated that although changes became excessive and they underestimated the effects the changes had on them in terms of experiencing feelings of stress, tiredness and exhaustion, the changes taught them a valuable lesson. They appreciated that change was difficult and led to some being fatigued but, once they

got over that hurdle, they became accustomed to change, and the change ultimately provided them with the competencies of dealing with change and they developed a positive attitude towards change.

Stensaker and Meyer (2012) confirmed this by stating that employees who have undergone multiple changes can become accustomed to change and develop capabilities such as adapting to change and using it as an opportunity to upskill themselves technically, reducing any uncertainties.

5. Summary Discussion

It is evident from the research that the organisation in question had undergone multiple changes. The respondents stated that during and as a result of the changes, they experienced feelings of stress, burnout, exhaustion as a result of the frequency of change, the impact and to some degree the conflicts arising from the changes.

The types of changes included management, facilities, company growth and systems changes. However, not all the changes were directly related to or presented as drivers of change fatigue. The impact of some of the changes or the combination of them led to symptoms/drivers – such as stress, tiredness, burnout and exhaustion – that relate to change fatigue. Johnson (2016) describes change fatigue impact as the possible extent that the change may reach, and the perceived effects of the change, specifically towards the organisational climate, job performance and procedures that are known to be core to an employee's working routine. As such it can be noted that, although there was only one management change described, the impact was of such a significant nature that the participants experienced overwhelming feelings of tiredness and burnout. They described it as a driver of change fatigue. The combination of the changes in the system added feelings of exhaustion and stress.

The system changes in particular were noted to be many and at times described as excessive and had been perceived to be an on-going endless process which had resulted in the overwhelming feelings of stress and tiredness. Interestingly enough, although there were respondents who expressed feelings that were overwhelming as a result of the system change, there were positive attitudes relating to this particular change as it was contributing to a more efficient and conducive working environment. However, senior members in the team articulated that this was only apparent at a later stage of the change and prior to this there were symptoms of withdrawal due to the multiple changes.

However, frustrations lay in the lack of transparency in the organisation, which saw management changing the naming conventions of the projects. Dibben and Davies (2004) show similarities in their study with their participants perceiving change

initiatives as endless and many of them failing and reappearing with different naming conventions and multiple change implementation initiatives that are conflicting. In this study, however, there was no significant evidence that the changes were conflicting or overlapping. Where such evidence was present, it was in the form of internal conflicts as a result of the changes, and therefore had the capacity to hinder the change by presenting feelings of stress and anxiety.

It should be noted that there was one particular change – business growth – that went unnoticed by the majority of the respondents. Only a small percentage of respondents (mainly management) recognised and understood that particular change in the environment. This could be as a result of the population interviewed, as only management clearly articulated their understanding as to why the changes had occurred and the rationale of the changes. Bernerth et al., (2011) add that change fatigue is understood to be the overwhelming feelings and behaviours associated with change that go unnoticed, resulting in fatigue. Thus the lack of understanding of the change may have a correlation with the overwhelming feelings expressed by respondents throughout the study.

All respondents, however, stated that they understood the rationale behind the change in building facilities. This could be the contributing factor to the positive attitudes presented in terms of this particular change.

Although the various types of changes elicited different emotions, for the majority of the respondents it was evident that the drivers of change fatigue were stress, exhaustion, burnout, the frequency of change and the significance of the change. The majority of the respondents were also presenting symptoms of change fatigue as a result of not understanding the rationale of the change or merely because the change required more of them than they could give. The changes that were described as traumatic were those relating to pay and the radically altered status quo. Ultimately multiple or even excessive changes were the leading drivers of change although it was not explicitly expressed and therefore supported.

Management expressed that the impact of change fatigue resulted in the perception of an increase in workload, and that the workload did not increase but the way in which

work was conducted changed. The majority of the respondents, however, stated that having to learn a new skill while continuing to do their work contributed to their overwhelming feelings of stress and triggered some anxiety.

The research depicted that employees became disengaged and passive and accepted the change. As a result of the strain and the stress, it became easier to do things for the sake of doing them. They felt as if they had no control which added to the frustration. Beil-Hildebrand (2005) adds that employees who experienced feelings of change fatigue tended to withdraw, taking no reasonable steps to address issues related to change initiatives in the organisation. The intensity of the withdrawal led to employee absenteeism and an increase in sick leave utilisation.

The impact of the perceived drivers of change fatigue resulted in some employees resigning from the company and some of those who were still employed were contemplating leaving. This could also be attributed to the uncertainty the change brought as respondents stated that it presented feelings of stress. Johnson (2016) echoes that the uncertainty related to change leads to a decrease in commitment to the organisation and spurs an employee's intention to resign. This could be attributed to the lack of appropriate management communication regarding the changes which could have potentially alleviated the many fears, especially when it came to matters that related to employee remuneration.

Stensaker and Meyer (2012) state that employees who have undergone multiple changes can become accustomed to change and develop capabilities such as adapting to change and using it as an opportunity to upskill themselves technically, reducing any uncertainties.

It became apparent in the research that some respondents stated that though the changes were excessive and straining, they were able to learn valuable lessons in relation to their competency in dealing with change as change had become a constant factor in the organisation. The majority, however, expressed feelings of tiredness and despondency.

6. Conclusion

In the research conducted, the drivers of change that were identified were frequency of change, stress, exhaustion, burnout, and conflicting and overlapping change. At the beginning of the study, change fatigue was defined as the overwhelming feelings that are associated with emotions such as stress, exhaustion, and burnout caused by an organisation undergoing excessive change. It is evident in this study that the respondents resonated those feelings, and the feelings were overwhelming as the definition illustrates.

However, what was interesting in this study was that the majority of those feelings resonated with the lower level staff members who felt as if they neither had control in the process nor did they understand why the changes had come about. The types of changes that had occurred in the organisation included management, systems, business growth and building facility changes, and there were multiple changes within one change. The combination of all these changes led to what the respondents perceived as change fatigue.

The impact of the changes resulted in respondents withdrawing and presenting as passive to the change process and others contemplating resigning from the organisation as a result of the overwhelming emotions. Previous colleagues expressed their reasons for resigning as a result of feelings associated with change fatigue. Moreover, respondents admitted that they saw an increase in their sick leave utilisation and that they tended to take unauthorised leave. Uncertainty was raised as a factor that impacted employees and resulted in fatigue as they did not know what changes would follow. This further contributed to the stress levels experienced.

Not all emotions experienced as a result of the changes were negative; a minority of the respondents indicated that the multiple changes provided for learning opportunities and cultivated the competency to deal with change.

7. Recommendations

It was evident in the research provided that the manner in which the changes were conducted – participants lacking control in the change process and not understanding the rationale for the changes – contributed to the negative feelings associated with change fatigue. Thus communication in this instance could be central to alleviating some of the negative feelings experienced.

Secondly, because of the multiple changes that occurred in the organisation, respondents expressed that they became disengaged and withdrawn and conducted the change in a matter of fact manner. The inclusion of employees in the initial stages of the change process could contribute to further alleviating the overwhelming feelings as well as creating a positive perception of change. It was the senior members in the team who expressed their understanding of the changes which enabled them to develop competencies for change and to display positive attitudes towards change. Thus participation and involvement in change initiatives at all levels should be considered.

Management and team leaders expressed that they saw the members of their team stressed, exhausted, tired and burnt out as a result of the change. However, there was no indication of how they were equipped to assist their employees in dealing with change. As a suggestion, the company should invest in management training relating to assisting employees to deal with change. Furthermore, an employee assistance programme for both management and lower level employees should be introduced as a tool to aid all employees who are experiencing feelings of change fatigue.

Organisations need to understand and factor in that changes affect employees at all levels. Even if those changes are for the benefit of the employees, organisations need to ensure that when changes are being implemented within the organisation care needs to be taken. They must be aware of any symptoms relating to change fatigue and address them as part of the change process, in order to build positive attitudes in all employees at all levels.

8. Future Research

Future research in this field should consider the following:

1. Management change: to what extent does management competence affect the impact of change?
2. Does effective communication within the change process have an effect on change fatigue and to what extent does it have an impact on those affected?
3. The relationship between the significance of the change and the drivers of change fatigue: does the change have to be excessive to result in change fatigue or is the significance or impact of the change sufficient?
4. Does the type of change have an impact on change fatigue or is change fatigue solely as a result of excessive change?

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Annexure A: Research Instrument

In-depth interview guide: 45–60 minutes

Dear Participant

Thank you for taking the time to assist in the research. The aim of the research is to explore the perceived causes of change fatigue in relation to change management and to identify the possible causes of change fatigue.

The interview is sheduled to take about 45–60 minutes and there are no right or wrong answers. Insights as to your perceptions of change fatigue will be gained. The interview will be recorded to ensure that there are no disruptions caused by note-taking.

The process is completely voluntary and confidential and your details and data will not be shared.

Should you have any concerns, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details provided below:

Researcher	**Supervisor**
Name: Kelebogile Mokoka Email address: kelebogilemokoka@hotmail.com Contact number: 083 296 1104	Name: Conrad Viedge Email address: Conrad.Viedge@wits.ac.za

Changes in the Organisation:

1. Can you please provide background about yourself and your position in the organisation?
2. How long have you been employed in the organisation?

3. Tell me about the changes of which you are aware that have occurred in the organisation?
4. Do you know and understand how these changes came about and the rationale for them?
5. How many changes have had a direct impact on the way you have conducted your job? To what extent were these changes pragmatic?

Change Fatigue:

6. Did you find that you felt a little tired as the changes were occurring or were you excited about the changes? Why?
7. What impact did the changes have on the way you conducted your role in the organisation?
8. Has there been an increase or decrease in your workload due to the changes in the organisation? Why?
9. Have you experienced multiple change interventions in the organisation? Were they all different or did they have some similarities?
10. Did the changes overlap and potentially lead to chaos?
11. Were any changes possibly conflicting and why would you say so?

Causes of Change Fatigue:

12. Changes for employees can become overwhelming. What feelings or emotions did you experience as a result of the change?
13. Did you feel you were overextended physically and psychologically?
14. What do you think caused these emotions?
15. How do these emotions impact the way the change is perceived?
16. Does the number of changes impact your feelings towards the change?
17. How much control did you have in the change process and how did this affect you?
18. Did the change affect the independence that you previously had?
19. Did you feel like you lost something or had to forgo something as a result of the change? How did that make you feel?

20. Was the outcome of the change intervention predictable or unpredictable? What impact would the predictability of change intervention have had?
21. Did you have any fears and anxiety about the change and what may have caused these feelings?