

## **CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND ITS IMPACT AT UBUHLEBEZWE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY IN KWA ZULU NATAL (SA)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Managing change is a key strategy for organisational performance owing to educative, consultative, and transformative nature of change management. Organisational performance is a dependent factor to change management. Local government sphere has been experiencing constant changes in both political and administrative leadership, and has come under various organisational performance scrutiny. A default position is that when these political and administrative changes take place, the municipalities will conduct a change management exercises, however there is still prevalence of low performance within a sphere of local government. The objective of this study is to establish and recommend effective strategies for factors that impedes on change management and organisational performance in local government. The study is quantitative study, surveys will be used to collect data from the municipal officials. A total of 29 participants were purposely and randomly identified for data collection using the 5 likert scale questionnaire and data was analyzed using SPSS Version 28.0 to test the main objective. The study key findings is that uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality enjoys two groups of employees, those who understand change management and its impact on organizational performance. Furthermore, recommends that uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality should train and development all their employees, this is to ensure communal understanding of change management and its impact on organisational performance.*

*The original value of this study will be recommending effective strategies for change management and its impact on organizational performance in South African Local Government.*

**Keywords:** Change Management; Organisational Performance; Local Government, South Africa.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The study examines the impact of change management in the local government in South Africa, with a specific reference to uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal.

The Ubuhlebezwe Municipality is located within the Harry Gwala District Municipality (DC43). The main administrative center of the Municipality is the town of Ixopo, which is located approximately 85km south east of Pietermaritzburg, capital of KwaZulu-Natal, and is strategically located at the intersection of four major provincial routes leading to Pietermaritzburg, the Drakensberg, the Eastern Cape and the South Coast. uBuhlebezwe Municipality has been experience both planned and unplanned changes, from their political leadership at national, provincial, district and local level. According to Hayes, (2022) any form of change management should introduce new ways of organizing and working, which comes as a result of shifts in external and internal factors in any organization.

The historical change of leadership at the national level on 14 February 2018, where a president resigned and has in 2023 formed a new political party, gave birth to the emergence of two factions in government, with specific reference to uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.

Ubuhlebezwe Local Municipality has historical and currently under the governance of of the African National Congress. The constant changes in the African National Congress has been replicated in the uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality. Some of the changes includes but not limited to the Mayor, Municipal

Manager, and Directors for Social Development, and Chief Financial Officer. Ackerman, (2023) identifies factors that impedes on the organisational change, as resistance to change which often leads to change programs failing or falling short of delivering the required outcomes. In principle, there is a relationship between change and organizational performance. Change, both planned and unplanned, would directly influence the performance of an organization (positively or negatively). Singh, et al (2021) state that managing change positively, in a growth situation, taking advantage of opportunities rather than responding to threats, requires that the change process begins gradually and on a limited scale, and then spreads throughout the whole organization. Then the performance of the organization would be positively influenced because, meaningful change requires time to implement, monitor and evaluate, (Abualoush, Bataineh, and Alrowwad, 2018).

The aim of this study is to establish the impact of change management, and suggest effective strategies for change management at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality. The study begins by reviewing the literature and philosophical challenges change management in local government. Furthermore, recommend effective strategies for change management in local government with a specific reference to uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality, with the goal of eventually shedding light on how change management in local government have frequently failed to meet popular organisational performance expectations.

### ***Problem statement***

Change has been a constant factor in all aspect of organisational life cycle both in the public sector in the private sector. Change Management ideally is a result of an organisational challenge, and effect an organisational transformation, however, in government, political parties change has been creating challenges which ends up suffocating organisational performance, and as a result becomes adverse of transformation. According to Kotter, Akhtar, and Gupta, (2021) ongoing change is an inevitable part of the current organizational context. However, “Change management practices are often cited as a reason for resistance to change, and as a cause of stress for individuals during change interventions. This study seeks to establish the extent to which change impact on local government performance, with specific reference to uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This sections explores a systematic literature review, to specifically focus on academic argument in respect of organization change management, with a specific reference to local government and uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.

### ***General overview of organisational change management***

In general, the concept of general overview of change management, argues that the very tenet of change is to make the form, nature, content, future course of something different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone, (Suseno, et al, 2023) . On more direct view, Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown, (2016) states that the essence of organizational change, it embedded on the process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of the external and internal stakeholders. To advance on that Nkomo and Kriek (2011) advocates that at the essence of general overview of organization change is the obsession with clarifying and tweaking the organization’s strategy and operations, with a view to transform the organization into its basic strategies for effective change management.

Hollinger, et al (2021) argue that change is a prevalent feature in the developing organizational operation and strategic position. This is because, there is no single organization which is immune from need to change, which is making alteration in respect of organisational sustainability, (Cameron, and Green, 2019). Finally, Basu Mishra, Gupta, and Shree, (2020) concludes that change in an organization is as result of re-examining, and altering of organization’s operation composition and business, to have a competitive edge.

***Exploring strategies for organisational change***

The concept compiling strategies for change is according Harmon, (2019) organizations and managers change on a continuous basis, especially in volatile environments. Thus, challenging the managers’ strategies and ability to manage change effectively. Some changes are reactions to external threats while others are proactive attempts to seize opportunities and manage the business environment.

Organizations should seek to obtain and maintain a congruence between their environment, values and resources, making changes when there is pressure from either the environment or their resources (Thompson and Martin 2010). Managers, designing and implementing proper change management strategies, can only realize such a congruence.

**Table 1. Change management strategies**

<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Rational-Empirical	People are rational and will follow their self-interest once it is revealed to them. Change is based on the communication of information and the offering of incentives.
Normative reduction	People are social beings; and would adhere to cultural norms and values. Change is based on redefining and reinterpreting existing norms and values and developing commitment to new ones.
Power- coercive	People are compliant and will generally do what they are told or can be made to do; change is based on the exercise of authority and the imposition of something.
Environmental-adaptive	People oppose loss and disruption but they adapt readily to new circumstances, change is based on building a new organization and gradually transferring people from the old to the new one

*Source: Thompson and Martin 2010*

***Drivers of organisational change management***

There is no change that happens in the vacuum, as established in the above paragraph, change management can either reactionary, and or proactive. According to Hopwood, (2019) government policies has been one of the most consistent driver of change, and their enforceable nature has been living organisations with limited views in respect of responding to change. On another view, Atkin, and Brooks, (2021) states that the resignation, dismissal of top management, and the appointment of new and top management team and with inadequate knowledge and training often results in the need for change in organizational operation, tactical and technical strategy. According to Errida, and Lotfi, (2021) drivers of change has in most cases triggered by the dynamic environment which is cyclic and constantly changing. Hence, organisation, in both public and private sector should continually strive to respond the organisational changes. Finally, the technological advancement has been a key driver in organisational changes, because there has been migration from paper work, to system, and most employees, have been struggling to accept the change, (Ngang Tang, 2019).

***Resistance government to effective organisational change management***

Resistance to change has been a dominant factor in organisational change management. This is as a result, managing, planning, executing, and evaluation of organisational change has been a very complex and risky exercise for most organization, including local government and uBuhlebezwe Local municipality. According to Alanoglu, et al (2022) whether change has been planned, and or not, there tends to be an inbuilt resistance to change, by those who are affected by the change, and those who must implement the change.

This point is ventilated by Puyod, and Charoensukmongkol, (2021) who advocates that organization change programs often face serious problems with a large proportion of change programs failing or falling short of delivering the required outcomes, because of dominant forces of resistance to change.

The problem about resistance to change, is that it is often believed to be inevitable but it may be the result of the methods used to effect change, interpretation issues and miscommunication. Resistance by employees is associated with a fear of the unknown, threat to personal power and influence and loss of security argue Gonzalez-Arcos, et al (2021).

Hashim (2013) identifies three main resistance to change. First, when employees were not satisfied from change due to their self-interest, they would seek to frustrate any change in the status quo. Employees would resist every change capable of jeopardizing their interests. Thus, they would resist the new system of change because of the lack of trust and understanding of the facts involved. Secondly, when there is a dearth of information about the proposed change, there would exist uncertain situation, employees would seek to resist such change. Thirdly, employees have different goals and ideas in every organization. These differences might suffer the change management process.

#### ***Exploring general views about organizational performance***

The concept of organizational performance has been a widely debated concept, owing to the centrality it possesses in respect organization success. According to Anwar, and Abdullah, (2021) organization performance involves the analysis of a company's performance against its objectives and goals. On a similar note, Al Khajeh, (2018) states that organizational performance comprises real outputs compared to the intended output. Further, he argues several factors affected organizational performance. Serrat, (2017) posits that organizational culture plays an important role in organizational performance.

According to George, Walker, and Monster, (2019) organizational performance ensure an ability of an organisation to achieve such objectives, quality product, good financial results, and survival at pre-determined time using relevant strategy for action. On a similar note, Al Khajeh, (2018) argues that organizational performance required performance management as a control tool to sustainable organizational growth. Finally, Nikpour, (2017) concludes that, organizations that learn, achieve better performance. Even though organization learning may not always increase performance, but in most cases, it does. This regards, performance measurement is a key concept in achieving performance measurement (Sethibe and Steyn 2015).

#### ***Organisational performance measurement***

Organizational performance is a premise to organizational management, according to Fleisher (2014) performance measurement was important in management, especially in highly competitive, dynamic, complex, and global environments where managers were expected to have a strong grasp on dozens of issues. Mills and Smith (2011) wrote on performance management in relation to organizational performance, and argue that a decomposed model of performance management capabilities was assessed through organizational performance.

Choudhary, Akhtar, and Sethibe and Steyn (2015) note that the main aim of any organization was to sustain competitive advantage. They believe there were various facets on which performance of an organization could be evaluated, most of which were tangible. Cost reduction, profits, sales volume, asset turnover, equity turnover, and inventory turnover, were most common tangible indicators. Performance measurement was the method to achieve competitive advantage. It is therefore, important to deal more with performance management, which becomes the strategy in which competitive advantage, and organizational performance is achieved.

#### ***Organisational performance management***

Organisational performance management is according to Shanker, et al (2017) argues that performance management enabled an organization to search and identify the causes that have led to its success and the potential chances that the company could use for further development and advancement in the future. On a similar note, Berberoglu, (2018) states that, organisational performance management enables the organization to determine whether it has been able to gain the satisfaction of its customers and achieved its desired goals. A similar view, is noted by Gunasekaran, et al (2017) states that organisational performance management indicates the rate of progress of a company and highlights its present and future performance status. According

to Pang, and Lu, (2018) performance management provides the company with an increase in the overall rate of operation including communication among its staff and managers.

### 3. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to establish the impact of change management, and suggest effective strategies for change management at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality. To achieve this, the study adopted the following two objectives:

- To establish the impact of change management and impact at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.
- To suggest effective recommendations for change management at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative method of research, based on nature of descriptive statistics. Queirós, Faria and Almeida (2017) advocate that quantitative research focuses on objectivity and appropriate when there was the possibility of collecting quantifiable measures of variables and inferences from samples of a population. Quantitative research adopts structured procedures and formal instruments for data collection. Quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that could be expressed in terms of quantity. Hence there was a distribution and collection of the 5 Likert scale questionnaire to Ubuhlebezwe Municipality

The data was collected objectively and systematically. Finally, the analysis of numerical data was performed through statistical procedures, often using software such as SPSS, R or Stata. On the other side, Martin and Bridgmon, (2012) agree, that in quantitative research, the data can be quantified. Because the samples are generally large and considered representative of the population, the results are taken as if they constituted a general and sufficiently comprehensive view of the entire population. Disciplines such as mathematics and statistics assume a fundamental importance in the process of analysis and generalization of the results obtained.

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The following section provides the interpretations and discussions of the empirical findings of this study using the frequency table and exploring the variables that were tested.

**Table 2. Interpretations and empirical findings**

Variable Tested	Statement	Frequency	Percentage	Variable test	Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Job Changes experienced	Agree	20	79,3	The change affected your work negatively	Agree	16	55,2
	Neutral	1	3,5		Neutral	5	17,2
	Disagree	5	17,2		Disagree	8	27,5
Were you informed of the change	Agree	19	65,5	Change was managed well	Agree	18	62
	Neutral	3	10,3		Neutral	7	24,1
	Disagree	7	24,2		Disagree	4	13,8
Feelings on the changes	Agree	5	17,3	The change led to performance improvement	Agree	20	68,9
	Neutral	6	20,7		Neutral	4	18,8
	Disagree	18	62,1		Disagree	5	17,3
Changes were	Agree	20	68,9	Involvement of	Agree	25	86,2

necessary	Neutral	8	27,7	employees on decision Making	Neutral	1	3,4
	Disagree	1	3,5		Disagree	3	10,3
gender	Male	12	41,4	Total Respondents; 29			
	Female	17	58,6				

Table 1 above indicates that , 19 (65.5%) of the employees, were aware of the change whereas 7 (24.2%) were not informed and 3(10.3%) were neutral. By implication, the management of the Municipality provided adequate information on the proposed job change. This shows that job change was not impromptu nor imposed on the employees. In view of this, the next question sought to know about the opinions of the employees about their job changes.

The table further indicate that 5 (17.3%) of employees felt badly about job change, 6 (20.7%) was neutral, and 18 (65.1%) felt well about job change. This corroborated the earlier findings about the satisfactions of the respondents towards their job changes. In other words, the employees of the Municipality were motivated by changes in their jobs, and they see such development as necessary. As shown in the table that 4, 20 respondents (68.9%) agreed that job changes were necessary in the Municipality, 8(27.6%) were neutral while only one (3.5%) disagreed.

This mean that the employees gave approval of job changes in the Municipality and considered it as a right policy decision. The findings lead to the next question on the impact of such changes on the performance of an organisation. Moreover, 5, 8 (27.5%) of the employees agreed that the change of job affected their work negatively, 5 (17.2%) had no idea, whereas 16(55,2%) of them agreed that it did not affect them negatively. Thus, the implication of this was that job changes enhanced the performance of the Municipality. This means that the more job changes experienced by the employees, the more they were motivated, thereby contributing, positively, to the well ness of the municipality. In other words, the employees had a high sense of community because they would love to see progress in the outputs of the Municipality.

The municipality could not achieve this feat in isolation of internal arrangement to manage job changes. In the table above, 18(62%) agreed that the Municipality successfully managed job changes, while 4 (13.8%) disagreed and 7(24.1) were neutral. This means that the leadership of the Municipality was conscious of the need for job changes and were transparently committed to the various statutes and regulations guiding job changes consequence of this successful change management was improvement in the individual performance of the employees. Hence the table above indicates 7, 20 (68.9%) of the respondents agreed that job changes improved their performance in the Municipality, while 5 (17.3%) said they was no improvement in their performance and 4(13.5%) were neutral. This pointed to the fact that job changes was a driver for employee’s individual performance.

Consequently, this result affected the performance of the Municipality as a whole. As shown on the table above, 19(62%) respondents agreed that job changes led to the overall performance of the Municipality Government. On the other hand, 5 (17.3%) disagreed with this finding while 6 (20.7%) were neutral. It could be argued that the high percentage of those who were neutral, compared to those who disagreed might be as a result of their positions in the Municipality. Probably, those were in the category of ‘others’ (6) in the position, as shown in the demographic information data. This category of people do not know the performance measurement of the organisation by virtue of their lower positions in the Municipality. The data presented seem

to suggest that there is a need to involve employees when it comes to change management and developing strategies that will get a buy in from the workforce.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This section focuses on drawing conclusions on the findings of the study. The conclusions reflect the alignment between research objectives and findings.

Key findings on objective one, which sought to examine change management and its impact on organizational performance at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.

The makes the following conclusions.

- There were two groups in the data set, the first group was aware about the change, and they could comment on the impact it had on the organisational performance, and the other group who did not know about the change and as a result could not provide meaningful contribution to the impact of change.
- Change Management is the important aspect of organizational performance, especially when it is positive and transformational in nature. Furthermore, transformational change should be prioritized by all organizations, including uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.
- Change must be management for it to be transformational, and contribute positive to the organizational performance, because that is where organizations succeed, and or fail to meet their tactical and technical strategic anticipated goals and objectives.
- The premise of positive change management and organizational performance was reflected in the study on the method of communication which was strengthening the responses on the part of the employees, and as a result, uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality remained stable in operations.
- The internal promotions were a premised for motivated employees to improve their work ethic.
- Change management, had impact on the performance, because of the performance systems that already exist within the municipality. This helps to measure actual organizational performance, against the anticipated organizational goals and objectives of the uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality. It further helps to track if there were any deviations, which would allow the implementation of corrective measures.
- This study therefore concludes that while Ubuhlebezwe demonstrated a strong sense of change management, it could still grow to reach those who were neutral, and those who did not understand the management of change.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section focuses on drawing conclusions on the findings of the study. The conclusions reflect the alignment between research objectives and findings.

Key findings on objective two, which sought to suggest effective recommendations for change management at uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality.

The makes the following recommendations:

- Ubuhlebezwe Local Municipality should train and development all their employees, this is to ensure that there are no two groups who do not understand tactical and technical organisational strategy, because if employees see different things, they react differently, but if they see one thing, they will react the same way. This will assist with communal understanding of change management and its impact on organisational performance.
- Ubuhlebezwe Local Municipality, should maintain and continue to promote proactive approach to change Management, this is to ensure positive and transformational organizational performance.
- Change must be managed for it to be transformational, and contribute positive to the organizational performance, because that is where organizations succeed, and or fail to meet their tactical and technical strategic anticipated goals and objectives.
- The premise of positive change management and organizational performance was reflected in the study on the method of communication which was strengthening the responses on the part of the employees, and as a result, uBuhlebezwe Local Municipality remained stable in operations.
- The internal promotions were a premised for motivated employees to improve their work ethic.

- Ubuhlebezwe Local Municipality should monitor and evaluate the change management systems in the organizations, this would be to ensure that the impact on the performance is maintained, to maintain the organizational performance.

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## 9. COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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