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**Overcoming Resistance to Change: Strategies for Effective Change Management
in Rigid Hierarchical Organizations**

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Patras, Greece, May 2026

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Overcoming Resistance to Change: Strategies for Effective Change Management in Rigid Hierarchical Organizations

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how resistance to change can be overcome in rigid hierarchical organizations. Even though organizational change is increasingly necessary due to technological, regulatory, and operational pressures, hierarchical organizations often face distinctive barriers because of centralized decision-making, formal authority structures, bureaucratic procedures, and established organizational cultures. The study aims to explore the sources and manifestations of resistance to change and to identify strategies that support effective change management in such contexts. A qualitative research design was used, using semi-structured interviews with three participants from hierarchical and hierarchically structured organizational environments. The interview data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that resistance is shaped by perceived loss, increased workload, uncertainty, loss of status or control, communication gaps, limited participation, organizational culture, informal power relations, and emotional responses such as stress and change fatigue. The study also found that hierarchy can both support and hinder change: it can enable coordination and accountability but may also restrict employee voice and slow adaptation. Effective strategies for reducing resistance include transparent communication, phased implementation, credible leadership, employee involvement during implementation, middle-management alignment, training, and sensitivity to informal networks and emotional concerns. The dissertation concludes that successful change management in hierarchical organizations requires a balanced approach that combines formal authority with human-centered leadership, communication, support, and context-sensitive participation.

Keywords

Organizational change; resistance to change; change management; hierarchical organizations; leadership; communication

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα διπλωματική εργασία εξετάζει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο μπορεί να αντιμετωπιστεί η αντίσταση σε αλλαγές σε άκαμπτους και ιεραρχικούς οργανισμούς. Παρότι η οργανωσιακή αλλαγή γίνεται ολοένα και πιο αναγκαία λόγω τεχνολογικών, κανονιστικών και λειτουργικών πιέσεων, οι ιεραρχικοί οργανισμοί συχνά αντιμετωπίζουν ιδιαίτερα εμπόδια εξαιτίας της συγκεντρωτικής λήψης αποφάσεων, των τυπικών σχέσεων εξουσίας, των γραφειοκρατικών διαδικασιών και της εδραιωμένης οργανωσιακής κουλτούρας. Στόχος της μελέτης είναι να διερευνήσει τις πηγές και τις μορφές της αντίστασης στην αλλαγή και να εντοπίσει στρατηγικές που υποστηρίζουν την αποτελεσματική διαχείριση αλλαγών σε τέτοια περιβάλλοντα. Υιοθετήθηκε ποιοτικός και ερμηνευτικός ερευνητικός σχεδιασμός, με χρήση ημιδομημένων συνεντεύξεων από τρεις συμμετέχοντες με εμπειρία σε ιεραρχικά και λειτουργικά οργανωσιακά περιβάλλοντα. Τα δεδομένα αναλύθηκαν θεματικά. Τα ευρήματα δείχνουν ότι η αντίσταση επηρεάζεται από την αντιληπτή απώλεια, τον αυξημένο φόρτο εργασίας, την αβεβαιότητα, την απώλεια κύρους ή ελέγχου, τα κενά επικοινωνίας, την περιορισμένη συμμετοχή, την οργανωσιακή κουλτούρα, τις άτυπες σχέσεις ισχύος και τις συναισθηματικές αντιδράσεις, όπως το άγχος και η κόπωση από συνεχείς αλλαγές. Η εργασία καταλήγει ότι η επιτυχής διαχείριση αλλαγών σε ιεραρχικούς οργανισμούς απαιτεί συνδυασμό ορθής εφαρμογής εξουσίας, αξιόπιστης ηγεσίας, σαφούς επικοινωνίας, υποστήριξης και συμμετοχής προσαρμοσμένης στο οργανωσιακό πλαίσιο.

Λέξεις - Κλειδιά

Οργανωσιακή αλλαγή; αντίσταση στην αλλαγή; διαχείριση αλλαγών; ιεραρχικοί οργανισμοί; ηγεσία; επικοινωνία

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

ADKAR	Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement
HOU	Hellenic Open University
RQ	Research Question
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context of the Study

Today’s organizations operate in dynamic environments characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and evolving regulatory demands. As a result, organizations must continuously adapt their structures, processes, and strategies in order to remain competitive and effective (Burnes, 2017). Organizational change has therefore become a central feature of modern management practice, encompassing initiatives such as restructuring, diversity programmes, workflow automation, digital transformation, and the creation or restructuring of business units (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Despite the need for change, many organizations face significant challenges while attempting to implement transformation initiatives. Employees and managers may resist change for several reasons, including uncertainty, perceived threats to established routines and workflows, concerns about job security, and possible loss of status or control. Individuals often evaluate change through the lens of potential personal and professional costs (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Oreg, 2006; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Although resistance is a natural response to disruption, it can be especially difficult to overcome in traditional, rigid hierarchical organizations.

Rigid hierarchical organizations, such as public sector institutions, the armed forces, large corporations, and traditionally structured enterprises, usually rely on formal authority, centralized decision-making, clearly defined roles, and strict procedural rules. Although these characteristics can provide accountability and operational clarity, they may also limit flexibility, slow decision-making, and discourage innovation. In these environments, change initiatives frequently encounter structural inertia and cultural barriers that can intensify resistance among employees (Mintzberg, 1983; Schein, 2010).

Understanding how resistance emerges and how it can be effectively managed within hierarchical contexts is therefore of critical importance. While existing literature offers numerous models of change management, there remains a need to examine how these frameworks apply specifically to rigid organizational systems where authority gradients, formalized procedures, and entrenched cultures shape employee responses to change. This study seeks to explore strategies that leaders and managers can employ to overcome resistance and facilitate effective change within such environments.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although change management has been widely studied, many organizations continue to struggle with implementing change successfully. Those operating within rigid hierarchical structures (Burnes, 2017). Traditional bureaucratic systems often reinforce established routines, power dynamics, and formal processes that can hinder adaptability. Employees within these systems may perceive change as disruptive or threatening, leading to resistance that undermines organizational initiatives (Oreg, 2006).

These systems also usually rely on top-down decision-making processes, which can create gaps between leadership and employees. When change initiatives are introduced without sufficient engagement, communication or transparency, employees may develop mistrust or disengagement, further intensifying resistance (Kotter, 1996). Middle managers, who play a critical role in translating strategic decisions into operational practice, may also act as bottlenecks if they feel excluded or uncertain about said changes, highlighting the importance of alignment across organizational levels (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Despite recognition of these challenges, there remains limited consensus on which strategies are most effective in addressing resistance within highly structured environments. Many change management models implicitly assume levels of flexibility, openness, and participation that may not exist in hierarchical organizations. Consequently, leaders often lack context-specific guidance on how to navigate structural and cultural barriers.

This study addresses this gap by examining the sources of resistance in rigid hierarchical organizations and identifying strategies that can support successful change implementation. By focusing on the interaction between organizational structure, culture, and leadership practices, the research aims to provide insights that are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how resistance to change can be effectively managed within rigid hierarchical organizations and to identify strategies that enhance the success of change initiatives in such contexts. Given that hierarchical structures often reinforce formal authority, established routines, and institutionalized practices, understanding how these factors interact with employee perceptions is essential for improving change outcomes.

Specifically, this study seeks to explore the organizational, cultural, and psychological dimensions of resistance and to examine how leadership approaches and communication practices can influence employee responses to change. Drawing on insights from change management and organizational behavior literature, the research aims to deepen understanding of how change initiatives can be implemented more effectively in structured environments (Burnes, 2017; Oreg, 2006).

To achieve this aim, the research pursues the following objectives:

- To examine the concept of organizational change and the nature of resistance within hierarchical environments, drawing on established theoretical frameworks.
- To analyze structural and cultural factors — such as bureaucratic procedures, authority relationships, and organizational norms — that contribute to resistance in rigid organizations.
- To explore the role of leadership, communication, and employee involvement in shaping attitudes toward change.

- To identify strategies and practices that can mitigate resistance and facilitate successful implementation of change initiatives.
- To contribute to existing literature by providing context-specific insights into managing change within hierarchical organizational settings.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following primary research question:

How can resistance to change be overcome in rigid hierarchical organizations?

To support this inquiry, the study addresses the following subsidiary research questions:

- What are the key sources and manifestations of resistance within hierarchical organizational structures?
- How do organizational culture, formal authority, and bureaucratic processes influence employee perceptions of change?
- What role does leadership style, communication strategies, and employee participation play in facilitating or hindering change initiatives?
- Which change management practices are perceived as most effective in reducing resistance within rigid organizational contexts?
- How can existing change management practices be adapted to reflect the realities of hierarchical organizations?

These questions guide the research and ensure alignment between the study's theoretical foundations, empirical investigation, and practical implications.

1.5 Scope and Significance of the Study

This research focuses on resistance to change within organizations characterized by formal hierarchies, centralized decision-making, and clearly defined roles and procedures. The study considers both structural and human factors that influence change processes, including leadership behavior, communication mechanisms, organizational culture, employee attitudes, and institutional constraints. While the findings may have relevance across sectors, particular emphasis is placed on organizations where bureaucratic structures shape how decisions are made and implemented.

The significance of this study is twofold. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on change management by examining how widely used models — which often assume flexible and participative organizational environments — operate within rigid hierarchical systems. By exploring the interaction between structural constraints and human responses, the research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of resistance dynamics and highlight potential limitations of existing frameworks (Burnes, 2017; Schein, 2010).

From a practical perspective, the study offers insights for leaders, managers, and policymakers responsible for implementing change initiatives in structured environments. Understanding how resistance develops and identifying strategies to address both psychological and organizational barriers can support more effective decision-making, improve employee engagement, and enhance the likelihood of successful transformation. Ultimately, the study aims to inform approaches that balance the need for organizational stability with the imperative for adaptability in an increasingly complex environment.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, outlines the problem, and presents the aims, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature, including theories of organizational change, models of change management, concepts of resistance, and the influence of organizational culture and hierarchy. It also presents the conceptual framework guiding the research.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the research design, philosophical approach, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data and the key findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and explores their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by summarizing key insights, offering recommendations for practice, and suggesting directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Organizational Change

Organizational change refers to the process through which organizations modify their structures, strategies, systems, processes, technologies, or cultures in response to internal and external pressures. In contemporary organizational environments, change is frequently driven by globalization, technological development, regulatory shifts, competitive pressures, and changing stakeholder expectations (Burnes, 2017). As a result, change has become an ongoing feature of organizational life rather than an occasional managerial activity.

Scholars often distinguish between incremental change and transformational change. Incremental change involves gradual improvements to existing processes, while transformational change involves deeper shifts in organizational strategy, structure, culture, or identity (By, 2005). This distinction is important for the present study because rigid hierarchical organizations may be able to tolerate incremental adjustments more easily than transformational reforms that challenge established roles, authority relationships, and routines.

Lewin's (1951) three-stage model remains one of the foundational approaches to understanding change. The model proposes that organizations move through the stages of unfreezing existing behaviors, implementing change, and refreezing new practices. Although this model has been highly influential, it has also been criticized for presenting change as a relatively linear and stable process, whereas modern organizations often experience continuous and overlapping change pressures (Burnes, 2017). Nevertheless, Lewin's model remains useful because it highlights the importance of preparing individuals and groups psychologically before change can be successfully embedded.

More recent perspectives emphasize that organizational change is not only a technical or structural process but also a social, emotional, and interpretive process. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) argue that employee beliefs, attitudes, and readiness are central to the success of change initiatives. Similarly, Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking suggests that employees actively interpret organizational events in order to understand what change means for them, their roles, and their future. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) further distinguish between sensemaking and sensegiving, arguing that leaders not only interpret change themselves but also attempt to influence how others understand it.

These perspectives are particularly relevant to rigid hierarchical organizations, where formal authority and centralized decision-making may shape how change is interpreted. In such contexts, employees may rely heavily on managerial communication, organizational routines, and informal networks to understand the purpose and consequences of change. Therefore, studying organizational change in hierarchical settings requires attention to both formal structures and the meanings employees attach to change initiatives.

2.2 Change Management Theories and Models

Several change management models have been developed to guide organizations through transformation. Among the most widely cited are Lewin’s three-stage model, Kotter’s eight-step model, and individual-level approaches such as the ADKAR model. These frameworks provide useful guidance, but their relevance must be critically assessed when applied to rigid hierarchical organizations.

Lewin’s (1951) model emphasizes the need to destabilize existing practices before introducing and institutionalizing new behaviors. Its strength lies in its simplicity and its recognition that change requires preparation. However, critics argue that the model may understate the complexity, politics, and ongoing nature of organizational change (Burnes, 2017; By, 2005). In rigid organizations, the “unfreezing” stage may be especially difficult because established procedures, formal authority, and cultural norms often reinforce existing practices.

Kotter’s (1996) eight-step model places strong emphasis on leadership, urgency, coalition-building, communication, empowerment, and short-term wins. The model is useful because it recognizes the importance of leadership visibility and communication during change. However, it also assumes that leaders can create alignment and mobilize support across the organization. This assumption may be problematic in hierarchical organizations where information flows slowly, employee participation is limited, and middle managers may interpret or filter strategic messages differently from senior leaders (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

Individual-level models of change, such as ADKAR, highlight the importance of awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement in supporting employee transition (Hiatt, 2006). Such approaches are helpful because they recognize that organizational change ultimately depends on individual adaptation. However, focusing too strongly on the individual may underplay structural and political barriers. In hierarchical organizations, resistance may not simply reflect individual reluctance but may also be shaped by bureaucracy, power relations, communication barriers, and cultural expectations (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992; Schein, 2010).

A critical body of change literature argues that universal change models can oversimplify organizational realities. By (2005) notes that change management theory often lacks consensus and that different contexts require different approaches. Ford, Ford, and D’Amelio (2008) also challenge the traditional view of resistance as purely negative, suggesting that resistance can provide valuable feedback about flaws in the change process. This is significant for the present study because resistance in hierarchical organizations may indicate deeper structural, cultural, or political tensions rather than simple unwillingness to change.

2.3 Resistance to Change: Definitions, Causes, and Types

Resistance to change is commonly understood as negative attitudes, behaviors, or emotional responses directed toward organizational change initiatives (Oreg, 2006). It may be expressed openly through criticism or refusal, or more subtly through withdrawal, reduced commitment, passive compliance, or delays in implementation. In rigid hierarchical organizations, resistance may be especially difficult to detect because employees may avoid openly challenging authority and instead express resistance through indirect behaviors.

Earlier literature often treated resistance as a problem to be overcome. However, more critical perspectives argue that resistance is more complex. Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that employees are not necessarily resistant to change itself, but rather to the perceived consequences of change, such as loss of status, job security, influence, competence, or familiar routines. Piderit (2000) further argues that resistance should be understood as multidimensional, involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. Employees may support the overall purpose of a change while simultaneously fearing its personal consequences, creating ambivalence rather than simple opposition.

Psychological sources of resistance include uncertainty, perceived loss of control, fear of incompetence, and anxiety about future roles (Oreg, 2006). These concerns are particularly relevant in hierarchical organizations, where employees may have limited involvement in decision-making and may therefore feel that change is imposed upon them. Lines (2005) suggests that attitudes toward change are shaped by how employees evaluate the expected outcomes of change, including whether they perceive the process as fair, beneficial, and credible.

Emotional responses are also central to resistance. Kiefer (2005) demonstrates that organizational change can generate negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, disappointment, and anger, especially when employees perceive change as poorly managed or threatening. Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) further link stress and negative attitudes with reduced openness to organizational change. These findings suggest that resistance should not be understood only as rational disagreement, but also as an emotional response to uncertainty, pressure, or perceived injustice.

Resistance may also have political roots. Pfeffer (1992) argues that organizations are political arenas in which individuals and groups seek to protect resources, influence, and status. Buchanan and Badham (2008) similarly emphasize that organizational change often disrupts established power relationships, making political behavior a central feature of change processes. In rigid hierarchical organizations, change may threaten existing authority patterns or departmental influence, leading some actors to resist in order to preserve their position.

Therefore, resistance to change should be understood as a complex phenomenon shaped by psychological, emotional, cultural, structural, and political factors. This understanding is

important for the present study because it moves beyond simplistic explanations and allows resistance to be examined as a meaningful organizational response.

2.4 Organizational Culture and Hierarchy

Organizational culture refers to the shared assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms that shape how members of an organization think and behave (Schein, 2010). Culture influences how employees interpret change, how they respond to leadership messages, and whether they view change as legitimate or threatening. In organizations where stability, compliance, and respect for authority are strongly valued, change initiatives may be interpreted as disruptive or risky.

Schein (2010) argues that organizational culture operates at different levels, including visible artifacts, stated values, and deeper underlying assumptions. These deeper assumptions are often difficult to change because they become taken-for-granted ways of understanding the organization. In rigid hierarchical organizations, employees may become accustomed to formal procedures, top-down decision-making, and clearly defined authority. As a result, change initiatives that require flexibility, participation, or innovation may conflict with deeply embedded cultural expectations.

Hierarchy is also central to how change is experienced. Mintzberg (1983) explains that bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations rely on formalized roles, standard procedures, and centralized coordination. These features can support consistency, accountability, and control. However, they can also slow decision-making, restrict communication, and limit employee autonomy. In change contexts, this may reduce responsiveness and make it harder for employees to raise concerns or contribute ideas.

Power distance and authority relationships further influence responses to change. Hofstede (2001) suggests that in high power-distance cultures, individuals are more likely to accept unequal authority relationships and may be less willing to challenge senior management. Within hierarchical organizations, this may reduce open dialogue and create a situation where employees appear compliant while privately resisting or disengaging.

Informal networks also shape change processes. Pfeffer (1992) argues that influence in organizations does not operate only through formal authority but also through informal relationships, coalitions, and control over resources. This is important because hierarchical charts may not fully reveal who influences employee attitudes toward change. Informal leaders, respected colleagues, or middle managers may significantly affect whether change is accepted or resisted.

Overall, organizational culture and hierarchy are not simply background conditions; they actively shape how change is interpreted, communicated, and implemented. For this reason, they form a central part of the conceptual foundation of this dissertation.

2.5 Change in Rigid Hierarchical Organizations: Challenges and Barriers

Rigid hierarchical organizations face distinctive challenges when implementing change. Formal rules, centralized authority, and layered decision-making can limit flexibility and slow the implementation of new initiatives (Mintzberg, 1983; Burnes, 2017). Although these structures may provide order and accountability, they may also reinforce inertia by encouraging employees to follow established procedures rather than experiment with new practices.

One major barrier is communication. Kotter (1996) emphasizes that change requires clear and consistent communication of vision and purpose. Nevertheless, in hierarchical organizations, communication often passes through multiple layers, increasing the risk of delay, distortion, or selective interpretation. When employees receive limited or unclear information, they may make sense of change through rumors, assumptions, or informal conversations (Weick, 1995). This can increase uncertainty and resistance.

Middle managers are especially important in hierarchical change processes. Balogun and Johnson (2004) show that middle managers play a key role in interpreting, translating, and implementing organizational change. They act as intermediaries between strategic decision-makers and operational employees. However, if middle managers are uncertain, excluded, or unconvinced, they may unintentionally or deliberately slow implementation. Their role is therefore not merely administrative but interpretive and political.

Another barrier is the presence of entrenched power relations. Buchanan and Badham (2008) argue that change frequently involves political behavior because it affects interests, resources, and authority. In hierarchical organizations, individuals may resist change when they perceive that it threatens their influence or disrupts established reporting relationships. This political dimension is often underemphasized in linear change models but is highly relevant to rigid organizational contexts.

Emotional exhaustion and change fatigue also present challenges. Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) highlight the relationship between stress and negative attitudes toward change. When employees experience frequent or poorly explained change initiatives, they may become cynical, disengaged, or fatigued. This is particularly relevant in bureaucratic environments where employees may have little control over the pace or direction of change.

These barriers suggest that effective change management in hierarchical organizations requires more than issuing directives from senior leadership. It requires careful attention to communication, middle management alignment, employee perceptions, emotional responses, and informal power structures.

2.6 Strategies for Overcoming Resistance to Change

The literature identifies several strategies for reducing resistance and supporting successful change implementation. One of the most consistently emphasized strategies is effective communication. Kotter (1996) argues that leaders must communicate the change vision

clearly and repeatedly in order to build understanding and commitment. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) further suggest that education and communication are particularly important when resistance is caused by misinformation or lack of trust.

Participation is another important strategy. Lines (2005) argues that employee participation can strengthen commitment to change by increasing perceived fairness, influence, and ownership. When employees are invited to contribute to the change process, they are more likely to understand the rationale for change and less likely to view it as imposed. This is especially significant in hierarchical organizations, where limited participation may otherwise reinforce feelings of powerlessness.

Leadership credibility and trust are also essential. Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell (2007) find that leadership behavior significantly influences employee commitment to change. Leaders who provide support, communicate consistently, and demonstrate competence are more likely to reduce uncertainty and build acceptance. Yukl (2013) similarly emphasizes that effective leadership involves not only directing tasks but also motivating, supporting, and enabling employees.

A further strategy involves sensegiving. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argue that leaders play an important role in shaping how organizational members interpret change. In hierarchical organizations, where employees may depend heavily on leadership communication, leaders must explain not only what is changing but also why it is necessary, how it will affect employees, and how concerns will be addressed. This helps reduce ambiguity and supports more constructive sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Training and support mechanisms also help reduce resistance by increasing employee competence and confidence. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) argue that readiness for change depends partly on whether employees believe they have the capability and resources to adapt. In rigid organizations, structured training may be especially useful because employees may be accustomed to formal processes and may require clear guidance when new practices are introduced.

Finally, resistance should be treated as feedback rather than simply opposition. Ford et al. (2008) argue that resistance can reveal weaknesses in the change process, including poor communication, lack of involvement, unrealistic timelines, or unresolved concerns. Managers who listen to resistance may therefore improve implementation rather than simply suppress disagreement. This perspective is particularly valuable in hierarchical organizations, where open criticism may be limited and resistance may provide important signals about underlying problems.

2.7 Summary of Key Findings from the Literature

The literature demonstrates that organizational change is a complex process shaped by structural, cultural, psychological, emotional, and political factors. Traditional change models such as Lewin's three-stage model and Kotter's eight-step model provide useful foundations, but they may require adaptation in rigid hierarchical contexts where centralized

authority, formal procedures, and bureaucratic norms influence how change is experienced (Lewin, 1951; Kotter, 1996; Burnes, 2017).

Resistance to change is not simply irrational opposition. Rather, it may reflect uncertainty, perceived loss, emotional stress, lack of trust, political interests, or concerns about the way change is implemented (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2006; Ford et al., 2008). This is particularly important in hierarchical organizations, where employees may have limited voice and where power relations may shape both visible and hidden forms of resistance.

The literature also highlights the importance of communication, leadership, participation, culture, and middle management. Leaders influence change not only through formal authority but also through sensegiving, trust-building, and support (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Herold et al., 2007; Yukl, 2013). Middle managers play a key role in translating and interpreting change, while organizational culture shapes whether change is viewed as legitimate, threatening, or necessary (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Schein, 2010).

However, despite extensive research on change management, there remains a need for greater understanding of how resistance can be managed specifically within rigid hierarchical organizations. Many established frameworks assume levels of openness, participation, and flexibility that may not exist in bureaucratic settings. This study therefore addresses a research gap by examining how hierarchy, culture, leadership, communication, and employee perceptions interact to shape resistance and change outcomes.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, this study adopts a conceptual framework that links organizational structure, organizational culture, leadership behavior, communication quality, employee participation, and employee perceptions to resistance and change outcomes.

The framework assumes that rigid hierarchical structures influence how change is communicated, interpreted, and implemented. Hierarchy may increase resistance when employees experience limited participation, weak upward communication, or perceived threats to status and control (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992; Oreg, 2006). Organizational culture further shapes whether employees view change as compatible with existing values and assumptions (Schein, 2010).

Leadership and communication are positioned as central mechanisms that can either reduce or intensify resistance. Leaders influence employee sensemaking by explaining the purpose of change, building trust, and providing support (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kotter, 1996; Herold et al., 2007). Employee participation and training are also expected to reduce resistance by increasing ownership, fairness, and confidence (Lines, 2005; Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

In this framework, resistance is understood as a multidimensional response involving cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and political elements (Piderit, 2000; Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Change success is as a result more likely when organizations address not only the technical aspects of implementation but also the human, cultural, and structural conditions that influence employee acceptance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study is to explore how resistance to change can be managed effectively within rigid hierarchical organizations. Given that resistance to change is shaped by employee perceptions, organizational culture, leadership behavior, communication, and power dynamics, this study adopts a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate when the aim is to understand meanings, experiences, and interpretations within a specific social or organizational context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A qualitative approach is suitable for this dissertation because resistance to change cannot be fully understood through measurable variables alone. As discussed in the literature, resistance may include cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and political dimensions (Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2006; Buchanan & Badham, 2008). Therefore, exploring participants’ lived experiences allows the researcher to capture the complexity of how change is perceived and experienced within hierarchical organizations.

This study follows an exploratory research design. Exploratory research is useful when investigating complex phenomena where existing knowledge may be incomplete or context-dependent (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Since this dissertation focuses specifically on rigid hierarchical organizations, the exploratory approach allows the research to examine how formal authority, bureaucratic procedures, communication patterns, and organizational culture shape resistance to change.

The study is also informed by the view that organizational change is a social and interpretive process. Weick’s (1995) concept of sensemaking suggests that employees interpret change based on the information available to them, their organizational context, and their relationship with leadership. Similarly, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argue that leaders engage in “sensegiving” by attempting to influence how employees understand change. These ideas support the use of qualitative interviews, as they allow participants to explain how they interpreted change initiatives and how those interpretations influenced their responses.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Rationale

This study is guided by an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through individual meanings, experiences, and interactions rather than existing as a single objective truth (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophical position is appropriate because the study investigates how employees and managers perceive, interpret, and respond to organizational change.

Resistance to change is often subjective and context-specific. Employees may respond differently to the same change initiative depending on their role, level of authority, trust in leadership, previous experiences, and perceived consequences of the change (Oreg, 2006;

Lines, 2005). For example, a senior manager may interpret a restructuring initiative as strategically necessary, while an employee may perceive the same initiative as a threat to job security, status, or control. An interpretivist approach allows these different meanings to be explored in depth.

The interpretivist stance also aligns with the literature on sensemaking. During change, employees attempt to understand what the change means and how it will affect them (Weick, 1995). In hierarchical organizations, where communication is often top-down and formalized, employees may rely on leadership messages, middle managers, and informal networks to interpret change. Therefore, understanding participants' subjective interpretations is essential to answering the research questions.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The population for this study consists of employees and managers working within organizations characterized by formal hierarchy, centralized decision-making, clearly defined roles, and bureaucratic procedures. These may include public sector organizations, large corporations, financial institutions, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, or other traditionally structured organizations.

The study uses purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants who are likely to provide relevant and meaningful information about the research topic (Saunders et al., 2019). Purposive sampling is appropriate because the research requires participants who have direct experience of organizational change within hierarchical settings.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in, exposure to, or experience of organizational change initiatives. The sample included employees and managers who were able to provide insight into how change was introduced, interpreted, resisted, and managed within hierarchical settings. Including participants from different hierarchical levels was important because resistance and perceptions of change may vary according to organizational position and power relations (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Pfeffer, 1992).

The final sample consisted of three participants selected through purposive sampling. Although a larger sample was initially desirable, access constraints and the sensitivity of discussing organizational resistance within hierarchical settings limited the final sample size. The sample was nevertheless appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study, as the aim was to generate depth of insight rather than statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The primary method of data collection for this study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate because they provide a balance between consistency and flexibility. They allow the researcher to ask predetermined questions while also giving space for participants to elaborate on their experiences and introduce themes that may not have been anticipated (Saunders et al., 2019).

The interview questions are based on key themes identified in the literature review, including resistance to change, leadership, communication, employee participation, organizational culture, hierarchy, power dynamics, and emotional responses. This ensures that the data collection process is theoretically informed and aligned with the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for this dissertation because resistance to change often involves subjective perceptions and emotional experiences. Previous literature shows that resistance may be shaped by uncertainty, perceived loss, stress, fear, lack of trust, and perceived threats to status or control (Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2006; Kiefer, 2005). Interviews allow participants to explain these experiences in their own words.

The interview guide also includes questions about leadership and communication because these factors are central to successful change management. Kotter (1996) emphasizes the importance of leadership communication in building commitment to change, while Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell (2007) show that leadership behavior influences employee commitment during change. Questions on participation are also included because employee involvement has been linked to stronger commitment and reduced resistance (Lines, 2005).

Interviews were conducted either online or in written format, depending on participant availability and practical constraints. Participants responded to a semi-structured interview guide designed around the research questions and key literature themes. With participants' consent, responses were recorded or documented and then prepared for analysis. This supported accuracy and allowed the researcher to review participants' responses carefully during the analysis stage.

Although document analysis was considered as a possible supplementary method, the final analysis was based on semi-structured interview data only, due to limited access to internal organizational documents. This decision was consistent with the study's qualitative and exploratory focus on participant perceptions and experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was appropriate for this study because the research aimed to identify recurring themes related to resistance, hierarchy, leadership, communication, culture, and change management strategies.

The analysis followed the six-stage process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the interview responses. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments of text related to the research questions. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader themes. Fourth, themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data. Fifth, themes were defined and named. Finally, the findings were written up and linked back to the literature.

Initial coding was informed by the themes identified in Chapter 2, including:

- perceived loss and uncertainty;
- emotional responses to change;
- leadership behavior and trust;
- communication quality;
- employee participation;
- hierarchy and bureaucracy;
- middle management influence;
- power dynamics and informal networks;
- strategies for reducing resistance.

However, the analysis also remained open to new themes that emerged from participant responses. This was important because qualitative research should allow unexpected insights to develop from the data rather than forcing responses into predetermined categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Thematic analysis is particularly useful for this study because resistance to change is multidimensional. Piderit (2000) argues that resistance can include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, while Buchanan and Badham (2008) highlight its political dimensions. Thematic analysis allows these different dimensions to be identified and examined systematically.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this research because participants were asked to discuss workplace experiences, perceptions of leadership, and possible resistance within their organizations. The study therefore followed established ethical principles including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and secure data handling (Saunders et al., 2019).

Before participating, each participant received information explaining the purpose of the study, what participation involved, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw. Informed consent was obtained before each interview. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question and could withdraw from the study without providing a reason.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Participants' names, job titles, organizational names, and identifying details were removed or generalized in the transcripts and final dissertation. This was particularly important because participants discussed sensitive issues such as mistrust, leadership weaknesses, organizational politics, or resistance to management decisions.

Interview recordings, notes, and transcripts were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. Only the researcher had access to the raw data. These measures were intended to protect participants and encourage honest responses.

3.7 Limitations of the Methodology

As with all research methods, this study has certain limitations. First, because the study uses a qualitative research design and a relatively small sample, the findings may not be statistically generalizable to all hierarchical organizations. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not statistical generalization but rather depth of understanding and contextual insight (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Second, the study relies on participant perceptions, which may be subjective. Participants may interpret change differently depending on their role, personal experience, organizational position, or relationship with leadership (Oreg, 2006). However, this limitation is also a strength, since the study specifically aims to understand how employees and managers interpret and experience change.

Third, access to participants was limited by organizational sensitivity. Employees and managers may be cautious when discussing resistance, leadership, or internal change processes. To reduce this risk, the research emphasized confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Fourth, the researcher's interpretation may have influenced the analysis of qualitative data. To address this, the analysis followed a systematic thematic approach based on Braun and Clarke (2006), and findings were supported by clear evidence from participant responses.

Despite these limitations, the selected methodology is appropriate for this dissertation because it enables an in-depth exploration of how resistance to change is experienced and managed within rigid hierarchical organizations. The qualitative approach allows the study to capture the social, emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of change that may be overlooked by purely quantitative methods.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Overview of the Data Collected

This chapter presents the findings from the primary data collected for this dissertation. The purpose of the research was to examine how resistance to change is experienced and managed within rigid hierarchical organizations. The data were collected through three semi-structured interviews with participants who had experience of organizational change within structured, hierarchical, and operationally focused organizations.

The interviews included participants from maritime transportation and military contexts. These settings were considered appropriate for the study because they are characterized by formal authority, defined reporting lines, operational discipline, and centralized decision-making. Such characteristics are relevant to the research topic, as the study focuses on the ways in which hierarchy, culture, leadership, and communication influence resistance to change.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with interview responses, identification of initial codes, grouping of codes into broader themes, and interpretation of these themes in relation to the research questions and literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The analysis was both deductive and inductive: some themes were informed by the literature on resistance to change, hierarchy, leadership, and organizational culture, while others emerged directly from the interview data.

To preserve confidentiality, the participants are referred to as P1, P2, and P3. Any information that could directly identify participants, organizations, individuals, or internal units has been removed or generalized. The findings are presented thematically rather than participant-by-participant in order to identify patterns and contrasts across the three interviews.

4.2 Profile of Participants

Table 4.1: Participant Profile

Participant Code	Organizational Context	Role Level	Relationship to Change
P1	Maritime transportation operations	Middle management / operational management	Directly involved in implementing procedural and technological changes related to repair approvals, claims handling, and monitoring systems
P2	Armed forces / aviation maintenance environment	Senior operational management	Led and implemented personnel and structural changes within a strictly hierarchical unit
P3	Armed forces / operations and communication systems	Junior to middle management	Observed and participated in procedural change initiatives, particularly

			those relating to internal procedures and standard operating practices
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The participant profile indicates that the sample included perspectives from different levels of hierarchical organizations. P1 offered insight from a middle-management operational role in a commercial maritime setting. P2 provided a senior operational leadership perspective within a military environment. P3 contributed a lower-level managerial and observational perspective within a similarly hierarchical military context. This variation is useful because the literature suggests that hierarchical position influences how individuals interpret, experience, and respond to organizational change (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Pfeffer, 1992).

4.3 Coding and Theme Development

The thematic analysis generated several recurring codes across the interviews. These codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the main factors influencing resistance to change in hierarchical organizations.

Table 4.2: Coding and Theme Development

Initial Code	Evidence from Interviews	Final Theme
Increased workload	P1 described resistance from local agents due to additional duties and responsibilities.	Perceived Loss, Workload, and Uncertainty
Loss of status and control	P2 identified loss of status and control as the main source of resistance.	Power, Status, and Control
Poor or incomplete communication	P3 stated that resistance often occurs when change is not communicated properly to different hierarchical levels.	Communication and Sensemaking
Top-down authority	P2 described change as initially enforced through order, followed by explanation down the chain of command.	Hierarchy and Decision-Making
Operational feedback	P1 noted that employees and agents provided feedback during implementation.	Participation and Employee Involvement
Informal influence	P2 emphasized that informal networks played both positive and negative roles in the change process.	Organizational Culture and Informal Power
Stress and insecurity	All three participants identified stress, uncertainty, insecurity, or psychological exhaustion.	Emotional Responses and Change Fatigue
Phased implementation	P1 identified gradual implementation as one of the most effective strategies.	Strategies for Reducing Resistance

From this coding process, seven major themes were identified:

- Perceived loss, workload, and uncertainty;
- Communication and sensemaking;

- Hierarchy and top-down decision-making;
- Leadership credibility and trust;
- Participation, support, and implementation involvement;
- Organizational culture, informal power, and emotional responses.
- Strategies used to reduce resistance.

These themes are discussed in the following sections.

4.4 Theme 1: Perceived Loss, Workload, and Uncertainty

A major theme across the interviews was that resistance to change often emerged when individuals perceived change as creating loss, uncertainty, or additional pressure. This supports Dent and Goldberg's (1999) argument that employees may not resist change itself, but rather the perceived consequences associated with change. It also reflects Oreg's (2006) view that resistance is often linked to uncertainty, perceived loss of control, and disruption of established routines.

P1 described the change initiative in largely positive terms, explaining that the changes improved monitoring, delegation, and operational control. However, P1 also acknowledged that uncertainty existed at the beginning, particularly in relation to workload distribution. Resistance was mainly observed among local agents, who were concerned about additional responsibilities:

"There was some resistance, mainly from local agents. It mostly appeared as skepticism and concerns about additional responsibilities and workload." (P1)

This suggests that resistance in P1's context was practical and workload-related rather than ideological. Local agents did not necessarily reject the purpose of the change; rather, they were concerned about how the change would affect their operational responsibilities. P1 also noted that concerns about control and responsibility influenced resistance more than job security, as agents were given greater authority and accountability for repair approvals and claims handling.

P2 presented a more political interpretation of resistance. In this case, resistance was linked primarily to loss of status and control. P2 stated:

"The cause of resistance was almost exclusively due to loss of status and control." (P2)

This finding aligns with Pfeffer's (1992) argument that organizations are political arenas in which individuals seek to preserve influence, resources, and status. It also supports Buchanan and Badham's (2008) view that change frequently disrupts existing power arrangements and can therefore trigger resistance from those who feel threatened by the redistribution of authority.

P3 provided a third perspective. While P3 did not strongly emphasize deliberate political resistance, they suggested that employees may resist change because it disrupts familiar

routines and requires them to learn new procedures. P3 explained that people often dislike having to adapt to new methods, especially when there are few motivating factors:

"People generally do not like to get used to new ideas and procedures... because people have to learn anew critical items regarding their daily routine, with few motivating factors." (P3)

This reflects Piderit's (2000) argument that resistance can be cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Employees may understand the logic of change while still experiencing discomfort, reluctance, or low motivation when required to alter established routines.

Overall, the findings suggest that resistance in hierarchical organizations is not caused by one factor alone. In P1's case, resistance was linked to workload and operational responsibility. In P2's case, it was strongly connected to status and control. In P3's case, it related more to routine disruption, adaptation effort, and motivation. These findings confirm that resistance to change is multidimensional and context-dependent.

4.5 Theme 2: Communication and Sensemaking

Communication emerged as one of the most important factors influencing the success or failure of change. All three participants emphasized that change must be clearly explained, justified, and communicated to employees. This supports Kotter's (1996) argument that successful change requires clear communication of vision and direction. It also reflects Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking, which suggests that employees interpret change through the information and cues available to them.

P1 described communication as generally effective. The change initiatives were introduced through emails and online meetings, and management explained the operational goals, timelines, and responsibilities expected from departments and local agents. P1 stated:

"Regular emails and online meetings helped employees understand the objectives and progress of the changes." (P1)

This suggests that structured communication helped reduce uncertainty and support employee adaptation. P1 later identified continuous communication as one of the most effective strategies for reducing resistance.

P2 also emphasized the importance of communication, even though the change took place in a highly directive and hierarchical environment. P2 described communication as essential after the initial decision had been made:

"Communication was highly effective and in my opinion the most critical part in enforcing the change." (P2)

This finding is significant because it shows that authority alone was not sufficient. Even where change was introduced through formal command, explanation was still required to secure acceptance. This reflects Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) concept of sensegiving, where leaders attempt to shape how organizational members interpret change.

P3 was particularly explicit about the link between communication and resistance. According to P3, resistance often occurs when ideas are not communicated properly to either lower-ranking or higher-ranking personnel. P3 argued that a correctly communicated change initiative must explain why the change is necessary and beneficial:

"A correctly communicated idea or initiative is one that is accompanied by the reasons of why such a change is necessary or beneficial." (P3)

This supports Kotter and Schlesinger's (2008) argument that communication reduces uncertainty and helps overcome resistance caused by misunderstanding or lack of trust.

Overall, the findings show that communication performs two functions. First, it provides practical information about what is changing and what employees are expected to do. Second, it helps employees interpret the meaning and purpose of the change. This second function is particularly important in hierarchical organizations, where employees may have limited input into decisions and therefore rely heavily on leadership communication to understand the rationale for change.

4.6 Theme 3: Hierarchy and Top-Down Decision-Making

The findings show that hierarchy had both enabling and constraining effects on change implementation. All three participants described their organizations as hierarchical, but they differed in how they evaluated the effect of hierarchy on change.

P1 described a relatively hierarchical organization where strategic decisions were mainly made by senior management and implementation was coordinated through regional offices and local agents. According to P1, hierarchy helped maintain coordination and consistency, but it also sometimes slowed decision-making:

"The hierarchical structure helped maintain coordination and consistency during implementation, although decision-making could sometimes be slower due to multiple approval levels." (P1)

This reflects Mintzberg's (1983) view that hierarchical and bureaucratic structures can provide control and coordination, while also limiting flexibility and responsiveness.

P2 viewed hierarchy more positively. In P2's case, hierarchical structure supported delegation of authority and coordination. The change was implemented through formal authority, and explanations were later communicated down the chain of command. P2 described the leadership approach as directive with some participative elements:

"The most evident style was directive, accompanied by some participative elements." (P2)

This suggests that in highly structured environments, hierarchy can provide the authority needed to initiate change. However, the finding also raises the issue of whether compliance reflects genuine acceptance or merely obedience to authority.

P3 offered a more critical view, stating that hierarchy mostly hindered the change process. P3 explained that resistance differed across levels of the organization. Higher hierarchical

levels might resist strategic changes without openly expressing opposition, middle levels might resist when ideas are not communicated effectively, and lower levels might appear interested but fail to adapt in practice:

"Higher hierarchical levels will resist changes regarding strategic thinking and won't show it initially... Low hierarchical levels... tend to show interest and be complacent but in the end very few are willing to adapt." (P3)

This finding is particularly important because it suggests that resistance in hierarchical organizations may be hidden. Employees may outwardly comply while inwardly resisting or failing to fully adopt new practices. This aligns with Piderit's (2000) argument that resistance can involve inconsistencies between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses.

Overall, the findings suggest that hierarchy is not simply a barrier to change. It can support coordination, authority, and consistency, particularly in operational contexts. However, it can also slow decision-making, reduce employee voice, and encourage hidden resistance. This dual role of hierarchy is central to understanding change management in rigid organizations.

4.7 Theme 4: Leadership Credibility and Trust

Leadership credibility was another central theme. Participants suggested that leadership influenced whether employees trusted the change process and accepted the rationale for implementation. This supports Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell's (2007) argument that leadership behavior affects employee commitment to change, and Lines' (2005) argument that trust shapes attitudes toward change.

P1 described leadership as mainly directive and top-down, but also available for clarification and support. Leadership credibility was built through clear explanation of the purpose of change and regular communication during implementation. This suggests that directive leadership was more acceptable when combined with support and transparency.

P2 emphasized leadership by example. According to P2, credibility was established when the leader demonstrated personal competence and willingness to apply the same standards expected of others:

"When I required something to be put into practice from lower ranking personnel I always had to lead the way in implementing it first." (P2)

This finding suggests that in hierarchical organizations, credibility depends not only on rank but also on perceived competence, consistency, and personal example. This aligns with Yukl's (2013) argument that effective leadership involves influence, role modelling, and support rather than formal authority alone.

P3 described a leadership approach that was more participative in the specific change initiative discussed. P3 viewed the commanding officer positively, emphasizing that he provided guidance without micromanaging or acting aggressively:

"He would provide inputs and guidance in a well thought manner without coming across as aggressive or as an authoritative figure." (P3)

P3 also argued that participative leadership is particularly beneficial when implementing change. This suggests that even in hierarchical organizations, employees value leaders who combine authority with openness, emotional intelligence, and respect for employee input.

Across the interviews, leadership credibility was associated with communication, consistency, competence, and support. While all three organizations had hierarchical structures, participants suggested that leadership was most effective when authority was balanced with explanation and engagement.

4.8 Theme 5: Participation, Support, and Implementation Involvement

Participation emerged as an important factor in reducing resistance, although the degree of participation varied across the cases. In all three interviews, participation was more common during implementation than during initial decision-making. This reflects the hierarchical nature of the organizations studied.

P1 explained that employees and local agents were involved mainly during the implementation phase. They provided operational feedback and reported practical challenges. P1 stated that feedback was considered when operational adjustments were required:

"Feedback from employees and agents was considered, especially when operational adjustments were needed." (P1)

This suggests that even limited participation can improve change implementation when it allows employees to raise practical concerns and influence operational details.

P2 described a similar approach. Employees were not involved in the main decision, but they were invited to suggest how the change could be implemented most effectively:

"This is what has to be done. I am open in suggestions on how it can be best implemented." (P2)

This illustrates a form of bounded participation. The strategic decision was not open for debate, but implementation methods could be shaped by employee input. This finding is particularly relevant to hierarchical organizations, where full participation in decision-making may be structurally limited.

P3 reported a stronger sense of involvement. P3 stated that employee involvement was encouraged and that their opinions were considered. This was viewed positively and linked to the success of the change. P3's response supports Lines' (2005) argument that

participation can increase commitment to change by improving perceived fairness and ownership.

Support mechanisms also played an important role. P1 described support through meetings, operational instructions, and ongoing communication. P3 mentioned training as a support mechanism. P2, however, stated that training was not required in the specific case because the issue did not concern employee capability.

Overall, the findings suggest that participation and support reduce resistance by giving employees a sense of involvement, improving implementation quality, and reducing uncertainty. However, the findings also show that participation in hierarchical organizations is often limited to how change is implemented rather than whether change should occur.

4.9 Theme 6: Organizational Culture, Informal Power, and Emotional Responses

Organizational culture and informal influence shaped how change was experienced. This supports Schein’s (2010) view that culture influences employee behavior and attitudes, as well as Pfeffer’s (1992) argument that informal power structures can shape organizational outcomes.

P1 described the organizational culture as professional, operationally focused, and efficiency-driven. This culture appeared to support change when the change was framed as improving monitoring, delegation, and operational control. However, some resistance still emerged where the change increased responsibility and workload.

P2 described a more difficult cultural context, shaped by discontent and disappointment among personnel. According to P2, some employees had developed a mindset that they were already performing beyond what could reasonably be expected. This cultural attitude made additional demands more likely to be interpreted negatively.

P2 also strongly emphasized the importance of informal networks. Informal influence was described as working both positively and negatively:

“Informal networks and power structures played a very important role.” (P2)

This finding supports Pfeffer’s (1992) view that power in organizations operates not only through formal hierarchy but also through informal relationships and influence. It also suggests that formal organizational charts may not fully reveal who shapes employee attitudes toward change.

P3 gave a different answer, stating that informal networks were not important in the specific change initiative discussed. However, P3 also acknowledged that groups of people can influence each other negatively in closed environments such as the armed forces. This suggests that informal influence may still be present even where it is not formally recognized as a power structure.

Emotional responses were also evident across the interviews. P1 described temporary stress and pressure during the transition period, especially while employees adapted to new procedures. P2 described insecurity regarding short-term effects and daily routines. P3 described stronger emotional resistance, stating:

“Mostly they are not fond of it. They feel psychological exhaustion.” (P3)

These findings support Kiefer’s (2005) argument that emotions play a central role in organizational change. They also align with Vakola and Nikolaou’s (2005) finding that stress and negative attitudes can reduce openness to change.

Overall, the findings suggest that culture, informal influence, and emotional responses are closely connected. Employees interpret change through existing cultural assumptions, informal group dynamics, and emotional reactions to uncertainty. These factors can either support or undermine formal change strategies.

4.10 Strategies Used to Reduce Resistance

The interviews identified several strategies used to reduce resistance. The most common were communication, gradual implementation, leadership credibility, employee involvement, support, persuasion, and training.

P1 identified regular communication, gradual implementation, employee support, and clear delegation of responsibilities as the main strategies. P1 considered continuous communication and phased implementation especially effective:

“The most effective strategies were continuous communication and phased implementation because they allowed employees and agents to gradually adapt to the new processes.” (P1)

This finding supports Kotter and Schlesinger’s (2008) argument that communication and support are important strategies for reducing resistance. It also suggests that gradual implementation may be particularly useful in hierarchical organizations because it allows employees to adapt without being overwhelmed.

P2 emphasized leadership, communication, and engagement. P2 explained that many hours were spent with employees at different levels to encourage participation and support the course of action. Small inputs and suggestions were viewed as important in managing resistance. This suggests that even when change is directive, resistance can be reduced by giving employees some influence over implementation.

P3 emphasized persuasion, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and training. P3 argued that the manager’s ability to inspire people was important in encouraging implementation. P3 also advised leaders to avoid arrogance when proposing change and emphasized the importance of communication skills:

“Communicative skills is the most important factor when trying to implement change in hierarchical organizations.” (P3)

This finding reinforces the importance of leadership communication and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). It also suggests that emotional intelligence may be important in hierarchical environments where employees may not openly express concerns.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective change management in rigid hierarchical organizations requires a balance between authority and engagement. Formal authority may be necessary to initiate change, but communication, credibility, support, and participation are required to reduce resistance and sustain implementation.

4.11 Summary of Findings

The findings show that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations is shaped by multiple interacting factors. Resistance was not simply the result of employee unwillingness to change. Instead, it reflected concerns about workload, responsibility, loss of control, loss of status, uncertainty, communication quality, culture, informal influence, and emotional pressure.

The first key finding is that perceived loss and uncertainty were major drivers of resistance. P1 emphasized workload and responsibility, P2 emphasized status and control, and P3 emphasized routine disruption and lack of motivation. These findings support the view that resistance is multidimensional and context-specific (Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2006).

The second key finding is that communication was central to change acceptance. Participants consistently emphasized that change needed to be explained clearly and justified properly. This supports the importance of communication and sensemaking in change processes (Kotter, 1996; Weick, 1995).

The third key finding is that hierarchy had both positive and negative effects. It supported coordination, authority, and consistency, but it also slowed decision-making, limited participation, and sometimes encouraged hidden resistance. This finding reflects the dual role of bureaucracy identified in the literature (Mintzberg, 1983; Burnes, 2017).

The fourth key finding is that leadership credibility and trust influenced resistance. Leaders who communicated clearly, demonstrated competence, led by example, and supported employees were more likely to reduce resistance. This supports Herold et al.'s (2007) argument that leadership behavior influences commitment to change.

The fifth key finding is that participation helped reduce resistance, even when participation was limited to implementation rather than strategic decision-making. This suggests that hierarchical organizations may benefit from structured forms of employee involvement that allow employees to contribute practical knowledge without undermining formal authority.

The sixth key finding is that culture, informal power, and emotions shaped employee responses. Organizational norms, informal networks, stress, insecurity, and psychological exhaustion all influenced how change was interpreted and accepted. These findings confirm that effective change management must address not only technical implementation but also human, cultural, and political dimensions.

4.12 Theme-to-Research-Question Summary Table

Table 4.3: Theme-to-Research-Question Summary

Theme	Key Finding	Link to Research Question
Perceived loss, workload, and uncertainty	Resistance was linked to workload, responsibility, status, control, routine disruption, and uncertainty.	RQ1, RQ2
Communication and sensemaking	Clear communication helped employees understand why change was necessary and how it would affect them.	RQ3, RQ4
Hierarchy and top-down decision-making	Hierarchy supported coordination and authority but also limited participation and sometimes encouraged hidden resistance.	RQ2
Leadership credibility and trust	Leaders reduced resistance when they communicated clearly, led by example, and provided support.	RQ3, RQ4
Participation and support	Employee input during implementation improved acceptance and helped identify practical issues.	RQ3, RQ4
Culture, informal power, and emotions	Organizational culture, informal influence, stress, and psychological exhaustion shaped responses to change.	RQ1, RQ2
Change management strategies	Communication, phased implementation, support, training, persuasion, and engagement reduced resistance.	RQ4

4.13 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented the findings from three semi-structured interviews on resistance to change within hierarchical organizations. The analysis showed that resistance was shaped by a combination of practical, psychological, cultural, structural, political, and emotional factors. Although hierarchy sometimes supported coordination and implementation, it also created barriers by limiting participation and slowing decision-making.

The findings suggest that successful change management in rigid hierarchical organizations depends on more than formal authority. While authority may initiate change, sustained implementation requires clear communication, leadership credibility, employee involvement, emotional awareness, and context-sensitive support. These findings will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5, where they will be compared with the existing literature and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The purpose of the study was to explore how resistance to change can be effectively managed within rigid hierarchical organizations. The findings were generated through semi-structured interviews with three participants from hierarchical and operationally focused organizational contexts.

The chapter interprets the findings around seven key areas: perceived loss and uncertainty, communication and sensemaking, hierarchy and top-down decision-making, leadership credibility, participation and employee involvement, organizational culture and informal power, and emotional responses and change management strategies. These themes are discussed in relation to existing literature in order to identify how the study supports, extends, or challenges previous research.

Overall, the findings suggest that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations is not caused by a single factor. Rather, it is shaped by the interaction between structural constraints, employee perceptions, leadership behavior, communication quality, organizational culture, and informal power relations. This supports the view that resistance should not be treated simply as irrational opposition, but as a complex organizational response that can reveal deeper concerns about uncertainty, control, status, workload, trust, and implementation.

5.2 Interpretation of Results in Relation to the Research Questions

5.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the key sources and manifestations of resistance within hierarchical organizational structures?

The findings indicate that resistance within hierarchical organizations was mainly driven by perceived loss, uncertainty, workload concerns, loss of status, loss of control, and disruption of established routines. These findings support Oreg's (2006) argument that resistance is often associated with uncertainty, perceived loss of control, and negative attitudes toward change. They also reflect Dent and Goldberg's (1999) claim that employees are not always resistant to change itself, but rather to the perceived consequences of change.

In the interviews, resistance manifested in different ways depending on the organizational context and hierarchical level. In the maritime transportation context, resistance appeared mainly as skepticism and concern about additional responsibilities. In the military contexts, resistance was more closely associated with status, control, routine disruption, and psychological exhaustion. These differences suggest that resistance is not uniform. Instead, it depends on how individuals interpret the personal and professional implications of change.

The findings also support Piderit’s (2000) multidimensional understanding of resistance. Resistance was not expressed only through open opposition. It also appeared through reluctance, passive compliance, skepticism, hidden disagreement, and limited willingness to adapt. This is particularly important in hierarchical organizations, where employees may avoid direct confrontation with authority. As a result, resistance may be less visible but still affect implementation.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: How do organizational culture, formal authority, and bureaucratic processes influence employee perceptions of change?

The findings show that hierarchy had both enabling and constraining effects. On one hand, hierarchy supported coordination, consistency, delegation of authority, and operational control. This was particularly evident in settings where disciplined implementation was required. On the other hand, hierarchy also slowed decision-making, limited employee voice, and sometimes encouraged hidden resistance.

This dual effect reflects Mintzberg’s (1983) argument that bureaucratic structures provide coordination and control but can reduce flexibility and adaptability. The findings also support Burnes’ (2017) view that formal structures may create inertia when organizations rely too heavily on established procedures and centralized decision-making.

Organizational culture also played a significant role. In contexts where efficiency, professionalism, and operational performance were valued, change was more easily justified when framed as improving effectiveness. However, where employees had developed dissatisfaction, discontent, or attachment to established routines, change was more likely to be interpreted as burdensome or threatening. This supports Schein’s (2010) argument that organizational culture shapes how employees interpret change and whether they view it as legitimate or disruptive.

The role of informal power was also significant. One participant emphasized that informal networks and influencers affected whether change was accepted or resisted. This supports Pfeffer’s (1992) view that organizations are political systems in which influence does not operate only through formal authority. In hierarchical organizations, formal structure may define official authority, but informal relationships can still shape attitudes and behavior.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: What role do leadership style, communication strategies, and employee participation play in facilitating or hindering change initiatives?

The findings strongly indicate that leadership, communication, and participation are central to reducing resistance. Communication was repeatedly identified as one of the most important elements in successful change implementation. Participants emphasized that employees need to understand not only what is changing, but also why the change is necessary and how it will affect them.

This supports Kotter’s (1996) argument that effective communication is essential for creating commitment to change. It also aligns with Kotter and Schlesinger’s (2008) view that communication helps overcome resistance caused by misunderstanding, lack of trust, or uncertainty. The findings further support Weick’s (1995) sensemaking theory, as employees appeared to interpret change based on the explanations, signals, and messages provided by leadership.

Leadership credibility was another important factor. The findings suggest that formal authority alone is insufficient to secure genuine acceptance. Participants responded more positively to leaders who communicated clearly, demonstrated competence, led by example, provided support, and avoided arrogance. This aligns with Herold, Fedor, and Caldwell’s (2007) finding that leadership behavior influences employee commitment to change. It also reflects Yukl’s (2013) view that effective leadership requires influence, support, and credibility rather than reliance on authority alone.

Participation was also found to reduce resistance, although it was often limited to the implementation stage rather than the decision-making stage. This reflects the reality of hierarchical organizations, where strategic decisions are often made by senior leaders. However, even bounded participation helped employees feel that their operational knowledge and concerns were recognized. This supports Lines’ (2005) argument that participation can increase commitment by improving perceived fairness, ownership, and involvement.

5.2.4 Research Question 4: Which change management practices are perceived as most effective in reducing resistance within rigid organizational contexts?

The findings suggest that the most effective strategies were clear communication, phased implementation, leadership credibility, employee involvement, operational support, training where necessary, and sensitivity to emotional responses. These strategies were perceived as effective because they reduced uncertainty, allowed employees time to adapt, and created opportunities for feedback.

Phased implementation was particularly important in the maritime transportation context, where gradual adaptation helped reduce skepticism among local agents. This supports the view that change should be adapted to organizational context rather than applied as a universal formula (By, 2005). In rigid organizations, gradual implementation may be especially useful because employees are often accustomed to formal procedures and may require time to adjust to new responsibilities.

The findings also indicate that resistance should be treated as feedback rather than simply as opposition. Ford, Ford, and D’Amelio (2008) argue that resistance can reveal weaknesses in the change process, such as poor communication, lack of involvement, unrealistic timelines, or unresolved concerns. The present findings support this view, as resistance often reflected practical or emotional concerns that could be addressed through better communication, support, and involvement.

5.2.5 Research Question 5: How can existing change management practices be adapted to reflect the realities of hierarchical organizations?

The findings suggest that existing change management practices should be adapted by balancing formal authority with communication, participation, and emotional support. In rigid hierarchical organizations, leaders may need to use formal authority to initiate and coordinate change, but this authority should be supported by clear explanation, phased implementation, employee feedback, and credible leadership behavior.

Rather than applying universal change models mechanically, managers should adapt change practices to the specific structural and cultural realities of the organization. This includes recognizing the role of middle managers, addressing informal power networks, and providing employees with opportunities to contribute to implementation even when strategic decisions remain centralized. In this way, hierarchical control can be combined with practical involvement and human-centered support.

5.3 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings are broadly consistent with the literature on resistance to change. Oreg (2006), Piderit (2000), and Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that resistance is shaped by perceived loss, uncertainty, and ambivalence. This study supports those arguments by showing that participants associated resistance with workload concerns, loss of control, loss of status, disruption of routine, and lack of motivation.

The findings also support the literature on sensemaking and communication. Weick (1995) argues that individuals interpret organizational change through sensemaking processes, while Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) emphasize the role of leaders in sensegiving. In this study, communication was not simply a tool for transmitting information; it was central to how employees interpreted the purpose and legitimacy of change. Where communication was clear and justified, resistance appeared lower. Where communication was perceived as incomplete or ineffective, resistance increased.

The findings also align with literature on hierarchy and bureaucracy. Mintzberg (1983) and Burnes (2017) suggest that hierarchical structures can provide control and coordination but may limit flexibility. This study confirms that hierarchy can both support and hinder change. It can help enforce decisions and maintain consistency, but it can also restrict participation, delay decision-making, and produce hidden forms of resistance.

The role of leadership in the findings is consistent with Kotter (1996), Herold et al. (2007), and Yukl (2013). Participants emphasized that leaders needed to communicate clearly, provide support, demonstrate competence, and lead by example. This suggests that leadership credibility is particularly important in hierarchical contexts, where employees may be expected to comply but may not necessarily be committed.

The findings further support the literature on organizational politics. Pfeffer (1992) and Buchanan and Badham (2008) argue that change often disrupts power relations and can

therefore generate political resistance. This was especially evident in one interview, where resistance was directly linked to loss of status and control. The study therefore reinforces the idea that resistance is not only psychological but also political.

Finally, the findings align with research on emotions and change. Kiefer (2005) argues that emotional responses are central to organizational change, while Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) link stress and negative attitudes to resistance. The participants described uncertainty, stress, insecurity, and psychological exhaustion, suggesting that emotional responses must be addressed as part of change management strategy.

5.4 Implications for Change Management Theory

This study contributes to change management theory in several ways. First, it reinforces the argument that resistance should be understood as multidimensional. Rather than viewing resistance as irrational opposition, the findings show that it may reflect workload concerns, perceived loss, emotional stress, political interests, or lack of trust. This supports Piderit's (2000) multidimensional model of resistance and Ford et al.'s (2008) argument that resistance can provide useful feedback.

Second, the study highlights the importance of context. Many change management models, such as Kotter's (1996) eight-step model, emphasize communication, leadership, and coalition-building. While these elements are relevant, the findings suggest that they need to be adapted to hierarchical organizations where decision-making is centralized and participation may be limited. This supports By's (2005) critique that universal change models may oversimplify organizational realities.

Third, the study contributes to understanding the dual role of hierarchy. Hierarchy is often treated as a barrier to change, but the findings show that it can also support coordination, consistency, and delegation. The theoretical implication is that hierarchy should not be viewed only negatively. Instead, researchers and practitioners should examine the conditions under which hierarchy enables or constrains change.

Fourth, the study supports the integration of sensemaking into change management theory. Employees do not merely receive change messages; they interpret them through their own roles, experiences, and expectations. Leaders therefore act as sensegivers by shaping how employees understand change. This reinforces the relevance of Weick (1995) and Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) to the study of resistance in hierarchical organizations.

5.5 Practical Implications for Leaders and Managers

The findings have several practical implications for leaders and managers responsible for implementing change in rigid hierarchical organizations.

First, leaders should communicate the rationale for change clearly and repeatedly. Employees need to understand why change is necessary, what it involves, and how it will affect them. Communication should not be limited to formal announcements; it should include opportunities for questions, clarification, and feedback.

Second, managers should recognize that resistance may reflect legitimate concerns. Workload increases, loss of control, unclear responsibilities, or fear of status reduction can all create resistance. Instead of dismissing resistance as negativity, managers should analyze what the resistance reveals about employee concerns and implementation risks.

Third, leaders should involve employees during implementation, even where strategic decisions remain centralized. In hierarchical organizations, full participation in decision-making may not always be possible. However, employees can still contribute to implementation planning, operational adjustments, and problem-solving. This can increase ownership and reduce resistance.

Fourth, leaders should pay attention to middle managers. Middle managers often translate strategic decisions into daily practice and influence how employees interpret change. If middle managers are not aligned, informed, or convinced, they may unintentionally become barriers to implementation.

Fifth, leaders should address emotional responses to change. Stress, uncertainty, and fatigue can reduce openness to change even when the change is rationally justified. Providing support, training, phased implementation, and reassurance can help reduce emotional resistance.

Finally, managers should understand informal networks and power structures. In hierarchical organizations, formal authority does not always determine influence. Informal leaders and group dynamics can either support or undermine change. Identifying and engaging these informal influencers can improve implementation.

5.6 Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The findings support the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, which linked organizational structure, culture, leadership, communication, participation, employee perceptions, resistance, and change outcomes. However, the findings also suggest that the framework should be refined in several ways.

First, hierarchy should be understood as both an enabling and constraining factor. It enables change by providing authority, coordination, and accountability. However, it constrains change when it limits participation, slows communication, and encourages passive or hidden resistance.

Second, employee perceptions should be placed at the center of the framework. The findings show that employees respond not only to the objective content of change but also to how they interpret its consequences. Perceptions of workload, status, control, fairness, and trust strongly influence resistance.

Third, communication should be understood as a sensemaking mechanism rather than simply an information-sharing tool. Leaders must help employees understand the meaning and necessity of change, not merely announce decisions.

Fourth, informal power should be included more explicitly in the framework. The findings show that informal networks and influencers may affect whether change is accepted or resisted, particularly in rigid hierarchical organizations.

Finally, emotional responses should be included as a key component of resistance. Stress, insecurity, and psychological exhaustion can influence whether employees engage with or withdraw from change initiatives.

The revised conceptual framework therefore suggests that effective change management in rigid hierarchical organizations depends on the interaction between formal authority, informal influence, leadership credibility, communication quality, employee participation, and emotional support.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature. The discussion showed that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations is complex and multidimensional. It is shaped by perceived loss, uncertainty, workload, status, control, communication, leadership credibility, participation, culture, informal power, and emotional responses.

The findings support existing literature while also emphasizing the importance of context. Hierarchy can both support and hinder change. Formal authority may help initiate change, but successful implementation requires communication, trust, participation, and emotional awareness. Resistance should therefore be understood not simply as a barrier, but as a source of insight into the concerns and tensions created by change.

The next chapter concludes the dissertation by summarizing the key findings, presenting recommendations for practice, identifying limitations, and suggesting areas for future research.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the dissertation by summarizing the key findings, presenting the conclusions drawn from the study, and offering recommendations for practice and future research. The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how resistance to change can be effectively managed within rigid hierarchical organizations. The study focused on how hierarchy, organizational culture, leadership, communication, employee participation, and emotional responses influence resistance to change.

The research was based on a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews with participants from hierarchical and operationally focused organizational contexts. The findings were analyzed thematically and discussed in relation to existing literature on organizational change, resistance, leadership, culture, sensemaking, and power dynamics.

Overall, the study found that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations is not simply the result of employee unwillingness or negativity. Instead, resistance is shaped by a combination of practical, psychological, structural, cultural, political, and emotional factors. The findings suggest that effective change management in such organizations requires more than formal authority. It requires clear communication, credible leadership, meaningful employee involvement, awareness of informal power structures, and support mechanisms that help employees adapt to new expectations.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The first key finding of the study is that resistance to change is often linked to perceived loss and uncertainty. Participants described resistance as emerging when employees feared increased workload, additional responsibility, loss of control, loss of status, or disruption of established routines. This suggests that employees may not necessarily resist the purpose of change itself, but rather the personal and professional consequences they associate with it.

The second key finding is that communication plays a central role in reducing resistance. The interviews showed that employees were more likely to accept change when the reasons for change were clearly explained and when communication was consistent throughout the implementation process. Communication was important not only for providing information but also for helping employees understand the meaning and purpose of the change.

The third key finding is that hierarchy has both positive and negative effects on change implementation. Hierarchical structures can support coordination, delegation, consistency, and accountability. However, they can also slow decision-making, limit employee participation, reduce upward feedback, and encourage passive or hidden resistance. This dual role of hierarchy is particularly important because it shows that hierarchy is not automatically a barrier to change, but it must be managed carefully.

The fourth key finding is that leadership credibility strongly influences employee acceptance of change. Participants emphasized the importance of leaders who communicate clearly, provide support, demonstrate competence, lead by example, and avoid arrogance. The findings suggest that formal authority alone is insufficient to create genuine commitment to change. Employees are more likely to support change when they trust leaders and believe that leaders understand the practical realities of implementation.

The fifth key finding is that participation reduces resistance, even when participation is limited to the implementation stage. In hierarchical organizations, strategic decisions are often made by senior leaders, but employees can still be involved in operational adjustments, feedback, problem-solving, and implementation planning. This type of bounded participation can help employees feel heard and can improve the practical effectiveness of change initiatives.

The sixth key finding is that organizational culture and informal power structures shape how change is interpreted. The interviews showed that informal networks, group influence, professional norms, and existing attitudes toward authority can either support or undermine change. This indicates that leaders need to understand both formal structures and informal relationships when implementing change.

The final key finding is that emotional responses are an important part of resistance. Participants described stress, insecurity, psychological exhaustion, pressure, and uncertainty during change processes. These emotional responses can reduce openness to change, especially when employees feel excluded, unsupported, or unclear about expectations.

6.3 Conclusions Drawn from the Study

In response to the primary research question, the study concludes that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations can be overcome through a balanced approach that combines formal authority with transparent communication, credible leadership, structured employee involvement, phased implementation, and emotional support. While hierarchy can support coordination and accountability, successful change depends on leaders' ability to address the human, cultural, and political dimensions of resistance.

The study concludes that resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations is a multidimensional phenomenon. It cannot be fully explained by individual reluctance or lack of discipline. Instead, resistance reflects the interaction between employee perceptions, organizational structure, leadership behavior, communication quality, workplace culture, informal influence, and emotional experience.

The research also concludes that hierarchy can be both an asset and a limitation in change management. In structured organizations, hierarchy can provide the authority and coordination necessary to implement change. This is particularly useful in operational environments where consistency, accountability, and discipline are important. However, hierarchy becomes problematic when it restricts communication, limits participation, or creates distance between decision-makers and those affected by change.

Another conclusion is that communication is one of the most important mechanisms for overcoming resistance. Employees need to understand why change is necessary, what it means for their work, and how they will be supported during implementation. Communication should therefore be treated as a continuous process rather than a one-time announcement.

The study further concludes that leadership credibility is central to successful change management. Leaders in hierarchical organizations must do more than issue instructions. They must demonstrate competence, consistency, fairness, and willingness to engage with employee concerns. Leading by example was especially important in the findings, as it helped build trust and reduce perceptions that change was being imposed without practical understanding.

Finally, the study concludes that effective change management in rigid hierarchical organizations requires a balance between authority and participation. While formal authority may be necessary to initiate change, participation is necessary to secure acceptance, identify practical challenges, and reduce resistance. Employees are more likely to support change when they are given opportunities to contribute to the implementation process.

6.4 Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be made for leaders and managers implementing change in rigid hierarchical organizations.

6.4.1 Communicate the Rationale for Change Clearly and Repeatedly

Leaders should clearly explain why change is necessary, what objectives it aims to achieve, and how it will affect employees. Communication should not only focus on instructions and deadlines but should also explain the reasoning behind decisions. In hierarchical organizations, where employees may not be involved in strategic decision-making, clear communication is essential for reducing uncertainty and preventing misinformation.

Communication should also be repeated throughout the change process. Employees may require ongoing clarification as implementation progresses and as practical challenges emerge. Regular meetings, written updates, briefings, and feedback channels can help ensure that employees understand both the purpose and progress of change.

6.4.2 Involve Employees During Implementation

Even when strategic decisions are made at senior levels, employees should be involved in the implementation process. This may include asking for feedback, identifying operational risks, inviting suggestions for practical adjustments, and allowing employees to raise concerns.

Involving employees does not necessarily mean that all decisions must be decentralized. Rather, it means recognizing that employees possess practical knowledge about daily

operations. Their input can improve implementation quality and reduce resistance by creating a sense of ownership.

6.4.3 Strengthen Middle Management Alignment

Middle managers play a critical role in hierarchical organizations because they translate senior management decisions into operational practice. If middle managers are unclear, unconvinced, or poorly supported, they may become barriers to change.

Organizations should therefore ensure that middle managers understand the purpose of change, receive sufficient information, and are equipped to communicate effectively with employees. Middle managers should be treated as change agents rather than simply as channels for passing instructions downward.

6.4.4 Use Phased Implementation Where Possible

The findings suggest that gradual or phased implementation can reduce resistance by giving employees time to adapt. Sudden change may increase anxiety, confusion, and workload pressure. Where possible, organizations should introduce change in stages, allowing time for training, adjustment, feedback, and correction.

Phased implementation is particularly useful in rigid hierarchical organizations because employees may be accustomed to established routines and formal procedures. Gradual adaptation can help prevent disruption while still moving the organization toward the desired outcome.

6.4.5 Address Perceived Losses Directly

Managers should identify what employees believe they may lose as a result of change. These perceived losses may include job security, status, control, competence, routine, or workload balance. Leaders should address these concerns openly rather than assuming that resistance is irrational.

For example, if employees fear increased workload, managers should clarify responsibilities, provide support, and adjust expectations where necessary. If employees fear loss of status or control, leaders should explain how roles will change and how individuals can still contribute meaningfully.

6.4.6 Build Leadership Credibility Through Example

Leaders should demonstrate the behaviors and standards they expect from employees. The findings showed that leading by example can strengthen credibility and reduce resistance. When leaders show that they understand the practical difficulty of implementation, employees are more likely to trust them.

Credibility also depends on consistency. Leaders should avoid making promises they cannot keep and should ensure that their actions align with the stated purpose of change.

6.4.7 Recognize Informal Networks and Influencers

In hierarchical organizations, influence does not only operate through formal authority. Informal leaders, peer groups, and unofficial networks can strongly shape attitudes toward change. Managers should identify individuals who influence employee opinion and engage them constructively.

Positive informal influencers can help communicate the value of change and encourage acceptance. Negative informal influence should not simply be suppressed, but understood as a signal of possible concerns, mistrust, or unresolved tensions.

6.4.8 Provide Training and Emotional Support

Change often requires employees to learn new procedures, systems, or responsibilities. Training should therefore be provided where change affects skills, knowledge, or daily routines. Training can reduce uncertainty and increase employee confidence.

Organizations should also recognize the emotional side of change. Stress, insecurity, and fatigue can reduce acceptance even when the change is logically justified. Leaders should create opportunities for employees to ask questions, express concerns, and receive reassurance during the transition.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides insight into resistance to change within rigid hierarchical organizations, but further research could expand the topic in several ways.

First, future research could use a larger sample size across multiple sectors. This study focused on three interviews from operational and hierarchical contexts. A larger study including public sector institutions, healthcare organizations, financial institutions, or multinational corporations could provide broader comparative insights.

Second, future research could compare resistance to change across different hierarchical levels. The findings suggested that senior managers, middle managers, and operational employees may experience and express resistance differently. Further research could examine these differences in more detail.

Third, future research could investigate the role of middle managers as change agents in hierarchical organizations. The findings indicated that middle managers are important in translating change and influencing employee perceptions, but this role could be explored more deeply.

Fourth, future research could examine informal power networks in hierarchical organizations. Since informal influence emerged as an important factor, further studies could investigate how unofficial leaders, peer groups, and informal communication channels affect change acceptance.

Fifth, future research could explore the emotional dimension of resistance more extensively. Stress, insecurity, and change fatigue appeared in the findings, suggesting that emotional

responses may significantly influence change outcomes. Future studies could examine how emotional support strategies affect employee acceptance.

Finally, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach. Combining qualitative interviews with surveys could provide both detailed participant insights and broader measurable patterns regarding resistance, leadership, communication, and organizational culture.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the research was based on a small sample of three interviews. While the interviews provided rich qualitative insights, the findings cannot be statistically generalized to all hierarchical organizations.

Second, the study relied on participant perceptions. Although perceptions are central to understanding resistance to change, they may be influenced by personal experience, organizational position, memory, or individual interpretation.

Third, the participants came from specific operational and hierarchical contexts. While these contexts were relevant to the research topic, findings may differ in other sectors or less formal organizational environments.

Fourth, the study focused mainly on the experiences of employees and managers who had direct or indirect exposure to change initiatives. It did not include documentary analysis of organizational change plans, internal communications, or performance outcomes. Including such materials in future research could strengthen triangulation.

Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insight into how resistance is experienced and managed in rigid hierarchical organizations. The findings are valuable because they highlight the practical, emotional, structural, and political dimensions of change.

6.7 Final Reflections

This dissertation has shown that overcoming resistance to change in rigid hierarchical organizations requires a careful balance between structure and flexibility. Hierarchy can help organizations coordinate action, delegate authority, and maintain operational consistency. However, when hierarchy limits communication, participation, and trust, it can intensify resistance.

The study highlights that employees are more likely to accept change when they understand its purpose, trust leadership, receive support, and feel that their practical knowledge is valued. Resistance should therefore not be dismissed as obstruction. Instead, it should be understood as a response that may reveal uncertainty, perceived loss, cultural tension, emotional pressure, or weaknesses in the implementation process.

Ultimately, effective change management in rigid hierarchical organizations depends on combining formal authority with human-centered leadership. Leaders must communicate

clearly, involve employees where possible, address emotional and practical concerns, and remain aware of both formal and informal sources of influence. By doing so, organizations can reduce resistance and increase the likelihood of successful and sustainable change.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. The purpose of this study is to explore how resistance to change is experienced and managed within hierarchical organizations. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time.

Section 1: Background and Organizational Context

1. Can you describe your role and your involvement in organizational change initiatives?
2. How would you describe your organization’s structure and decision-making processes?

Section 2: Perceptions of Organizational Change

3. How was the change initiative introduced and communicated to you?
4. How did you initially interpret or make sense of the change?
5. Did you perceive the change as beneficial or threatening? Why?

Section 3: Resistance to Change

6. Did you observe any resistance to the change? How did it manifest?
7. What do you believe were the main causes of resistance?
8. To what extent did concerns about job security, status, or control influence resistance?
9. Did resistance differ across hierarchical levels?

Section 4: Leadership and Change Management

10. How would you describe leadership behavior during the change process?
11. Did leadership build trust and credibility during the change? How?
12. What leadership style was most evident, for example directive or participative?

Section 5: Communication and Participation

13. How effective was communication throughout the change process?
14. Were employees involved in decision-making or implementation?
15. Did you feel your opinions were considered?

Section 6: Organizational Culture and Hierarchy

16. How would you describe your organization’s culture?
17. Did the hierarchical structure help or hinder the change process?

18. Were informal networks or influencers important during the change?

Section 7: Emotional and Psychological Responses

19. How did employees emotionally respond to the change?

20. Did you observe stress or change fatigue?

Section 8: Change Management Strategies

21. What strategies were used to manage resistance?

22. Which strategies were most effective and why?

23. Were training or support mechanisms provided?

Section 9: Outcomes and Reflection

24. Was the change successful? Why or why not?

25. What were the main challenges during the process?

26. What could have been done differently to reduce resistance?

27. What advice would you give to leaders managing change in hierarchical organizations?

28. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Title of the Study: Overcoming Resistance to Change: Strategies for Effective Change Management in Rigid Hierarchical Organizations

Purpose of the Study: The aim of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to resistance to change in hierarchical organizations and to identify strategies that can support effective change management.

What Participation Involves: Participants are asked to take part in a semi-structured interview about their experiences with organizational change, leadership, communication, and resistance. Participation is voluntary.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information collected during this study will be treated confidentially. Participant identities and organizational details will be anonymized in the dissertation.

Data Protection: Data will be stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Consent Statement: By participating, the participant confirms that they understand the purpose of the study, agree to take part voluntarily, understand that they may withdraw, and consent to their responses being used anonymously for academic research.

Author's Statement:

I hereby declare that, in accordance with article 8 of Law 1599/1986 and article 2.4.6 par. 3 of Law 1256/1982, this thesis/dissertation is solely a product of personal work and does not infringe any intellectual property rights of third parties and is not the product of a partial or total plagiarism, and the sources used are strictly limited to the bibliographic references.