

**THE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR LEADERS DRIVING  
LARGE SCALE CHANGE IN A CONSTRUCTION COMPANY**

By

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## DECLARATION

I, Sharene Grace Koopman, student number 07051409, declare that “the experiences of senior leaders driving large scale change in a construction company” is my own original work, and that all the sources that I have utilised or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

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And most importantly and unfailingly, my Faithful God, my all Sufficient One, my Father, my Friend indeed!

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## SUMMARY

A phenomenological study was conducted to explore and understand the personal experiences and meaning ascribed by senior leaders within a large multidisciplinary construction company. An effort was made to understand how they personally experienced leading others, what they learnt about themselves, what challenged them most, and what support, if any they had during their leadership of large-scale organisational change. The research found that there is a significant personal cost to the individual. This cost comes in terms of career, work-life balance and even reputation. It provides an opportunity to grow in self-knowledge, provided leaders are open to learn and reflect and that there is a substantive support structure both internally and externally to the organisation in order to 'survive'. Without this malleable disposition, the already high cost escalates to the extent that it could be life threatening. In spite of the prolific literature available, the leaders claim that shareholders and most others do not understand the extreme length of time it takes to start and embed change that is sustainable. Without that understanding from the other role players, the leader carries not only the blame but also the scars of failed change.

### Key terms:

phenomenology; change management; change leaders; change processes; emotional intelligence; personal growth, coaching

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 PROJECT TITLE**

The experiences of senior leaders driving large scale change in a construction company

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

In a quest to search for simpler and more effective ways to lead organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organisations have to be attentive to the reality that “we live in a time of chaos, as rich in the potential for disaster as for new possibilities” (Wheatley, 2006, p. ix). This quest necessitates ongoing change, which in turn poses great challenges for organisations and their success (Chew & Choo, 2008). Due to the increasing competitiveness imposed by globalisation, organisational adaptation is critical. This adds even more pressure on leaders to lead organisations (Epperson, 2006) in an era that embraces randomness and chaos, lack of certainty, as well a plethora of competing views and voices. Organisations who are unable to produce recipes for dealing with the now typical unstable environment will find sustainability illusive (Kirkbride, Duncan & Obeng, 1994).

Saparnis, Bersenaite and Saparniene (2009) as well as Kotter (1990), among others, have shown that most people react to change in similar ways, taking them through various stages, including loss, doubt, discomfort and various others, through to integration, similar to those of Kubler-Ross (Corey, 2005). The predominant focus of change management research is on the role leadership must play in implementing the change process. Leaders are responsible for their employees’ journey through change, ensuring their commitment, overcoming resistance and ensuring employees embrace the change (Alas, 2008; Chew & Choo, 2008; Cilliers, 2006; Coutts, 2007; Herold, Fedor & Caldwell, 2007; Johnson, 2008; Kotter, 1990).

This phenomenological study was aimed at understanding how senior executives themselves, who are members of the leadership team driving the change process, experience the initiation and subsequent implementation of the changes to the business. An

insight into their journey in the leadership role, as opposed to the employees' journey, is the unique contribution of the study.

From the leaders' perspective, the research examined change practices that occurred in a prominent South African-based construction company and specifically how the leader experienced that process. The research examined the effect of change practices on the leaders' experience from their own perspective, occurring in a prominent South African-based construction company. As a large construction company, different parts of the business had functioned largely independently and identified the need for closer collaboration, consolidation and improved coherence across the business. This was relevant to both the business and the leadership team, and so they embarked initially on an individual business change process to a greater or lesser degree and subsequently on a large-scale change process, where large scale refers to change in orientation or strategic shifts in relationships of the enterprise with its environment (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011). This process was aimed at improving the company's functioning and effectiveness in its response to continuously changing market demands, enabling improved delivery on its full potential and value chain.

Each of the individual businesses had, to various degrees, analysed their own business, journeyed individually towards improved functioning, changed business models, and even, or perhaps especially, organisational structures. As a peripheral member of the core team, I had watched the struggle and the toll the change process seemed to take on the leaders themselves and wondered what could have or should have been done to make their demanding leadership role, exacerbated by the change process, easier or lighter. I watched my own leader in exasperation resort to an autocratic style, quite contrary to his personality, in order to effect the demanded change. "Most managers claim that change responsibility affords valuable personal learning. However, recent change has also been accompanied by stress, work intensification, command and control and management–employee distrust" (Doyle, Claydon & Buchanan, 2000, p. s59).

I wondered what that cost my leader and how it affected him in his own growth journey. I saw his resistance to the demands of the market place and pressure that the bottom-line profits put on the established way the business was run. I witnessed how he grappled with his own reluctance to change the business model and how he struggled with the impact it would have on his team and their lives. I wondered whether other leaders' experiences were similar, whether they faced similar challenges and grew personally from the experience and whether there was anything that could make it less arduous for them, and so decided to

explore their personal experiences and journeys through leading the change process in the business.

My own experience of feeling un-led and disappointed by the leadership also supported my need to understand why it was so hard for them to step up and ensure employees' comfort and ease us along the journey. This link to the experience formed the motivation for this study, which, according to Probert (2006), is not an unusual decision but in fact "inextricably linked with individual passions, fears, insecurities and values" (Probert, 2006, p. 1).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Driving change requires leaders to manage, support and lead others through a change process while supporting them in the adaptation demands this poses (Epperson, 2006). In addition, leaders also have to cope with their own experiences and continue to manage the business at the same time. Based on the work of Kets de Vries (2006) and Schein (1990), this seems to be a demanding dual task for which they may well be ill equipped (Bellus, 2004; Epperson, 2006). According to Herold et al. (2007), most of the change management research, as well as my own search for an explanation, focus on the importance of the change implementation process and how this shapes employees' attitudes and behaviours. In contrast, this research seeks to explore the experience of leaders who implement and drive change into the organisation, while facing their own possible challenges, growth and experiences and how these may have shaped their attitudes and behaviours and particularly how they derived meaning from the process. By exploring the leaders' experience, it is hoped that the body of knowledge on change management would be expanded and perhaps assist organisational psychologists in addressing the needs of leaders themselves during change processes in the construction industry and possibly others.

### **1.4 GENERAL RESEARCH AIM**

This qualitative research explored the experiences of senior leadership driving large-scale organisational change in a South African-based construction company.

### **1.5 SPECIFIC RESEARCH AIM**

The following specific aims are framed for the literature review and the empirical study:

### **1.5.1 Literature review**

With little literature available regarding the experiences of senior leaders during change processes, the specific aim of the literature review is to understand the context in which change happens, the aims therefore included:

- To identify and conceptualise what change and culture are and the various types of change that takes place in organisations.
- To identify various concepts relating to leadership, its evolution and modern requirements.
- To conceptualise change management, change models and strategies and what change leadership entails.

### **1.5.2 Empirical study**

It is often assumed that leaders who drive change have initiated and therefore embraced as well as supported its implementation. According to Saparnis et al. (2009), change is however often enforced through strategic necessity or other environmental factors, and the assumed support is not necessarily the reality. This exploration specifically seeks to highlight some of the experiences of leaders specifically related to:

- how they experienced the process of driving change;
- what leaders have learnt about themselves, or their leadership, during the process;
- the challenges or personal dilemmas the change process posed for them individually; and
- that which assisted each leader during his or her personal change journey, making the experience meaningful.

## **1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **1.6.1 Paradigm perspective**

This research falls within the organisational psychology field of study. As an applied derivative of psychology, industrial and organisational psychology is a specialist area of psychology, studying normal behaviour in the work context, and includes sub-disciplines such as personnel psychology, career psychology and others (Bergh & Theron, 2000), but pertinent to this research is the sub-discipline of organisational psychology. Organisational psychology is concerned with systems involving not only organisational systems and dynamics but also groups within those systems and the individuals, “fostering worker

adjustment, satisfaction and productivity, as well as organisational efficiency” (Bergh & Theron, 2000, p. 17). This non-categorical research (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis & Quizon, 2005) focuses specifically on the description of individuals’ adjustments and personal journey through the organisational change process they were expected to lead, which is particularly appropriate in an applied discipline (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003) such as organisational psychology.

The research methodology is explained in terms of epistemology, how we come to know, in other words which practical steps and specific methods (Henning, 2005) will be used in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of the leaders’ experience of change from their own point of view (ontology), which is subjective and particular to each individual. This therefore necessitates qualitative methodology using in-depth interviews that focus on the experienced meanings of the participants’ life-world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) as described during the interviews and being dependent on the inter-subjectivity of the relationship (Ashworth & Chung, 2006) between researcher and participant.

### **1.6.2 Research paradigm**

A qualitative interpretive paradigm was used to ensure leaders’ personal subjective and contextual experiences (Della Porta & Keating, 2008), understanding and construction of the change events were heard. This philosophical position (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) shows an interest in people’s subjective interpretation and understanding of events and settings, in this case, specifically in the work context. This ontology allows for the study of human experiences within this specific organisational context (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006), specifying the nature of reality and the participants’ subjective meanings and experiences of the process as they intertwine their own ascribed meaning from both their objective and subjective realities, typical of the interpretivist approach. This research has as a necessary condition the interpretation and understanding of human actions, which is the foundation of all knowledge in social sciences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The researcher was known to the participants and therefore an ‘insider’. This offered both advantages and disadvantages (King & Horrocks, 2010; Suzuki et al., 2005). The most obvious advantage is that the researcher is in such a case fully conversant with the context, which, according to King and Horrocks (2010), is integral to understanding the individual experiences of participants and their world. The researchers’ familiarity with the subtle nuances of the environment led to improved understanding of the participants’ experiences based on an established foundation of trust. The insider is also more aware of how to

approach potential participants and therefore more readily access the information from their experiences. The naiveté of an outsider necessitates questions that are obvious to the insider and that could be crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon, but because they are not asked, will not be captured. The insider's social identity and location (race, gender, position in the hierarchy) naturally inform the conceptualisation, methods and interpretations (Suzuki et al., 2005). Epperson (2006) suggests it is not enough to simply articulate the insider's methods and interpretation but particularly the insider's identity and its influence should be analysed in terms of *how* these influence the study. The disadvantages for the insider are the myopic view limiting accurate perceptions and low objectivity (Schein, 1999).

The interpretivist, inductive approach assumes the interconnectivity between objective and subjective meanings of both participants and observers or researchers (Della Porta & Keating, 2008), thereby endorsing the possible subjectivity, as the researcher is active and part of the data generation and analysis. The researcher's identity, location, theoretical grounding and growth formed part of the reflexive meta-analysis of her own experience in the change process as well as the conducting of the research, which is critical, particularly when the researcher is an insider (Bellas, 2004). A deeper look into the researcher's own beliefs and values and the way she has meshed the psychological theories in her academic studies into an ontology of her own brought into focus her own analytical and interpretive lens (King & Horrocks, 2010). This alludes to the connection between research purpose and personal journey of the researcher (Probert, 2006). This continuous self-reflection is documented in a research journal in order to support the ethical demands of validity (Tesch, 1992) while retroductively discovering her own philosophies and position (Henning, 2005) and continuously questioning interpretation and considering alternatives through this self-reflection.

According to Gunasekara (2007), the identity either occupied by the researcher or ascribed to her could also influence not only the validity and reliability of data collected but also the interpretation thereof. Personally, the researcher was already involved in the 'story' (epistemology) embedded in the participants' own and different environments. Resultantly, she was empathetic to their possible anxiety and the dilemmas caused by the change process. This enabled a relational style of data collection, which, according to Ashworth and Chung (2006), is a pre-requisite to gain insight and meaning. To fully understand this phenomenon, the researcher also had to maintain a balance between her own intra- and inter-subjectivity.

Qualitative interpretive research affords the opportunity to emphasise the holistic focus of the individual participant in the context in which he/she makes meaning of their life-world (King & Horrocks, 2010) and is therefore the most appropriate methodology to follow.

## **1.7 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

This qualitative study had as its main goal the in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the life-world and subsequent interpretation of the experiences of senior leaders. Employing open-ended questions allowed for an open, flexible and inductive approach (Kelly, 2006a; King & Horrocks, 2010). The ontological nature explored the leaders' internal subjective reality of their change experiences, lending itself to making sense of feelings, experiences and social constructions as they were experienced in the workplace. The epistemological relationship was empathetic, bearing in mind the subjective experience and influence of the researcher were an integral part of the research process (Gunasekara, 2007).

The circulatory nature of qualitative research allowed for the evolving learning of the researcher, which in turn was likely to shape her interpretation of the data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2006). The roles of both researcher and participants were therefore fluid and this reflexive stance of the researcher was captured through ongoing research journals and field notes. The empathetic, non-judgemental and understanding stance of the primary data-gathering instrument ensuring rapport lent itself to the common criticism against qualitative research, namely subjectivity and bias (Merriam & Associates, 2002). This was specifically mitigated through a rigorous research strategy during both collection and analysis of the data and a personal commitment to truth. In so doing, analysing and subsequently presenting the findings in an unbiased way were supported through evidence as gathered through the data.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHOD**

An interpretive paradigm was used in an endeavour to understand the subjective experience of senior construction leaders during a change process, which they led within each of the businesses (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). The interviews focussed on their experiences during the process and were semi-structured and qualitative in nature. These interviews enabled senior leaders to voice their personal experiences of driving organisational change, including the challenges they faced and the way they coped with these, as well as what they learnt about themselves through the process.

Between 2002 and 2012, change management has arguably been the most written about management practice, as indicated by the 184 000 hits by Google Scholar on 27 April 2012. This vast amount of literature enabled a wide-ranging literature survey of this phenomenon with specific emphasis on the leaders' experience of which, unfortunately still little was known at the time of the research, with only 9 110 citations. In its absence, the requirements and expectations of modern leaders formed the majority of the literature review. This limited empirical knowledge regarding the leaders' experience lent itself to the use of a phenomenological research design. Originally, a philosophy, the phenomenological method, was rigorously and practically described by Amedeo Giorgi (Ashworth & Chung, 2006). Phenomenological research can be described as qualitative research with a "rigorous attitude toward soft phenomena" (Giorgi, 1985, p. vii, cited in Ashworth & Chung, 2006) of a particular lived experience, while as far as possible remaining faithful to the natural context in which it occurs. In addition to the literature review, in-depth interviews are used as the preferred instrument for data gathering, which affords the skilled interviewer the opportunity to probe and reflect (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Table 1.1 below highlights the interview discussion topics and questions as they relate to the particular purposes of the study.

**Table 1.1: Interview schedule**

To explore the experience of leading a business unit through a large-scale change process.	
Research questions	What has it been like for you during your time as business unit leader leading the change process?
To investigate what the leader learnt about himself during this process.	
Research questions	What did you learn about yourself during this process? Do you think you would have learnt it if you had not been required to lead this change process?
To understand what the most challenging aspect of the leading change was for the leader.	
Research questions	What were the hardest things you had to do or the roughest decisions you had to make? What was the most difficult?
To understand what supported or facilitated the leader personally while leading the change process.	
Research questions	What supported you during this process? Who or what helped you?

### 1.8.1 Sampling

The study took place within a specific organisation, exploring the life-world of senior leaders driving change during a period of, but not limited to, the last three years (since 2008). The researcher, having special knowledge of the context and insight into the influential role players (Bergh & Theron, 2000), described the desirable sample as leaders who headed up a business unit or who specifically had a strategic role of heading the change process within the organisation. The managing director of the operating group as a whole was also adjudged the most representative of this population who experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Purposeful sampling was used to identify a sample (Durrheim & Painter, 2006) of seven current leaders who could at the time of the study provide rich data in order to study the specific phenomenon being investigated (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Considering the high turnover and availability of these leaders, it became necessary to interview an additional leader who fit the description above in order to ensure that at least

seven interviews were conducted into the subjective experience of the phenomenon. The additional participant was identified through referrals from the leaders during the interview process or other interaction, a technique referred to as snowballing (Durrheim & Painter, 2006; Henning, 2005).

In this case, a purposeful sampling method implies that the researcher knows the context and relies on her own knowledge of the organisation and the roles and positions held by the leaders, which results in the selection of subjects according to 'subjective' criteria set by the researcher. No statistical techniques are therefore necessary and therefore no sampling error can be induced. It stands to reason then that the study cannot be generalised, as the sample is not representative of the broader population (Henning, 2005). The sample may not represent other industries' or even other companies' experience. This is neither the intention nor the purpose of qualitative studies and specifically not from a phenomenological stance, as each life-world is unique.

Consent was secured prior to the study through the gatekeeper (Appendix 1), who positioned the study to encourage participation (Kelly, 2006a). The sample of seven were invited in writing to participate and interviews were subsequently scheduled based on their availability and convenience, typical selection of this method.

### **1.8.2 Data collection**

The phenomenological study focussed on two aspects of the phenomenon, namely what it is the leaders experienced (noema) and how they experienced it in terms of the meaning they ascribe to it as well as their associated feelings, values and perceptions thereof (noesis) (King & Horrocks, 2010). In-depth interviews utilising a semi-structured interview schedule (Angrosino, 2007) consisting of four open-ended questions were utilised (see Table 1.1). As an exploratory study, fully structured interviews were deemed inappropriate, as this would not have supplied rich and detailed data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Unstructured interviews could have left the data unfocussed and unsuitable for purposes of this study. The four questions illustrated in Table 1.1 form the basis of the interview schedule, providing an overall guide to focus rather than restrict the data gathering. The researcher was therefore able to be flexible, which King and Horrocks (2010) regard as appropriate and consistent with the phenomenological methodology; transferring insights from the previous interviews to subsequent interviews. Probing formed an important technique, ensuring the provision of in-depth and rich data necessary for qualitative interviews, allowing the researcher to explore in detail the issues of interest, and affording participants the liberty of fully conveying the

fullness and complexity of their experiences, which led to the enhancement and enrichment of the quality of the data. These probing techniques included three main types as listed by King and Horrocks (2010). These are *elaboration*, encouraging on-going dialogue; *clarification* of sections, phrases or words used by the participants; and *completion*, where it becomes necessary to ensure the conclusion of a thought that the participant may leave hanging.

The questions were constructed neutrally to ensure no bias, irrespective of the background, level or experience of the participants, although the participants were relatively homogenous in terms of race, gender, age, experiences and academic background as depicted in the table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2: Biographical data of targeted sample**

Current age	Highest qualification	Race	Gender
<b>48</b>	<b>N6, Currently doing master's in Change Management</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>49</b>	<b>B Marketing</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>60</b>	<b>Partially completed BSc QS</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>49</b>	<b>ND: Civil Engineering</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>62</b>	<b>Engineer</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>54</b>	<b>BSc Mech Eng, BComm</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>55</b>	<b>BSc Civil Eng</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Male</b>

The interviewer as the primary instrument for observation and gathering data (Henning, 2005; King & Horrocks, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002) is a trained and experienced interviewer, although not specifically in the research context; however, these skills proved to be transferable. Research interviews demand intense listening; being attentive to key words, phrases and/or ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 1997, cited in Berg, 2009) and draw on tacit knowledge to observe nonverbal cues, enhancing the understanding of the context and emotional state of the interviewee through social interpretation (Berg, 2009).

The research instrument in this complex organisational structure, as an insider, proved invaluable, as the participant soon became aware, if they were not already, that the

researcher was intimately familiar with the environment and not ignorant of the context or jargon of the topic or context at hand, a point that could facilitate the gathering of relevant data. A researcher who would need clarification of these aspects would not only need much more time but would also frustrate the participants in having to explain the context, leading to the participants possibly losing interest in continuing the conversation on the area of interest (King & Horrocks, 2010). Resultantly, such familiarity allowed for natural conversation in an informal manner, which in turn created a genial, relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere.

### **1.8.3 Procedure**

#### *Pre-interview preparations*

The participants were invited to attend an interview via telephonic conversations or in person, whichever was appropriate and convenient. This was followed up with an electronic meeting invitation, to which the information leaflet and informed consent form (see Appendix 2) were attached. Included in this document was a brief description of the reason for the interview together with a consent form for the participants' signature. King and Horrocks (2010) warn that 'high-status' participants could be difficult to interview because they are accustomed to being in control of their interactions with others. For this reason, the researcher deemed it wise to conduct the interviews in a place of their choosing, to ensure their own feelings of comfort and safety.

#### *Conducting the interviews*

Conducting the interviews at venues and times suitable to the participants ensured the least disruption to their very busy schedules. At the outset, the purpose of the interview, the extent of the confidentiality and the dissemination of the final product were explained, and permission was sought to record the interview. The summarised themes of the 'meaning units' distilled from the transcripts were made available together with the relevant mind map (Figure 3.1) for verification (Tesch, 1992).

Once permission to record the interview was obtained, two recording devices (Sony Digital Voice Recorder ICD-PX720 and Apple i-Pod generation 4) were utilised, the second providing a back-up if one were to fail. As the most common method of recording (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), the audio chronicle frees the researcher to focus on the participant, their words, meaning, tone, pauses and gestures, as well as the dynamics of the interview, of which notation could be made. This afforded the leaders the opportunity to articulate their

experiences regarding the areas of focus in an unhindered way with the full attention of the listener, who was not distracted by having to take copious notes.

Having first-hand knowledge of most of the participants, albeit in some cases from a distance, the researcher was aware that socially it would not necessarily come easily for the participants to share deeply. A completely unstructured interview would lend itself to broad, vague responses and as a novice researcher who may not have the skill to guide the interview appropriately, semi-structured interviews were therefore regarded as more appropriate (Henning, 2005). The phenomenological method of a semi-structured life-world interview closely resembles an everyday open conversation, with a specific approach and technique, focussing on the topic through suggested questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### *Post-interview actions*

The research would not be viable without the willingness and openness of the participants. Their contribution in terms of content and time was acknowledged during the conclusion of the interviews.

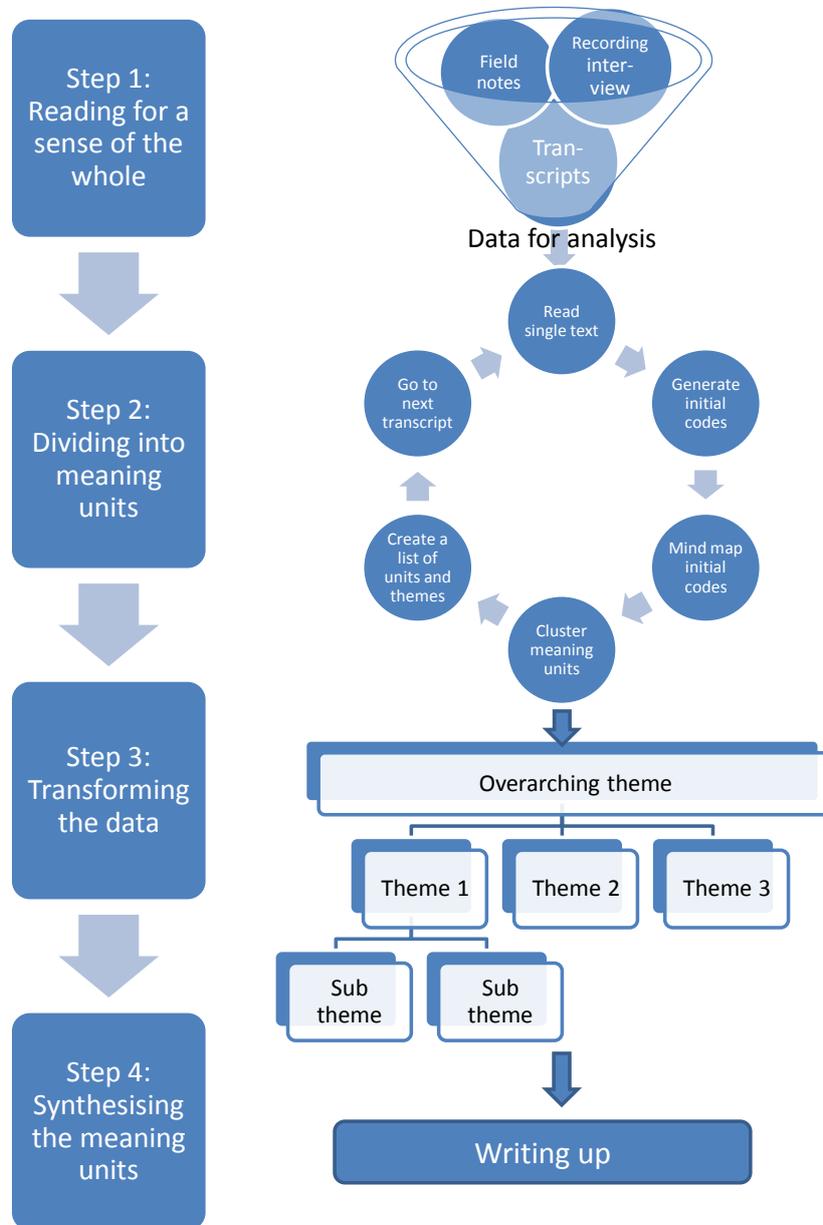
These interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim, while every attempt was made to continue to reduce detrimental influences on the research process, also referred to as bracketing. Furthermore bracketing requires the researcher to hold the delicate tension between intra- and inter-subjectivity, ensuring that the researcher's own views and experiences did not influence the data gathering or analysis. This is done by remaining conscious of one's own inner personal awareness (Ashworth & Chung, 2006) – a process Merriam and her associates (2002) believe heightens the consciousness and intuition of the researcher. For this reason, an independent transcriber was utilised to ensure the data were kept pure. Staying 'in touch' with the data through continuously playing the recordings in order to understand the nuances of the participants in terms of tone, emphasis, pauses and other non-verbal cues, provided rich data for analysis.

#### **1.8.4 Data analysis**

Once transcribed, the audio-recorded interviews together with the reflexive field notes made during the interviews were used to re-familiarise the researcher with the data through a process of immersion, in other words living with the data (Kelly, 2006b) through repeated attentive listening to the recordings while following the transcripts and notes (Silverman, 2011). Finding meaning in the participants' life-world involved a process described as

interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008), being both the desired and preferred method of analysis, illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

Data analysis and interpretation naturally are not segmentable into delineated steps, as indicated in Figure 1.1, as many of these processes occur simultaneously and even during the process of data collection (Kelly, 2006a; Tesch, 1992). However, the steps overlap and they are concluded sequentially while remaining re-iterative.



**Figure 1.1: The process of finding meaning in data**

(adapted by the researcher from Ashworth & Chung, 2006, and Silverman, 2011)

### *Step 1*

The content of the transcripts was analysed firstly through a careful process of immersion by repeatedly listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts as well as the field notes, with no judgement, no analysis and no interpretation. The aim of this step was to get a sense of the whole, paying only casual attention to the content – the essence of the story line, a phenomenological conceptual task (Tesch, 1992).

### *Step 2*

In order to make valid inferences from the text, it was necessary to divide the text into meaning units, ultimately to expose the psychological meaning of experience, mindful of the phenomenon being studied (Ashworth & Chung, 2006). These units of meaning can be single words, phrases or even synonyms, a decision that can be regarded as one of the most important in the analysis process. For the purposes of this study, the unit consisted of the themes that preserve the information and particularly the meaning (Weber, 1985). These illuminated experiences and themes emerged through a cyclical analytic process, which included looking for what was missing (in the silences), the obvious and the unique (Bergh & Theron, 2000; Tesch, 1992). This process was conducted for a single text, producing some preliminary themes through mind mapping, clustering and grouping for application and review in the ensuing texts. The revision of the clustering and re-evaluation of the themes were ongoing and added to rather than distracted from the veracity of the inferences. While necessary, this form of data reduction can cause some concerns regarding the dependability of the data, but such concerns were assuaged through the process of triangulation (to be discussed later) and through the documentation of the researcher's own journey and her reflexive journal, knowing full well that bias can neither be completely overcome (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Tesch, 1992), nor is it desirable in this paradigm.

### *Step 3*

To facilitate understanding of the meaning of the units, these units were repackaged with clarification and meaning added where appropriate. This allowed for a full description of the nuances of the experiences culminating in transformed meaning units (Ashworth & Chung, 2006) which resulted in reaching a rich understanding of the material.

### *Step 4*

Identifying the fundamental structure aided in fully understanding the various shared and unique elements of the particular experiences of the participants (Tesch, 1992). Illuminating the structure through complex meanings included expansive descriptions of the context, which is integral in understanding experience (King & Horrocks, 2010) as well as who was

involved as participants and the phenomenon of driving organisational change (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

The structured themes from Step 3 were then taken back to the participants for verification and clarification, where necessary. This ensured support of the findings, as the experience of the researcher was negligible, an element that could have detracted from the findings (Berg, 2009) but that was negated through ongoing professional supervision.

### **1.8.5 Data quality**

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), good qualitative research focuses on two issues, namely process and methodology. The former focuses on whether the study is appropriate for qualitative inquiry and the latter includes sampling, data collection, data analysis, presentation and finally whether it has been ethically conducted and whether the findings are trustworthy. Both dependability and credibility are necessary for the study to be legitimate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) list four criteria with corresponding methods to ensure high quality of qualitative studies and trustworthiness of the findings. These criteria are confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability.

#### *Confirmability*

In the case of qualitative research, reliability refers to whether the observation (in this case through an interview) would yield the same data if it were possible to observe the same thing several times independently (Babbie, 2010). In the context of qualitative research, reliability can be referred to as confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As qualitative research is broadly not replicable (Angrosino, 2007; Berg, 2009; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; King & Horrocks, 2010; Merriam & Associates, 2002), the purpose is rather to ensure that the findings were appropriately drawn from the data and therefore confirmable. In this study, an all-inclusive register of the data, how the data were collected and what meanings were interpreted were noted. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were typed soon after the interview to ensure that nuances and other observations were correlated with the text before the connections had been forgotten or confused. Only one interviewer was used, which further enhanced the consistency of the observation, supported by a reflexive journal to document possible bias as well as continuous field notes to ensure that the ongoing data analysis, typical of qualitative studies, was captured without forgetfulness and selective memory impacting the study through loss of data. A reflexive journal also allows for a documented record of the researcher's perceptions and views, limiting bias (Merriam & Associates, 2002). These observations were noted during the interviews and notes were

made of any decisions to change the approach or questions during the interviews. Even e-mails and correspondence regarding the setting up of the interviews were retained to ensure an accurate record of contact with the participants.

### *Credibility*

Given that “[o]bservations are susceptible to bias from subjective interpretations” (Angrosino, 2007, p. 59), the term ‘credibility’ is more appropriate than the quantitative term validity. Internal credibility was ensured by presenting the findings to the participants for ratification (Babbie, 2010). The supervisor and peer review also supported the credibility of the study. This entailed discussions regarding process and the congruency of emerging findings and tentative interpretations (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

### *Transferability*

The interviews were conducted with all the participants within a two-month period to ensure that observations occurred during the same ‘space’ of the change process, eliminating any possible influence of longitudinal effects (Babbie, 2010). Thick and detailed descriptions of the research process and data processes are contained in the dissertation to meet the transferability criteria (Babbie, 2010).

### *Dependability*

To ensure that the quality of the study is upheld, a purposive sample was used, as discussed in Section 1.8.1 above. The participants’ confidentiality was regarded as a priority in this study, particularly as the researcher was an insider. Not only did the participants sign consent forms, but recordings, transcripts and notes were also never unattended but rather always kept under lock and key or passwords. Discussions with participants were held to discuss the provisional themes as part of member checking and ensuring credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These discussions were always in thematic terms and the researcher was always careful not to reveal, indicate or imply personal information or experiences of any participants to each other or others. Both their own emerging themes and the cross-sectional themes were verified in this manner. The analysis process was conducted in a safe and confidential environment with discussions limited to the supervisor and then only in terms of the process of analysis and emerging themes. In this way, control over access to the data was ensured and the data were confidentially managed and analysed, thereby fulfilling the stringent commitment made to the participants.

## **1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Reber and Reber (2001, p. 251) describe ethics as a “branch of philosophy concerned with that which is deemed acceptable in human behaviour, with what is good or bad, right or wrong in human conduct in pursuit of goals and aims”. Ethical research in turn encompasses “four widely accepted philosophical principles” (Wassenaar, 2006) of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy and justice. The latter entails treating the participants with fairness and equity, implying that they should benefit from the research. The former concepts are discussed further below:

### **1.9.1 Beneficence and non-maleficence**

Ethical research requires that the researcher ensures that a balance is kept between benefit and risk for the participant and that they will come to no harm (Tesch, 1992). The participants were all members of senior leadership and were interviewed by a fellow member of the organisation, namely the researcher, who made every effort to bracket her own preconceived notions, prejudices and opinions. This could have impacted the way in which questions were phrased and probed, possibly leading the participants to express their possible dissatisfaction or support regarding the process and interfering with the findings. To combat this possible interference, the researcher documented her own perceptions, expectations and assumptions in writing as reference to balance the data analysis, thereby ensuring objectivity and limiting bias (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

### **1.9.2 Confidentiality**

The data from the study were only available to the research team and relevant departments of the University of South Africa (Unisa). No internal company member had or will have access to the data, which are stored electronically under password protection by the researcher. Anonymity was guaranteed, as only the emerging themes, patterns and experiences are highlighted in this dissertation without reference to the specific participants.

### **1.9.3 Autonomy - Informed consent**

A preface outlining the research, its voluntary nature and issues of confidentiality were included in the written invitation which also positioned the study as value add process for the business. In this way, support was garnered prior to the commencement of the study. Informed consent forms were also signed by each of the willing participants (see Appendix 2 Information leaflet and informed consent form).

#### **1.9.4 Dissemination of research**

The research findings were made available to Unisa as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Industrial and Organisational Psychology and the senior management of the organisation in which the research was conducted, specifically to the participants.

#### **1.10 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters are presented in the following manner.

Chapter 2	Literature review
Chapter 3	Research article: Leaders, more casualties of change
Chapter 4	Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

#### **1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In Chapter 1, the scientific orientation and intended process of the research were discussed. The most appropriate approach and design for examining the very personal life-world experiences of senior leaders driving organisational change are that of qualitative research, which allows for exploration into the rich and detailed meaning of their experience. The focus of Chapter 2 is the literature review, which covers a brief history of leadership research, followed by an overview of change literature, which in light of the scant research on the leaders' personal experience of the process, the focus of this study, begins to explore the very arduous role and responsibility of the change leader. The description of the method followed and experiences of the researcher is captured in Chapter 3, together with the accompanying analysis process and derived meanings in the form of a journal article. This chapter therefore provides both the technical details and the subsequent findings of the study. Chapter 4 entails the conclusions, the limitations of the study and possible recommendations for future and additional research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of theories and models that offer a representation of the development of the rationale for this study. Having experienced and observed a number of change processes in the businesses where the researcher worked and having been exposed to various models both academically and experientially, she was interested to learn how the leader driving these processes experienced the leading of these change processes. The analysis of the literature revealed little in this regard and consequently focuses on a number of overlapping, interrelated and sometimes interchangeable areas of research, which include change, leadership and finally leading change. As the environment and world of work changes both more and more rapidly and continuously, what becomes evident is the development or evolution of the organisational leader's role, which seems to now culminate in constantly having to lead change as an inherent requirement of the job. For this reason the structure of this review will be firstly look at change, why it is needed, how it relates to culture and what the different types of change are and may entail. Leadership is a key element of any change process and therefore a look at what leadership is apart from change is appropriate. This will be followed by an integrative look at what it means to lead change. Given that the study will focus on the experiences of change leaders, it is important to first understand change and leadership separately and then how they interact with each other during change processes. The relevant discussion is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

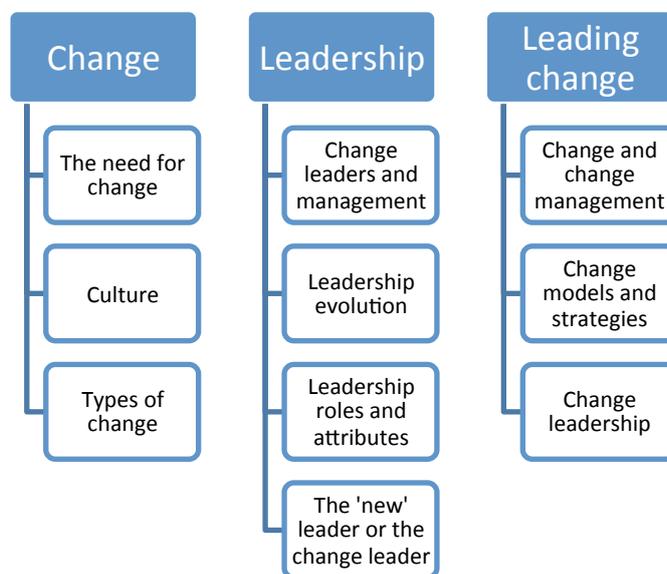


Figure 2.1: Literature discussion outline

McNamara (2005) offers good advice to organisational development consultants when he suggests they ensure 'they stay on the same page' when talking to clients about leadership and change. It would be wise to do the same here too. With the vast amount of literature on leadership, the view of leadership in this thesis focuses largely on how much responsibility the literature places on leaders who initiate and drive change within organisations. Interestingly, the failure rate of change processes is broadly estimated at 70% (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009), and authors such as Rowland and Higgs (2008) and Farmer (2008) place this failure rate squarely on the shoulders of leadership, with the former two stating that "what leaders did was the single biggest reason explaining why some changes ...were successful, and others were not" (pp. 7–8). It is therefore little wonder that Farmer (2008) suggests the need for 'super' managers.

The importance of this study can therefore not be underestimated, as the burgeoning of change management models and theories continues as a direct result of the need for concepts and tools to help leaders face these challenges (Schein, 2010). To what extent this has helped leaders remains to be seen (Andrews, Cameron & Harris, 2008; Young, 2009). The literature focuses mainly on theory building and prescriptive implementation checklists (Doyle et al., 2000) and the leaders' experience and own process of learning and growth have largely been disregarded.

## 2.2 CHANGE

The post-modern world is characterised by multi-faceted change that includes complexity, revolution in technology, exponential amounts of information via a labyrinth of networks and radically changing conceptions of location, purpose and value of work. This information age (or overload) forms the environment of our new world where communication is fast and impersonal. The advantages as well as the disadvantages of this new environment place new demands on the individual worker, the organisation and therefore the organisational leaders as well (Henning, 2009). In the same way that information moves seamlessly across information technology networks, people are expected to move from different jobs, projects or even organisations and possibly even countries with as much ease. This is a tall order for any organisation, not to mention a complex psychological creature such as an employee or leader. This new organisation and its inherent culture are now allegedly leaner, fitter, faster and cheaper (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and therefore necessarily place different and more stringent demands on leaders (Epperson, 2006; Schein, 2010).

### 2.2.1 The need for continuous change

These rapid changes have seen organisations losing identity and crumbling under these unabated demands. Consequently, organisations are focussing more and more on the values that underpin their identity, culture and purpose (Barrett, 2006). With this clear intent and identity, an organisation is able to make quick decisions and to adapt and re-create itself, establishing a system that is adaptable and therefore sustainable as it interacts with itself and the seemingly chaotic environment (Wheatley, 2006). Rapidly changing technologies empower organisations to change equally rapidly in a demanding and competitive environment where formal hierarchical structures are replaced by flatter, fluid groupings that change regularly as specific extrinsic and intrinsic environmental demands are placed on them (Wheatley, 2006). Simultaneously, these demands are transferred to the individual who now must continuously learn new skills and must become increasingly adaptable in order to survive. Leading organisations makes continuous learning a key responsibility of leaders (Aitken & Higgs, 2010).

This new economy therefore demands much of both individual and organisation. Not only must theorists and researchers begin to find new models, approaches and constructs, but the individual also has to learn to cope, adapt and ultimately thrive in this new space.

Leaders, on the other hand, must also come to terms with the needs of employees and their ability to hold onto or offer employment that is attractive and careers that are exciting, sustainable and explorative in a world that continues to demand more and more rapid change. These demands have seen a proliferation of change literature, change consultants and change models, none of which provides much evidence about what makes leadership more or less effective in managing change (Henning, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Culture**

Whether the change revolves around strategy, structure, purpose or any other dimension, the culture within an organisation will either hamper or facilitate the intended change. A glimpse therefore at organisational culture would therefore not be amiss. Attempting to change any of cultural aspects within an organisation, which can colloquially described as: 'the way things are done around here', therefore involves a change process that needs to be led. 'Culture' gives insight into the embedded behaviours that organisations must acknowledge if anything is to be changed. Schein (1990, p. 111) includes the following in defining and understanding organisational culture:

- a pattern of basic assumptions,
- invented, discovered, or developed by a given group,
- as it learns to cope with the problems of external adaptation and internal integration,
- that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore,
- to be taught to new members as the ...
- correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.

This definition encompasses the dynamic view that culture develops to help the organisation cope. A prerequisite for culture is a long, shared and common history (Schein, 2010). Culture is what members of a group learn together over time, not forgetting that there are subcultures within any organisation. Each team, unit or grouping can develop a subculture within the organisational culture (Martins & Von der Ohe, 2003) even when they are in conflict or independent of each other (Schein, 1990). Effecting change in any of these elements is difficult.

Schein (2010) has also defined Culture, and its various levels as basic underlying assumptions, espoused values and artefacts that exist within organisations. The visible organisational structures and processes which are easily observable are included as

artefacts. These artifacts must however be interpreted with care and in the context of the culture, and the remaining two levels of values which includes strategies, goals and philosophies as well as the basic underlying assumptions or the unconscious perceptions, thoughts and feelings in which the artefacts are embedded (Schein, 1990). Through interviews, questionnaires and a study of organisational documents it is possible to establish the values espoused by an organisation, as these are also often depicted in company slogans, mission statements and credos. The underlying assumptions, which often start out as values and then drop off a level of consciousness, are harder to extract, as “they are no longer questioned and they become less and less open to discussion” (Schein, 1990, p. 112), while influencing daily dealings between members of the organisation. Grout and Fisher (2007) support Schein by adding to his conclusion that when culture is understood this way, on all three levels, it is evident why culture is one of the most challenging processes to drive, and even with the best leadership, very slow to change. Farmer (2008) suggests that if senior leaders are poor drivers of change, they are even less successful at culture change initiatives. The failure rate, exceeding that of change efforts by a further 20 to 30%. If Schein’s (2010) definition of culture is accurate, change efforts and culture change efforts are not necessarily two different animals.

In the new, often global, multicultural organisations, leaders have the added complexity of having to deal with different cultures in different work units. Leaders now need additional tools and concepts to approach these settings, as their current practices and methodological frameworks are insufficient (Epperson, 2006; Schein, 2010). One of the dangers is that they will try to understand every aspect of other cultures, which Schein (2010) suggests is unnecessary, as only some dimensions are crucial, these being authority and intimacy. Understanding how a culture views and deals with power and love is crucial. Cultural learning therefore forms part of the role for leadership in the new era. The leader and the environment are interdependent and cannot be separated from each other. Leader effectiveness is therefore an element of culture and vice versa (Reinhard, 2007), making the study of culture equally important in change processes.

### **2.2.3 Types of change**

There are multitudes of interventions, processes or programmes that are described as ‘change’ within organisations. It is clear, though, that there are various types and layers (Fronza & Mariceau, 2008) of change, each presenting its own challenges (Aitken & Higgs, 2010) and demands on leadership. Various authors have named and described these

interventions and processes differently. Brief descriptions of the most prevalent three are offered as context below.

#### *2.2.3.1 Abrahamson's dynamic stability*

Abrahamson (2000) suggests that different levels of change can be introduced interchangeably, creating a dynamic stability of continuous change but ceasing the continuous major change initiatives. This approach will mitigate change's potentially destructive force, creating "initiative overload and organizational chaos" (Abrahamson, 2006, p. 129). According to Abrahamson (2006), interspersing these major changes with smaller, more organic changes, which he names tinkering and kludging, will leave more survivors, as it will reduce the often fatal pain of large-scale change.

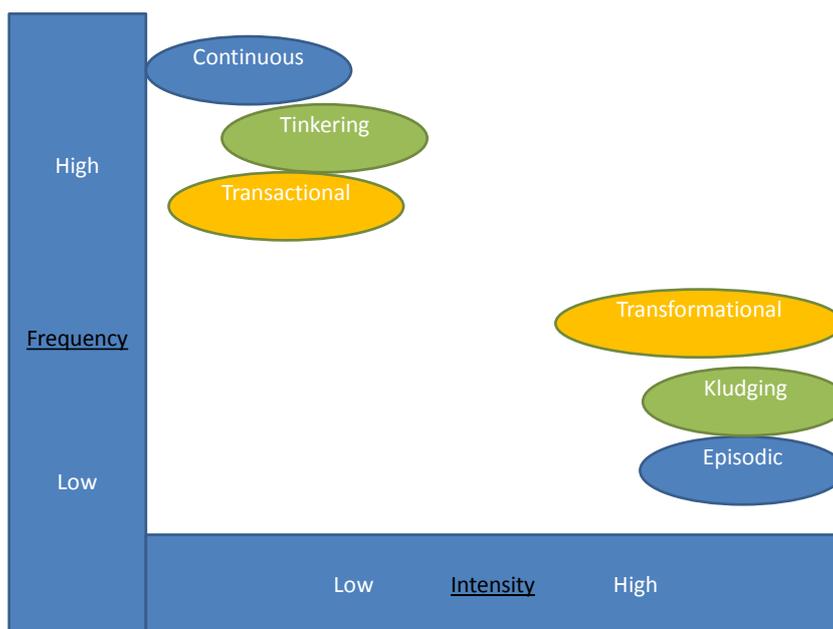
Tinkering is the continuous fiddling and fine-tuning of the organisation, while kludging takes place on a much larger scale and often involves the whole or large parts of the organisation. This alternating tactic is far more viable, as the ongoing tinkering and kludging allows for growth and change without the necessity for rapid and destructive large-scale change (Abrahamson, 2000). Rowland and Higgs (2008) refer to the predominant approach as 'programmatic', which presupposes that change is linear, predictable and can be managed. However, it is at best difficult to manage. They suggest change is ongoing and cannot be broken into parts, ratifying the tinkering approach of Abrahamson (2000), but emphasising that it is neither straightforward nor sequential. The typical plans and projects do not allow for the ever-present messiness of change as these plans presume that change happens in predictable, straight lines (Rowland & Higgs, 2008). It is only the conditions, the process and connections *created by leaders* that make it possible or conducive to bring about change.

#### *2.2.3.2 Episodic and continuous*

Episodic change tends to be radical, infrequent and planned, while continuous change tends to be ongoing and cumulative over time (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Bordum, 2010). The literature covers mainly the episodic, radical or transformational change processes. This "transformational change is a large-scale event that has had an impact on the vision, work procedures and values of the company" (Kleiner & Corrigan, 1989, cited in Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006) and should be sustainable in nature. While transactional change is less disruptive and developmental (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001), it is aimed at reaching a defined and anticipated end state. Episodic of nature, it is usually planned, and according to Aitken and Higgs (2010), most organisational change research and literature cover this type of change, which Abrahamson's refers to as kludging (Abrahamson, 2000), ironically in

his article entitled “Change without pain”. The DICE model, an acronym referring to duration, integrity, commitment and effort in the change process, was subsequently developed to measure the impact of the change (Sirkin, Keenan & Jackson, 2005), and is discussed in paragraph 2.4.2.2.

There are four basic ways of understanding change: low versus high intensity set against low versus high frequency, an axis depicted by Bordum (2010) and adapted to include various types of change, as incorporated in Bordum’s axis depicted in Figure 2.2 below:



**Figure 2.2: Types of change processes**

(adapted by the researcher from Bordum, 2010; Kotter, 1990; Norbutus, 2007)

This results in a strategic paradox – where the purpose of strategic planning is to enhance control, but the modern concept of change and strategy contradict this by reducing the possibility of planning and controlling anything (Bordum, 2010) because of the rate of change within the environment (Wheatley, 2006). To facilitate and guide these processes, various models have been developed. Leaders must make choices on how to drive processes and these models are intended to aid in the understanding of these processes and in the approach leaders will take in driving change. Grout and Fisher (2007), however, found that such forethought is not necessarily prevalent.

Leaders must make decisions in order to lead a business to sustainability and/or growth. Exploring what leaders must do and what they should be, will inform this discussion.

## **2.3 LEADERSHIP**

The very word 'leader' creates all sorts of confusion. Even in the title of this study, it implicitly refers to the top management echelon (Senge, 2006), implying that they are the only leaders. Leadership (top management) carries the full weight of the responsibility for failed change (Farmer, 2008; Kotter, 1990; Rowland & Higgs, 2008), but Farmer (2008) and Senge (2006) believe that leaders permeate the organisation at all levels. Describing this 'invisible' organisation, Farmer (2008) suggests that even within organisations there is a duality of leadership, the formal and the informal, both necessary for leading successful change together, as leaders, managers and employees inevitably see change differently (Strebel, 1996). Caldwell (2003) contends that these more dynamic organisations demand that managers be able to cope with uncertainty and take more risks in this uncertain environment and thereby move from the allegedly distinct role of management to leader.

Given the complexity, the necessity and what is at stake, the leader's responsibility is not only a daunting challenge but has also become an arduous one, which could be significantly different to the requirements of a previous era. This leadership evolution may necessitate a distinction between management and leadership, if there is one, and perhaps an overview of how the role of leaders and the requirements have changed. This is illustrated through an overview of the development or evolution of leadership theory.

### **2.3.1 Change leaders and managers**

Kane (2005) differentiates between leading and managing by explaining that leading is about setting direction and getting people to understand and follow that vision, and that it is vital for transformation change. Management, on the other hand, refers to someone who supports and takes the responsibility of the work performance of others. These simplistic views offer a clear distinction between the two, which is not necessarily evident in the literature (Williams, 2011). This contrast tends to elevate leadership (Nadler & Tushman, 1999) and relegate management to a lesser role with negative undertones, which Nienaber (2010) suggests is counterproductive, as they both have overall business success as the goal.

Management functions are often referred to as planning, organizing, leading and controlling, which could suggest that leading is a subset of management. However, the contrary is captured in most literature, as leading is often seen as the bigger all-incorporating concept, with 'charismatic' or 'transformational' leadership as the sought-after attribute (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Nadler & Tushman, 1999; Von Eck & Verwey, 2007; Watkins et al., 2011; Williams, 2011). In Caldwell's (2003) Delphi-style study, however, he found the key attributes of change management and leadership to be overlapping and complementary, but also concludes that in practice, they are often indistinguishable, the key difference being the level within the organisation. Von Eck and Verwey (2007) suggest that they are perhaps neither an overlap nor intertwined, but rather that leadership, specifically transcendental leadership, encompasses both management and leadership. A distinction is made between transactional (likened to management), transformational (possibly similar to Collin's Level 5 leadership, discussed in Section 2.3.2.5 Charismatic leadership versus Level 5 leadership) and ultimately transcendental leadership, which encompasses a spiritual aspect as well, with integrity and moral leadership coming strongly to the fore in recent times (Collins, 2001; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Naranjo-Gil, Harmann & Maas, 2008).

Without followers, there can be no leadership (Silverman, 2011), and therefore possibly the clearest difference is in the conceptualising and articulating of vision (Coutts, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Perhaps the 'Do, Know, Be' model of leadership captures the essence of the difference by suggesting that the leader must first 'get their own house in order' (Argyris, 2001; Collins, 2001; Schein, 2010; Senge, 2006) by courageously looking inside himself and considering new ideas and bravely change what needs to be changed while leading with character and competence (Schein, 1996). Managing is a small portion of the role of leadership (Do), while authenticity (Be) of the leader is what creates the 'following' in the first place (Quinn, 2005). At their best, leaders do not copy anyone (Quinn, 2005).

The fundamental purpose for change leaders is to set the overall purpose, build insight, capability and ownership and then empower others to become jointly responsible – a view endorsed by Herzig and Jimmieson's (2006) findings in their study focussing on middle managers in change processes. Management can direct and control, but leaders are more likely to influence than exert direct power (Rowland & Higgs, 2008). Perhaps the level within the organisation is the more pertinent difference (Williams, 2011).

Controversially, Epperson (2006, p. 9) states that "change, in reality, cannot be managed; it must be actively led and it must be led from the top". For purposes of this discussion, management and leadership are therefore seen as very similar, the latter encompassing the

former. The terms are used interchangeably, but the primary focus is on the development of leadership theories specifically.

### **2.3.2 The leadership evolution**

Reinhard (2007) groups organisational change theory literature into three categories. Firstly, theories that focus on the competencies that are specific and unique to leading change; secondly, theories on organisational culture and its readiness for change; and thirdly, strategies or models for leading organisational transformation but that to date inadequately cover the lived experiences of those leading change initiatives. Much of the academic literature on organisational change is of little help to those attempting to implement it (Young, 2009), which can be clearly seen in the well-publicised failure rate of such change (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Epperson, 2006; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009). Epperson (2006) offers that the reason models fail so frequently is because it is necessary for change models and processes themselves to change as change cannot be managed, but only led. Furthermore, a discussion of leadership covers so many aspects that it is important to understand exactly what is being discussed.

#### *2.3.2.1 Leadership domains*

To this end, McNamara (2005) distinguishes four possible domains, apart from roles, which he also cautions needs to be distinguished from traits. The domains include leading yourself, which is covered by authors such as Schein, Goleman and Kets De Vries. A second domain is leading other individuals, where skills such as coaching, mentoring and particularly listening are prominent (Schein, 2010; Schuitema, 1998; Senge, 2006; Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009). The third is leading groups and the fourth is leading organisations, each requiring a different set of skills but, as with Level 5 leadership (Collins, 2001), the executive leader must not sequentially move from one level of leadership to the next, but rather embrace each set of attributes in addition to those required for the previous level. Adding each set of attributes will enable the leader to understanding how to lead employees through uncertainty during times of change (Naranjo-Gil et al., 2008) for which leaders will need to be enabled (Schein, 2010; Schemerhorn, 2004).

#### *2.3.2.2 Trait theory*

Bergh and Theron (2000) suggest that in its most extreme, trait theory, which began in the 1920s, states that leadership cannot be learnt. Aitken and Higgs (2010) concur that the thinking of trait theorists is that leaders are born and possess instinctive qualities, which

even included the consideration of physical traits. Over the years, this notion has lost support as it led to inconclusive results, but three key traits remain evident in research that is more recent. These traits are listed as cognitive ability, drive and conscientiousness or alternatively as 'charismatic, influential and ethical' by McNamara (2005). Stoghill (1948), in his extensive seminal literature search, found that leaders also exceed their followership in the following traits: alertness, verbal facility, originality and judgement, and many others. The other significant conclusion he drew was that these qualities, characteristics and skills are largely determined by the circumstances in which the leaders finds themselves. With a more modern view, Kets de Vries (2006) offers that people are far too complex to be described in this way and these qualities, characteristics and skills are not necessarily predictive of leadership success. A view supported by Reinhard (2007). After all these years we are still not close to identifying a specific list of traits (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996) and it appears that in 2012 this still remains elusive as the debate continues through articles such as that of Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, and Humphrey (2011) who attempt to integrate trait and behavioural theories as late as 2011.

#### *2.3.2.3 Behavioural theories*

In the 1940s, the focus shifted from inherent traits, distinctive of trait theory, to how people acted, and theorists studied how leaders' behaviour influenced performance and the consequent satisfaction of followers. Studies conducted by Rensis Likert at the University of Michigan identified two distinctive styles of leadership, namely job- and employee-centred styles, both of which initially result in production improvements (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Over time, however, job-centredness created pressure, which was subsequently resisted through absenteeism, high turnover, grievances and poor attitudes (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996). The job-centred leadership style offers closer supervision, while employee-centred leadership provides greater opportunity for empowerment through delegation, supportive environments and a climate conducive to motivation (Bergh & Theron, 2000). The greatest distinction between trait theory and behavioural theory is that the behaviourists believe that these more conducive behaviours can be taught.

#### *2.3.2.4 Situational and contingency theories*

Neither the best set of traits nor specific behaviours were suitable for every situation, which brought the next wave of research, which hypothesised that leadership effectiveness is contingent on a fit between personality, tasks, power, attitudes and perceptions. Specific effective leader behaviours in one situation could well be counterproductive in another. It was therefore argued that leaders needed to be flexible enough to adapt to different

situations and different people within their groups. As the research on adaptability grew, contingency models began to be formulated, most notably by theorists such as Fiedler (Bergh & Theron, 2000; Fiedler, 1964).

Fiedler looked at leadership from the followers' point of view and proposed three factors:

- Leader-member relations, which considers the degree of confidence, trust and respect
- The extent to which tasks are formally structured
- The inherent power in the leadership position

The permutations of these three factors would prescribe the most appropriate style for the specific situation, but even Fiedler himself was not optimistic that leaders could change their preferred style (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996).

Although insufficient, Fiedler's work provided a platform for further research into high-performing teams and a pre-cursor for the current studies into the demanding change leader role, most notably ensuring at least an awareness of the complexities of leadership. Aitken and Higgs (2010), however, still conclude that applying both trait and contingency theories continues to fail to offer validity across a wide range of contexts.

Blake and Mouton's (1970) managerial grid model is a further example of the development of contingency models in reaction to the inadequate trait and behavioural theories. Underpinned by a 'best style', the model was also found wanting, as 'less desirable' styles also found success. Hersey et al. (2001) supported by Blake and Mouton (1970) suggested that it is not the style but rather the adaptability of the leader that ensures successful leadership. Hersey et al (2001). defined four leadership styles available to managers, namely telling, selling, participating and delegating – concepts still used in leadership training today.

#### *2.3.2.5 Charismatic leadership versus Level 5 leadership*

Leaders such as John F Kennedy, Winston Churchill and Walt Disney are popularly regarded as charismatic leaders and are said to have had a 'gift' of being able to motivate others. They are also often viewed as heroes. Contrastingly, Aitken and Higgs (2010) suggest that not only did this approach fail to offer compelling results, but also that it was

predominantly based on United States figures and culture. Jim Collins refers to them as “larger than life leaders with big personalities” (Collins, 2001, p. 68), who later made headlines and became celebrities. Emanating from his research, which began in 1996, he began to look for companies that had moved from good to great and sustained the performance over time, but subsequently found quite the opposite. Based on an analysis of over 1 435 companies on the Fortune 500, only 11 fit the stringent criteria of ‘great companies’. Following extensive quantitative and qualitative analyses, ‘Level 5 leadership’ was easily one of the “strongest, most consistent contrasts between good-to-great companies” (Collins, 2001, p. 75).

Epitomised by duality, Level 5 leadership encompasses both modesty and wilfulness, and being ‘shy’ but simultaneously fearless. Collins (2001) calls it the yin and yang of Level 5 and describes the unwavering resolve to do what is best for the company but shunning all forms of adulation. In contrast to the charismatic leader, a Level 5 leader is quiet, calm and takes the blame for poor results while crediting all but the self for the good.

The question, however, goes back to whether this is born or bred, for which Collins (2001) has no empirical answer. He offers that some have the seed but it remains to be nurtured or triggered, incorporating all of the qualities and capabilities of the four levels that precede it. He describes these levels as follows (Collins, 2001, p. 70):

- Level 1: Highly capable individual who makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge and good work-related habits
- Level 2: Effective leader who stimulates the group to high performance
- Level 3: Competent manager who is able to organise resources, including people, toward the pursuit of defined objectives
- Level 4: Effective leader who through a compelling vision stimulates high performance
- Level 5: An executive who through the paradoxical blend of humility and unwavering professional resolve build enduring greatness, both listed as requirements by Rowland and Higgs (2008) as well

Contrastingly, Schuitema (1998) divides the leadership writings of the 1990s into two broad groups. The first was led by Steven Covey (1992), which relates leadership to personal excellence and mastery. The second, Schuitema believes, was led by Tom Peters and Jim Collins, who focussed on unleashing human potential. Similarly Schuitema’s (1998) South

African-built model is built on trust and authenticity, essential for the now popular transformational leadership.

#### 2.3.2.6 *Transactional and transformational leadership*

Few would argue that “effective leadership contributes to positive health of an organization” (Turner, Barling & Zacharatos, 2005, p. 721). Transformational leadership has at its core the communication of the vision and mission, a critical aspect of healthy organisational culture, and creating excitement and motivation towards that end. This inspirational motivation increases employees’ feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy, enabling them to produce work performances that ensure satisfaction and growth (Turner et al., 2005). The focus is often on the soft people issues, where according to Kotter (1990) creating a vision for people to take ownership of, is an aspect that strategic management and particularly leadership must regard as a critical necessity (Bordum, 2010). An alternative view from Sirkin et al. (2005) is that perhaps the visionary leadership is not always vital. Even visionary leadership is not sufficient to garner a followership but requires, in addition, at least genuine, emotional, visible commitment from the leader in all that the leader does (Groves, 2006).

Bass then developed his own leadership model, which differentiated between behaviours and characteristics needed in times of change and alternatively in times of stability (Bass & Bass, 2008). He suggests that transactional models do not lend themselves to building adequate levels of trust, motivation and development of the employees one leads, but are still necessary as a base for higher levels of transformational leadership. “The level of integration and interdependencies that are needed of the new work environment will require leadership that goes beyond the more basic transactional style to styles that are more intellectually stimulating, inspirational and charismatic” (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 460).

Together with Avolio, Bass refined his Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which formed the basis of their research (Avolio & Bass, 1999) and has no doubt been influential in comprehending the demands on leadership in the current ever-changing environment (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Epperson, 2006). Albeit not without its flaws (Reinhard, 2007), the MLQ specifically looks at the following four factors for transformational leadership: idealised influence (providing a common purpose), inspiration motivation, intellectual stimulation (encouraging innovation and creativity) and individualised consideration (genuine concern for the individual and his or her needs).

Transactional leadership is measured through factors named:

- contingent reward (reward is dependent on delivery),
  - management by exception (which refers to intervention only when failure is evident)
  - active intervention (when job outputs are communicated and measured)
  - or alternatively passive (where job outputs are not communicated and measures)
- (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

Transformational leadership, it is argued by the authors, instils feelings of trust, loyalty and respect (Avolio & Bass, 1999; Lowe, 2010).

More modern approaches have a number of concepts and ideas that overlap with these, one of which is the older care and growth model espoused by Schuitema (1998), who based his theory on observation and research that he conducted working with miners, perhaps under the harshest possible conditions, during the height of the South African upheaval to overthrow the apartheid regime. At the heart of his model lies trust and empowerment, even in a contradictory and typically 'command' environment.

### **2.3.3 Leadership roles and attributes**

#### *2.3.3.1 Roles*

The role of the leader, according to Wheatley (2006, p. 131), is not to make sure everybody knows what to do, but rather to ensure that there is "a long evolving clarity about what the organisation is". She maintains that the sustainability of organisations in a changing world lies in the clear identity of the business rather than approaches, products or any other strategy. In the ever-changing world, the identity based on clarified and articulated values (Grout & Fisher, 2007) will ensure a better chance of survival than the most well-researched change processes.

Kaplan and Norton (2005) refer to Senge as the organisational change expert, who suggests that traditional leaders are similar to the charismatic leader described by Collins (2001), who heroically must save the powerless people without vision and those without the ability to master the forces of change (Senge, 2006). He concludes that the 'new' leader must focus on tasks that are more important and subtle, and describes these as designers, teachers and stewards. Designers must acknowledge that organisations are living systems filled with participants and must encompass the purpose, vision and core values that form the core that builds the teams and pervades daily decisions. As teachers, leaders must be open to learning first (Lowe, 2010), inspiring others to learn too. Finally, as stewards, Senge (2006) offers two paradoxes similar to Collins's (2001) duality, where he juxtaposes certainty and

commitment and subsequently conservation and change. This certainty resembles the Level 5 leadership quality of unwavering resolve while remaining open and questioning. Leadership, according to Senge (2006), is always about change, but while focussing on the new, the leader still holds to something that must also be conserved, which could be related to Wheatley's (2006) organisational identity.

### *2.3.3.2 Leadership attributes*

In attempts by various authors to come to terms with what a 'new' leader and specifically a change leader (if there is difference) entails, various leadership competency models have been proposed. Competencies can be described as a set of specific skills and traits that are needed in order to be effective at a specific job (Mansfield, 1996). The 'new' job is that of leading or driving change processes. Rowland and Higgs (2008) came across many well-intentioned leaders who knew what had to be changed but in trying to convince others, creating a change plan and launching it into the organisation, found their own behaviour to be a key determinant of success. Getting others to follow is reportedly the hardest task a leader faces (Allcorn & Godkin, 2011; Kotter, 1990).

### *2.3.3.3 Rowland and Higgs's competency framework*

Having factor-analysed concrete behavioural data, Rowland and Higgs (2008) established three factors that proved to be instrumental in empowering leaders to lead change. These three factors are briefly described below:

- Shaping leadership – a visible and personally present leader who uses communication and interaction to create and maintain urgency and momentum and to clearly agree on outcomes and deliverables while monitoring these personally. Such a leader provides strong encouragement to take risks and do things differently, bringing attention to him-/herself in order to meet his/her own personal needs.
- Framing leadership – creating the first starting points for a vision by raising awareness for the need to change with a broad agenda, enabling others to own and be held accountable for implementation.
- Creativity capacity – modelling and teaching others to master change and transition through understanding of the extraordinary demands placed on people through change. This also entails investing time and money in order to equip people with targeted development while coaching and providing feedback. Limiting or hampering

key processes are addressed, which also enables the organisation. (Adapted from Rowland & Higgs, 2008)

Having described these behaviours, Rowland and Higgs (2008) are clear that these are not competencies that are based on skills, attributes and traits, but rather actions that leaders are able to take and advocate, which require high levels of self-awareness, authenticity and specific beliefs. These beliefs consist of leaders' knowledge that they can never know everything and therefore need others and that they can be trusted, accepting that the world is not either/or but rather 'and' (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler, 2002). Exploration rather than problem-solving through the untapped potential of others and systems is the key to enacting the vision through the followers while remaining fully responsible.

### **2.3.4 The 'new' leader or the change leader**

Following the host of leadership research with the still-illusive answer, Aitken and Higgs (2010, p. 10) conclude that "perhaps, the frustration with the inability of leadership research is rooted in a paradigm which suggests there is a fundamental truth which is yet to be discovered". Yet, there is so much written about the 'new role of leadership' (Schein, 2010), essential leadership practices (Rowland & Higgs, 2008), leadership competency models (Kaplan & Norton, 2005), what leaders actually do (Grout & Fisher, 2007) as well as many other angles on what leaders must 'look like' in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world that is chaotic, strange, and constantly changing at increasing speed (Grout & Fisher, 2007; Wheatley, 2006). Must this 'new' leadership be synonymous with change leadership? What then is the difference between management and leadership? Or is that simply also the difference between transactional and transformational leadership?

Rowland and Higgs (2008) report two common strands for leadership which incorporate what leaders actually do and the impact they have on their followers and their ability to perform. Leaders need a coalition of leaders around them (Rowland & Higgs, 2008), moving away from the 'heroic' to the engaging leader.

#### **2.3.4.1 Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence, the popular term from the late 1990s, has been defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997, p. 5) as representing;

the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion accurately and adaptively; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to access and/or generate

feelings when they facilitate cognitive activities and adaptive action; and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others .

Emotional intelligence also includes competencies such as self-regard, self-management, self-motivation, change resilience, empathetic skills, lack of guilt, interpersonal relations (Bagozzi, 2003; Martins & Von der Ohe, 2006) as well as self- and social awareness, succinctly coined by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2001) as 'know thyself'. Rowland and Higgs (2001) suggest that these elements are correlated with the competencies they identified for successful change implementation.

Rowland and Higgs (2008) agree that self-awareness and utilisation of their own presence is a practice that change leaders must use. In addition, they must be able to stay in the moment, be mindful and not impulsive, attentive and expectant, while simultaneously keeping the so-called big picture in mind. They would necessarily seek feedback about their personal impact on both people and the organisation to facilitate their own continued growth for the good of the organisation. Leading a major implementation of change effort affords an invaluable opportunity for development, which can be personally beneficial (Doyle et al., 2000).

A primary way to improve business results is to begin to implement new business practices and this is in turn contingent on learning new ways of looking at the business, but more importantly, the leaders must be prepared to learn new things about themselves, their relationships and interactions with others. The significance of self-awareness was highlighted by Schein (1985) and subsequently was brought into vogue in the proliferation of literature surrounding what has been coined as 'emotional intelligence' (Aitken & Higgs, 2010).

This meta-ability allows for an increased harmonisation of the two 'distinct' minds, which Goleman (1996) calls the rational and the emotional. The ability to recognise emotions in others and to understand one's own allows leaders to regulate their own behaviour and better understand others. Particularly when they are going through a change process, which can be painful and may lead to resistance and corporate inertia, which only leadership can guide their employees through (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Epperson (2006) goes so far as to say that change is sustained by the dissatisfied and resistant, rather than the supportive.

Emotional intelligence develops over time and can be enhanced through training – a competence that Goleman, et al., (2001) regards as more influential than traditional

measures of cognitive intelligence, which has long been regarded as the single most valid predictor of job success (Scroggins, Thomas & Morris, 2009) and which, according to Collins (2001), has a direct impact on organisational commitment of leaders' direct reports. While Von Eck and Verwey (2007) found that different types of change each need a different set of competence, they found the need not only for cognitive intelligence but also emotional and particularly spiritual intelligence a necessity across all types of change.

#### 2.3.4.2 *Learning leadership*

Schein (2010) suggests four orientations that are necessary to exercise learning leadership that enables a leader to stimulate and facilitate the necessitated cultural learning and therefore change. Overlapping with many other authors (references indicated below), he describes these orientations as follows:

- *Perception and insight* – leaders need to be able to see their own weaknesses (McNamara, 2005) and defences and must have a high degree of objectivity about themselves gained through experiential learning (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009) and self-assessment programmes. Leader must figure themselves out (Goleman, 1996; Kets de Vries, 2006), acknowledge their own limitations and encourage the learning of others (Schuitema, 1998; Senge, 2006).
- *Motivation* – to unfreeze the organisation requires a great deal of pain for the organisation and the leader and to do this, the interests of the organisation must take precedence over any self-interest the leader may have (Collins, 2001).
- *Emotional strength* – leaders must have the ability to absorb the anxiety of organisations in transition, remaining supportive even when employees become angry and obstructive, and must remain genuinely concerned (Quinn, 2005) about the welfare of the whole organisation (Schein, 1990). Leading change is a lonely effort, as a host of enemies from the 'old school' are left behind with half-hearted support from the new (Kane, 2005).
- *Ability to create involvement and participation* – leaders should lead through listening and should be genuinely participative and collaborative (Farmer, 2008; Grout & Fisher, 2007). The way leaders see things (Strebel, 1996), their mind-sets or mental models must be changed (Senge, 2006) without imposition, which can only happen through collaboration (Levasseur, 2010; Schein, 2010).

Without the ability to manage relationships and groups across different cultures both within organisations and globally, including across hierarchical and occupational boundaries, leaders are unlikely to bring about the desired change (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Kahan, 2010; Rowland & Higgs, 2008; Schein, 2010). It is therefore clear that change management or leadership is needed in order to effect organisational or cultural change. A new set or extended set of attributes are required.

Argyris (2001) cautions against the assumption that leaders have the skills to learn these necessary new behaviours. He goes so far as to say they may not even have the skills to learn the new skills or may not even be aware that they do not. Self-knowledge and awareness, propagated by Collins (2001), Schein (2010) and Senge (2006), are therefore important qualities a leader must have to be effective in leading change.

## **2.4 LEADING CHANGE**

With these skills or orientations or attributes, leaders must consider that change is fundamentally about people (Farmer, 2008; Kane, 2005), motivating and influencing change of behaviour with a critical ingredient being leadership itself. This is an onerous task for which there is no place for failed leaders to hide (Farmer, 2008). It can be so disruptive that it can literally tear organisations to pieces (Abrahamson, 2000) particularly because people naturally prefer the status quo (Rowland & Higgs, 2008). This messy (Saka, 2003), chaotic process can be so painful that it can almost be described as instilling 'terror' (Essers, Bohm & Contu, 2009). Without a 'burning platform' (Kotter, 1990) being clearly communicated in order to convince employees and even management that change is necessary, few, if any, will 'move'. Ron Dennis suggests that the very reason change programmes fail is because following the formation of a complex change model, management forget that people are equally complex (2006, cited in Grout & Fisher, 2007).

### **2.4.1 Change management**

In conducting a review of the change management literature, Epperson (2006) found that change management practices and methodological frameworks, while abundant, remain inadequate to meet the demands of leading change in organisations. It is therefore important to understand that there are different types of change. When leading change, it must first be established what type of change is desired, after which the relevant model or process must be used to effect that change. A brief discussion of the types of change processes is offered, followed by the models leaders could consider as vehicles to effect these changes.

## **2.4.2 Change models and strategies**

Though a vast number of models and strategies exist, for purposes of this study, Lewin's foundational model is discussed and how this led to the development of Argyris's double-loop learning model, which lends itself to a brief look at Kolb's learning cycle as well. Kotter's model specifically seeks to address the high failure rate of change processes which is well documented. This model is also discussed and can be mapped onto the Lewin framework. Along with the lesser known DICE model, which provides a means to measure the impact and risk associated with organisational change, these all broadly, according to Cummings and Worley (2009), fall under the Lewin change model. Cummings and Worley (2009) also describe action research models, which are briefly covered, followed by a third model, which they name the positive model. By no means conclusive or extensive, it will only cover some of the most widely discussed and commonly applied models.

### *2.4.2.1 Building on Lewin*

In simple terms, Lewin's model (1952) proposed three stages for organisational change: unfreezing, moving and refreeze, which Rowland and Higgs (2008) regard as over-simplistic. Lewin's model has formed the prevailing model for many decades (Aitken & Higgs, 2010), even though further development by numerous writers abound (Argyris, 2001). Argyris refers to this as 'single-loop' or adaptive learning that looks at the problem and makes a change that addresses it but fails to look at why the problem occurred in the first place. Argyris (2001) suggests that this simplistic model has several gaps. These gaps include the assumption that people firstly have the skills to learn new behaviour or at least the skill to learn new skills. Secondly, the assumption is that people are largely oblivious to their own lack of their own desired skill, a state that he claims may be automatic. Thirdly, this unawareness is quite possibly a result of suppression, particularly of their feelings, which is a much more common experience than people realise (Hemfelt, Minirth & Meier, 1996; Kets de Vries, 2006). The final gap that Argyris (2001) identifies is that people espouse particular values and claim to behave accordingly. The inconsistencies between behaviours and values must therefore be errors and should be corrected. He suggests that the 'inconsistency' is in fact consistent and they must therefore have some sort of 'map' or theory they use or mental model (Senge, 2006) that guides their behaviour. The pivotal role the double-loop can therefore play is far more significant, because it focuses on transformational change. Double-loop learning includes not only feedback from past actions, but also reflections on the possible underlying assumptions (Argyris, 2002; Yeganeh & Kolb,

2009), allowing not only the leader to learn and adapt but subsequently the organisation as well.

Argyris (2001) goes on to highlight the length of time it takes to plan, let alone implement change, a statement Kotter (1990) reiterates and emphasises. To rush the process will only lead to an illusion of progress, as people will take all the time they need to ask questions, position themselves politically and develop means to protect themselves, even with seemingly necessary escape routes. Executive power and ability or lack thereof to effect change become evident when it is behaviour and entrenched ways of working (or culture) that need to change (Farmer, 2008; Grout & Fisher, 2007). Argyris (2001) concludes that the question is rather about using that time constructively, which must first and foremost include top management examining their own “theory-in-use”. Similarly, Schein (2010) suggests that leaders must learn to figure themselves and their own defensiveness and counterproductive behaviours out, in so doing understanding their own mental path to action (Patterson et al., 2002) before any change activity will be more than a passing and ineffective fad (Argyris, 2001). This could suggest that leaders unwittingly or instinctively use certain theories or models that they may have been exposed to. Furthermore, they could often be oblivious to the influence their own experiences, self-awareness as well as social-awareness have on their approaches to leading change (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008).

It is clear that the leaders need a new set of capabilities and skills to lead change. The impact, demands and cost of change processes to the organisations and employees can be excessive, not to mention the cost to the leaders as well. In an attempt to measure this cost, Sirkin et al. (2005) developed a mechanism to monitor this impact and suggested using DICE factors to calculate this risk. The significance of this is illustrated through a brief description of what influences this so-called calculation.

#### *2.4.2.2 Counting the cost*

Predicting the outcome of change processes is not hard when 70% are reported to fail (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990). The originators of the DICE factors, Sirken et al. (2006), claim that these four factors will predict whether or not a change management initiative will ‘fly – or die’ (Sirkin et al., 2005). Having applied them to over one thousand initiatives worldwide, they have concluded that there are no additional factors necessary, nor has the correlation been found wanting.

These factors are:

### **D – Duration**

The longer the initiative, the more likely it is to fail. Argyris (2001) as well as Kotter (1990), however, suggests that there should be no rush, as this only gives the illusion of progress. Although Kotter (1990) agrees that the momentum must be upheld, he suggests that the key is not so much the duration of the programme, but the intervals at which the programme is reviewed, which is even more critical. Milestones are therefore decisive and must be defined and monitored closely.

### **I – Integrity**

Referring to performance rather than personal integrity, the extent to which managers, team leaders and staff can be relied on to execute projects successfully is the factor in question. Often, the best performers are not included in the change teams, as regular business could potentially suffer. Talented teams are however fundamental to success and must include at least members with outstanding problem-solving skills and results-orientated individuals who are highly motivated (Kaplan & Norton, 2005).

### **C – Commitment**

Visible backing from the two most influential groups must be evident. These two groups are leaders who are not necessarily in the top echelon (Farmer, 2008; Sirkin et al., 2005) as well as those who will deal with the new system or processes. Both are essential for success.

### **E – Effort**

Company leadership must take into account that on top of existing responsibilities, the additional effort and time that must go into the change project can lead to an overstretched work force, morale will plummet and conflict could ensue, leading to failure. They advise that workloads should not increase beyond ten per cent.

This framework provides the opportunity for managers to calculate the DICE scores and predict the success of the project by making trade-offs. In their studies, Sirkin et al. (2005) found that people, including the 'obstinate' middle managers, would support change efforts in spite of the risk to their own jobs, additional work and uncertainty it causes *provided* they are given ample opportunity to give input into shaping the initiatives (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). The notion of ample opportunity and communication through numerous meetings, with short repetitive messages, is supported by some (Grout & Fisher, 2007), but is disputed by Argyris (2001), who argues that far too many meaningless meetings are held. A study into

the management experience of change in both the private and public sectors in the United Kingdom, revealed that management proposed the need for more employee involvement rather than more communication as an alternative, as the views between the levels of the organisation differed considerably (Doyle et al., 2000). Linking the change to organisational learning would support the process more effectively.

Failure to count the cost and potential risk of change processes and to make the necessary trade-offs, as suggested by Sirkin et al. (2005), inevitably leads to the well-documented exorbitantly high failure rate of these processes (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009). Specifically, the cost to the leaders themselves requires dedicated focus, as the leaders are particularly influential to each of the DICE factors.

#### *2.4.2.3 Reducing the failure rate*

Kotter's popular eight-step change model offers some insight into what needs to be done and what corresponding errors are typical in each step, subsequently leading to failure. Aside from these phases, none of which can be skipped, he suggests that the other very important lesson is to be cognisant of the considerable time change processes take (Kotter, 2007). He groups these eight steps into three phases similar to the traditional linear model proposed by Lewin (1952) of unfreeze, move and re-freeze. In Kotter's case, however, he names these corresponding phases Creating a climate for change (unfreeze), Engaging and enabling the whole organisation (move) and Implementing and sustaining change (re-freeze) (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). These eight steps and the corresponding errors (Kotter, 2007) are briefly discussed below (Kotter & Cohen, 2002):

#### ***Phase 1: Creating a climate for change***

##### *Step 1: Increase sense of urgency*

Generally, (episodic) change is embarked on because there is a business imperative to change. This burning platform must be communicated to the employees in order to create a sense of urgency to encourage them out of their comfort zones, without which the effort will go nowhere. Kotter (2007) cautions that this is not an easy step and that moving forward before the need for change is fully embraced can only lead to ineffectiveness at best.

##### *Step 2: Build the guiding team*

Often, it is only one or two people initially involved, but without enough people with power and influence, little momentum will be gained (see DICE above). The most important player is the head of the organisation, without whose active support the coalition will achieve little.

Kotter (2007) suggests that it must contain a number of the senior management but will also include others outside of the normal hierarchy, a consideration strongly supported by Farmer (2008). The sense of urgency from the first step must be carried and communicated clearly by the managerial ranks, but particularly the line manager. No matter how competent and dedicated the support executives (human resources or quality executives as an example), without the key line managers it will never achieve the impact that is necessary to drive the change throughout the organisation.

*Step 3: Get the right vision*

An easily communicated 'picture' that appeals to all stakeholders (customers, shareholders and employees) and introduces the direction that becomes clearer over time must be the guiding principle for all other initiatives, interwoven and congruent.

***Phase 2: Engaging and enabling the whole organisation***

*Step 4: Communicate for buy-in*

"Transformation is impossible unless hundreds or thousands of people are willing to help, often to the point of making short-term sacrifices" (Kotter, 2007, p. 99). Employees will not do that unless they can see and support the direction, which they help create (Levasseur, 2010), particularly if job losses are a possibility. This can only be achieved if the message is communicated often. Leaders often underestimate how often it must be repeated before it 'sinks in' (Grout & Fisher, 2007). Farmer (2008) regards this as the single biggest source of failure. Every possible means of communication must be used, not least of which is the behaviour of the leaders (Rowland & Higgs, 2008), while never forgetting that communication must always include a duality of direction (Levasseur, 2010): both up and down.

*Step 5: Empower action*

New ideas, new approaches, innovation or improvement must be encouraged within the overall parameters of the well-broadcast and publicised vision. All hindrances, even if it is people, management or processes, need to be confronted and removed. The credibility of the change and the momentum will be lost unless people are empowered to behave and perform differently and all major obstacles, of whatever form, are removed. Removing people from the 'system' is particularly difficult and is specifically an action to be taken by the leader, however difficult it may be.

### *Step 6: Create short-term wins*

The time for change to be effected can never be underestimated. When people realise it will take a long time (which not many do), urgency levels can decrease (Argyris, 2002; Kotter, 2007). In order to maintain momentum and actively create and celebrate short-term wins, the key is to implement the change in small steps recognising each step as it is taken and finding ways to celebrate and reward these successes.

### ***Phase 3: Implementing and sustaining change***

#### *Step 7: Do not let up*

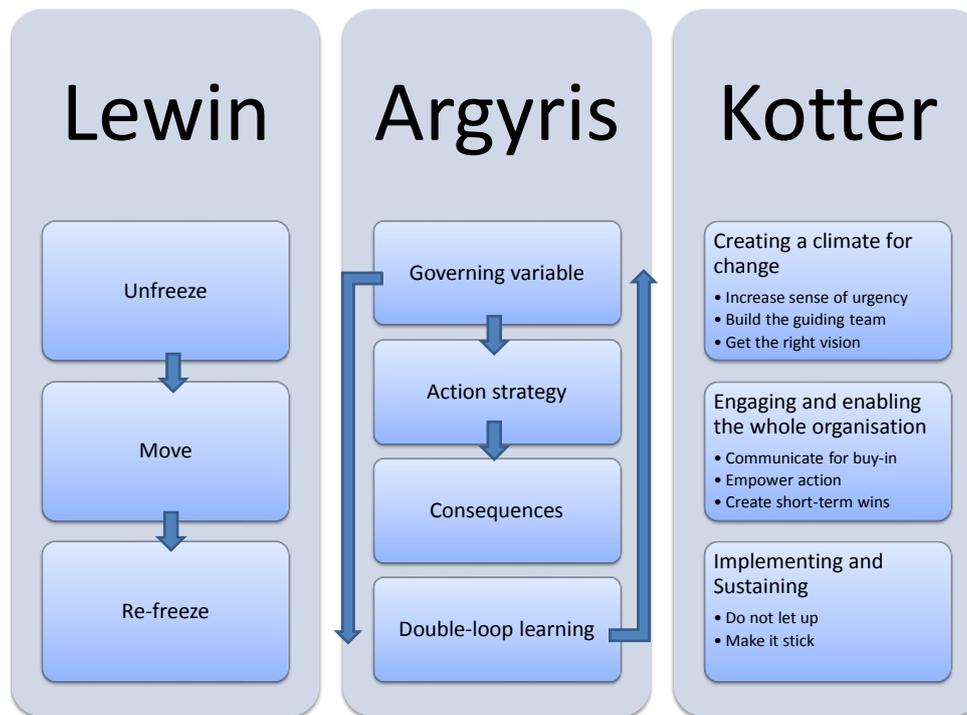
Embedding the change and changing a culture can take a long time, even up to five to ten years (Argyris, 2001; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Schein, 1990). After two or three years of useful introduction of change, victory is often declared, only to see the changes disappear. This premature victory celebration kills momentum and tradition takes over again. It cannot be overemphasised that it takes years and not months to embed change. Kotter (2007) contrastingly recommends focussing on the new, next reengineering project instead.

#### *Step 8: Make it stick*

Anchoring change requires that it becomes the 'norm', the way 'normal' things are done. Kotter (2007) suggests that making the link between the new approaches, behaviours and attitudes and improved performance must be explicitly communicated and that the next generation of top management must be selected with the transformation in mind. Promotion or selection requirements must include the mindset that promulgates the new transformation, else in as little as two years, a decade of transformation could be reversed. In spite of this, Fronda and Moriceau (2008) found that some active flag bearers offered substantial and long-term resistance, albeit often discreetly.

The three landmark models by Lewin, Argyris and Kotter can be described as the basic and most prominent developmental blocks of the family diagnostic models. The diagnostic models implicitly indicates that something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Lewin's simplistic model, although heavily criticised lately, was instrumental in the building of later models Argyris (2001). Argyris suggests Lewin's model as only a single-loop and advocates a deeper look into the cause and further reflection, which will ultimately eliminate the 'cause', leading to an iterative double-loop. Kotter, on the other hand, divides Lewin's steps into eight by including human aspects such as employees' natural resistance and promotes communication particularly to enhance buy-in and hopefully the success of implementation as a result. Though not explicitly stated, he does not show a double-loop, but also suggests

that the eight steps are not always clearly sequential and can jump back and forth until final implementation is embedded. The three models can be compared in terms of the similarity of sequence as depicted in figure 2.3 below. While Lewin only poses three steps, his 'unfreeze' can be likened to Argyris' identification of the governing variable and the action strategy while Kotters 'creating' of a climate for change could be regarded as similar to that of Lewin's unfreeze. Similarly 'action strategy and consequences' of Argyris, and Kotter's 'engaging and enabling' can broadly be regarded as Lewin's second stage of 'move'. In the same way the 're-freeze' stage of Lewin is mirrored particularly in Kotter's 'make it stick' and the 'double loop' of Argyris.



**Figure 2.3: A linear comparison of Lewin, Argyris and Kotter's models**

The next wave of development brought action research to the fore. Action research as can be inferred from its name, began more directly to involve all the participants from within the organisation.

#### 2.4.2.4 Action research model

Action research is a planned and cyclical approach to change underpinning the relevant action research models and approaches. These models provide a strong emphasis on data

gathering and diagnosis and specifically careful evaluation of results following the intervention (Levenson, 2009).

Burke and Litwin (1992) developed a model based on the theory of input-throughput-output (which could be likened to Lewin) with a feedback loop (such as Argyris) and progressed to a framework that included their experience from practice. Understanding firstly how organisations function and secondly how to deliberately change them are the cornerstones of their model, which enabled them to try to understand the causal framework. This complex model focuses on transformational and transactional dynamics and includes 12 areas of investigation, namely external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, organisational culture, structure, management practices, systems, work unit climate, task and individual skills, motivation, individual needs and values, and individual and organisational performance.

Other models, such as that of Nadler and Tushman (1999), are perhaps depicted with less complexity, but continue to see change processes less linearly than Lewin's original model (McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara, Murphy, Barker & Warrenfeltz, 2001). In contrast to traditional models, where consultants conducted most of the change activities, action research is becoming more and more participatory, with the consultant using diagnostic instruments and interventions and the organisation becoming more actively involved in the implementation (Levenson, 2009).

#### *2.4.2.5 Positive model*

All of the models discussed above focus on the organisation's desire to improve through resolving what appear to be limiting issues or challenges and to decide how best these can be resolved. With a significant departure from the deficit diagnostic model, the constant and relentless need to adapt by organisations requires a new approach that takes into account not only the how rapidly change happens but also the complexity of the stage on which it occurs, not forgetting the capriciousness of human behaviour. In addition a more general acceptance of the concept that what we imagine we can and do create is needed (Watkins et al., 2011).

A new approach to change based on social constructionism has emerged, which proposes that the language we use to describe our world and our experience is in line with the images we hold of our environment (Watkins et al., 2011). These images in turn create our reality. The criticism against the 'old' models is well documented by their own authors in the

extensive literature related to the resistance to the change efforts and ways to overcome it. Joseph Jaworski succinctly captured this concept when he said “[w]e do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe” (Jaworski, 1996, p. 178), The conclusion must then be drawn that if we describe it differently we will also get a different perhaps more desirable outcome as there will be less resistance to overcome.

Based on five principles, social constructionism being one, appreciative inquiry (AI) focuses instead on ‘the generative and life-giving forces’, that is, that which works rather than that which does not. The premise is that by focussing on images of wholeness, energy is released to make the image a reality, thus bringing about change. AI in change processes does not necessarily change the tools that are used, but the approach with which they are used, fundamentally reshaping the way organisations ‘do’ change.

To access this positive core of the organisation, positive questions must be asked. This is opposed to the deficit basis, problem identification and resolution of previous models. “Humans have a tendency to evolve in the direction of questions that are asked most often” (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 226), the value of which come in that AI will not only integrate practical change processes, but will do it with a fundamentally different paradigm of how the future is created. Inquiry and change happen simultaneously, as the seeds of a positive change experience are implicit in the way questions are constructed (Watkins et al., 2011).

AI is based on five guiding principles, which Watkins et al., (2011) list as follows:

- Constructionist principle: The way we know is fateful
- Principle of simultaneity: Change begins the moment you ask the question
- Poetic principle: Organisations are an open book
- Anticipatory principle: Deep change comes through describing the future in active images
- Positive principle: The more positive the question, the greater and longer-lasting the change

Probably the single biggest misperception of AI is the notion that it ignores what is wrong and focuses only on what is positive. Watkins et al. (2011), however, suggest that in/with AI, the problems and solutions are not separate, but that AI regard them as an integrated whole, assuming that organisations have an infinite capacity and imagination. The power of image

allows for the creation of a shared dream of where the organisation wants to go, thereby creating energy to move towards that. AI does not ignore weaknesses and threats, but rather reframes and changes focus by changing from the traditional SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results) (Watkins et al., 2011). This alternative drives very different conversations with very different language and vocabulary, the focus is on 'what could be different' rather than 'what caused the problem'.

In addition, AI claims to invite engagement, helping everyone to see and understand not only the need for change but also the new possibilities, sharing vision and contributing to the solutions while avoiding the single biggest challenge of deficit-based models, namely employee resistance (Strebel, 1996). If AI were a more popular model in a leader's toolkit, the outcomes could possibly be considerably different, not only for the organisation, but particularly for the leaders and their success in driving seemingly inevitably doomed changed processes.

***“The world we have made as a result of the level of things we have done thus far creates problems we cannot solve at the same level of thinking at which we created them” – Albert Einstein***

### **2.4.3 Change leadership**

A leader necessarily makes use of some model, theory or change practice, whether knowingly or not. How effective these models prove to be could often be as a result of their ability to lead the process. Rowland and Higgs (2008) came across leaders putting their efforts into driving change, which requires setting and selling (Fronza & Mariceau, 2008) a vision or story they believe in, which Kotter (1990) also proposes, and subsequently getting the organisation engaged by modelling behaviours as Schein (2010) suggests, thereby gaining commitment. The best way for leaders to communicate what they believe in or care about is what they systematically pay attention to, measure and control (Schein, 1985). This, Schein believes becomes a powerful communication tool, but only if it is consistently applied. Emotional outbursts, experienced as painful by those on which it is showered, will also dilute the message and hamper change.

In order to accelerate buy-in or commitment, Kahan (2010) suggests that the opportunity for people to build relationships that in turn can empower their own success is the most important way to make change happen. This he proposes should happen through

exploratory conversations with a genuine desire to broaden perceptions creating new and unique possibilities.

There is no right way to lead change (Senge, 2006), but leading change creates a demand for skills, knowledge, composure and abilities that go beyond what is normally required in a management role (Goleman, 1996; Schein, 2010). These new demands can now be regarded as a necessity even in generic management competencies and it is evident that all managers require a good understanding of change management principles (Doyle et al., 2000).

## **2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The question remains: Is it still necessary to make a distinction between change leadership and other types of organisational leaders? Due to the environmental, global and economic landscape, a state of change does certainly exist and adapting becomes the single biggest survival technique/skill/competency/attribute for organisations (Wheatley, 2006). Change management and leadership must therefore now become synonymous, with a decided need to improve 'leadership' (Farmer, 2008). Leaders now need to be able to learn about cultures, people, and most importantly about themselves. This self-learning creates a self-knowledge that precipitates self-awareness, which in turn allows for selfless leading. Encouraging others to learn, absorbing the anxiety of others and supporting them through the process becomes the key to success. Knowing what to change and how to do it is dependent, almost solely, on the leader.

Change models are helpful in this endeavour, but change is neither sequential nor linear and in the end, it is all about the people. Managing change is fundamentally about people (Sirkin et al., 2005) for whom communication and participation cannot be underestimated (Argyris, 2001). People cannot however be forced to change; they are far too complex and they will have to be on the leader's 'side' if the leader has any hope of being effective (Grout & Fisher, 2007). Leading people through the inevitably disruptive and often painful process requires a new approach and a learning leader. Perhaps the excessive focus on leadership is as a result of organisations being over-managed and under-led (Watkins et al., 2011). Change leadership appears therefore to be indispensable and its associated responsibility is the real challenge.

## CHAPTER 3

### ARTICLE

#### LEADERS: MORE CASUALTIES OF CHANGE

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### ABSTRACT

**Orientation** – The role of a leader in modern organisations is synonymous with change, which is difficult to lead and even more costly to implement, necessitating an investigation into their experiences.

**Research purpose** – This study explored the personal experiences of senior leaders who had led arduous large-scale change processes.

**Motivation for the study** – In spite of extensive research into change and change processes, little has been done to understand the experience of a leader leading and managing such processes. Understanding what the leaders' experiences are will provide a better understanding of what they go through and what needs to be done to support and aid them in that leadership, ensuring the personal cost is not too onerous and the change processes more successful.

**Research design, approach and method** – This study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the personal experience and meaning of senior leaders leading organisational change. Selected through purposive sampling (n = 7), data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

**Main findings** – Interpretive phenomenological analysis revealed that the personal cost is extreme and that many if not all of the participants were scarred by the process. This cost comes in terms of career, work-life balance and even reputation, although it provides an opportunity for personal growth. Without a malleable disposition, the already high cost

escalates to the extent that it could be life threatening. Even though prolific literature is available, shareholders particularly do not understand the time it takes to embed change that is sustainable. Without such understanding from role players, the leader carries not only the blame but also the scars of failed change.

**Practical/managerial implications** – The implications can be far-reaching if the research into the high rate of failure of change processes begins to explore the leaders' experience and what is needed to support them through the process. Potentially reducing the cost to the individual and improving the success of the organisational change if the period required is better understood will ensure that change processes are less painful and exacting to leaders in particular.

**Contribution/value-add** – Much research has been conducted on what leaders must do to support their staff through the change curve, but little is known of the leaders' own journey. The results of this study show that more needs to be done to understand this phenomenon and this will in turn contribute to a better understanding of what is needed to ensure their success in leading change, reducing the 70% failure rate and the personal cost.

**Keywords:** phenomenology; change management; change leaders; change processes; emotional intelligence; personal growth

## INTRODUCTION

There is probably little reason to doubt that the modern working world requires and demands a lot more from leaders and managers alike. There remains, however, doubt about whether the proliferation of literature, models and consultants can support them adequately through these challenging roles (Schein, 2010). Due to the increasing competitiveness imposed by globalisation, organisational adaptation is critical (Wheatley, 2006). Adaptation necessitates ongoing change, which in turn poses great challenges for organisations and their success (Chew & Choo, 2008). This adds even more pressure on leaders to lead organisations successfully (Epperson, 2006). Organisations that are unable to produce recipes for dealing with the now typical unstable environment will find sustainability illusive (Kirkbride et al., 1994).

Given the high percentage of change processes that fail, largely regarded as 70% (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009), perhaps the greater and more relevant question is whether leaders and managers are able respond to these demands and whether they have the necessary attributes to meet them. Authors such as Rowland and Higgs (2008) and Farmer (2008) place this failure rate squarely on the shoulders of leadership, with the former two authors stating that “what leaders did was the single biggest reason explaining why some changes ... were successful, and others were not” (pp. 7–8). It is therefore little wonder that Farmer (2008) suggests the need for ‘super’ managers. Understanding how leaders who drive these processes are affected through the journey has been insufficiently researched. What is covered and therefore forms the basis of the literature review is the overlapping, interrelated and occasionally interchangeable areas of research which includes change, leadership and the subsequent leading of that change. What is evident is that the organisational leader’s role becomes almost synonymous with having to continuously lead change, making the study pertinent as a means to understanding their experience and ultimately making that journey less onerous.

The aim of this article is to illustrate the findings of a phenomenological study conducted with senior leaders in a construction company, exploring their experiences of leading change in terms of driving the change into the business, what they learnt about themselves and their leadership during that process, the challenges or dilemmas they faced and finally what assisted them during that journey.

Saparnis et al. (2009) as well as Kotter (1990), among others, have shown that most people react to change in similar ways, taking them through various stages, including loss, doubt, discomfort and various others through to integration, similar to those of Kubler-Ross (Corey, 2005). The predominant focus of change management research is on the role leadership must play in implementing the change process. The leaders are responsible for the employees' journey through change, ensuring their commitment, overcoming resistance and ensuring employees embrace the change (Alas, 2008; Chew & Choo, 2008; Cilliers, 2006; Coutts, 2007; Herold et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; Kotter, 1990).

With the vast amount of literature that exists on leadership, the view of leadership within this article focuses largely on how much responsibility the literature places on leaders who initiate and drive change within organisations and makes little distinction between leadership and management. A view of change, leadership and leading change informs the discussion of the findings.

## **Change**

There are multitudes of interventions, processes or programmes that are described as 'change' within organisations. It is clear, though, that there are various types and layers (Fronza & Mariceau, 2008) of change, each presenting its own challenges (Aitken & Higgs, 2010) and demands on leadership. Various authors have named and described them differently. The most common reference to change is a deliberate effort to change or fix something within the organisation with the intention of making it better or more sustainable. Typically this 'change' in organisations refers to 'episodic' change which tends to be radical, infrequent and planned, while continuous change tends to be ongoing and cumulative over time (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Bordum, 2010). The literature covers mainly the episodic, radical or transformational change processes. This "transformational change is a large-scale event that has had an impact on the vision, work procedures and values of the company" (Kleiner & Corrigan, 1989, cited in Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006) and should be sustainable in nature. While transactional change is less disruptive and developmental (Hersey et al., 2001), it is aimed at reaching a defined and anticipated end state. Episodic of nature, it is usually planned, and according to Aitken and Higgs (2010), most organisational change research and literature cover this type of change, which Abrahamson's refers to as kludging (Abrahamson, 2000), ironically in his article entitled "Change without pain". This approach will mitigate change's potentially destructive force, creating "initiative overload and organizational chaos" (Abrahamson, 2000, p. 76). Each of these processes, whether episodic or transactional, presumes that there was some decision from a 'leader' or 'leaders'

within the organisation, with a vision of a better future who then must lead the organisation through the transition(s).

### **Leadership**

The leaders must therefore make choices on how to drive processes and the various models that are available are intended to aid in the understanding of these processes and inform the approach leaders will take in driving that change. Grout and Fisher (2007), however, found that such forethought is not necessarily prevalent. Controversially, Epperson (2006, p. 9) states that “change, in reality, cannot be managed; it must be actively led and it must be led from the top”. For purposes of this study, management and leadership are therefore seen as very similar, the latter encompassing the former, and the two terms are used interchangeably.

Reinhard (2007) groups organisational change theory literature into three categories. Firstly, theories that focus on the competencies that are specific and unique for leading change; secondly, theories on organisational culture and its readiness for change; and thirdly, strategies or models for leading organisational transformation but that to date inadequately cover the lived experiences of those leading change initiatives. Much of the academic literature on organisational change is of little help to those attempting to implement it (Young, 2009), which can be clearly seen in the well-publicised failure rate of such change (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Epperson, 2006; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009). Epperson (2006) offers that the reason models fail so often is because it is necessary for change models and processes to change as change cannot be managed, but only led. This results in a strategic paradox – where the purpose of strategic planning is to enhance control, but the modern concept of change and strategy contradict this by reducing the possibility of planning and controlling anything (Bordum, 2010) because of the rate of change within the environment (Wheatley, 2006). To facilitate and guide these processes, numerous models have been developed.

In addition to the proliferation of models and processes, there is also much written about the ‘new role of leadership’ (Schein, 2010), essential leadership practices (Rowland & Higgs, 2008), leadership competency models (Kaplan & Norton, 2005), what leaders actually do (Grout & Fisher, 2007) as well as many other angles on what leaders must ‘look like’ in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world that is chaotic, strange, and constantly changing at increasing speed (Grout & Fisher, 2007; Wheatley, 2006). Must this ‘new’ leadership be synonymous with change leadership, or, given the new world, are the leaders of today change leaders, or *should* they necessarily be change leaders? Yukl (2002, p. 438) answers the question by

explaining that leading change “is the essence of leadership and everything else is secondary”. The term ‘leadership’ itself is one that has multiple definitions, whether theories of trait based leaderships, behavioural or situational, the ‘new’ leader in the modern organisation must ensure growth, not only of the business but also themselves (Yukl, 2002).

One of the most effective ways to improve business results is to begin to implement new business practices and this is contingent on learning new ways of looking at the business, but more importantly, the leaders must be prepared to learn new things about themselves, their relationships and interactions with others. The significance of self-awareness was highlighted by Schein (1985) and was subsequently brought into vogue, coined as ‘emotional intelligence’ (Aitken & Higgs, 2010). Various models have been developed with varying components. Goleman (2000) lists self-awareness, self-regulation or management, motivation, empathy (motivation and empathy are also described as social awareness) and social skill (Goleman, 2004). In their article titled “Primal leadership: The hidden driver of great performance” (Goleman et al., 2001), the authors suggest that with their five-part process, leaders can improve their emotional intelligence, making a tangible difference to their impact on, and effectiveness in leading change. They conclude that the reason emotional intelligence matters so much is that it enables the leaders to monitor their own moods and emotions (self-awareness) and to adapt their behaviour by understanding their emotions in order to enhance relationship management.

Without the ability to manage relationships (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Kahan, 2010; Rowland & Higgs, 2008; Schein, 2010) and groups across different cultures both within organisations and globally, including across hierarchical and occupational boundaries, leaders are unlikely to bring about the desired change. It is therefore clear that change management or leadership is needed in order to effect organisational or cultural change. A new set or extended set of attributes are required. Self-knowledge and awareness, propagated by Collins (2001), Schein (2010), Senge (2006) and Goleman (1996), are therefore perhaps the most important qualities a leader *must* have to be effective in leading change. However, Goleman cautions that they are not the only pre-requisites, but that they have been found to be “twice as important” (Goleman, 2004, p. 84) as the entry-level requirements of traditional intelligence and technical skills for executive positions.

### **Leading Change**

With this self-knowledge and awareness, leaders must consider that change is fundamentally about people (Farmer, 2008; Kane, 2005), motivating and influencing change

of behaviour with a critical ingredient being leadership itself. This is an onerous task for which there is no place for failed leaders to hide (Farmer, 2008). It can be so disruptive that it can literally tear organisations to pieces (Abrahamson, 2000), particularly because people naturally prefer the status quo (Rowland & Higgs, 2008). This messy (Saka, 2003), chaotic process can be so painful that it can almost be described as instilling 'terror' (Essers et al., 2009). Without a 'burning platform' (Kotter, 1990) being clearly communicated in order to convince employees and even management that change is necessary, few, if any, will 'move'. Ron Dennis (2006, cited in Grout & Fisher, 2007) suggests that the very reason change programmes fail is because following the formation of a complex change model, management forget that people are equally complex.

In conducting a review of change management literature, Epperson (2006) found that change management practices and methodological frameworks, while abundant, remain inadequate to meet the demands of leading change in organisations. Lewin's change model has formed the prevailing model for many decades (Aitken & Higgs, 2010), even though further development by numerous writers abound (Argyris, 2001). Argyris (2001) suggests that this simplistic model has several gaps. These gaps include the assumption that people firstly have the skills to learn new behaviour or at least the skill to learn new skills. Secondly, the assumption is that people are largely oblivious to their own lack of their own desired skill, a state that he claims may be automatic.

Argyris (2001) goes on to highlight the time it takes to plan, let alone implement, change, a statement Kotter (1990) reiterates and emphasises. To rush the process will only lead to an illusion of progress, as people will take all the time they need to ask questions, position themselves politically, and develop means to protect themselves, even with seemingly necessary escape routes. It is clear that leaders need a new set of capabilities and skills. The impact, demands and cost to the organisations as well as employees can be excessive. These new capabilities will enable the leader to better lead, ensuring a higher rate of success and reducing even the costly impact on the leaders themselves.

### *Reducing the failure rate*

Kotter's popular eight-step change model offers some insight into both what needs to be done and what corresponding errors are typical in each step, subsequently leading to failure. Aside from these phases, none of which can be skipped, he suggests that the other very important lesson is to be cognisant of the considerable time change processes take (Kotter, 2007). He groups these eight steps into three phases similar to the traditional linear model

proposed by Lewin (Lewin, 1952; Shinseki, 2002) of unfreeze, move and re-freeze. In Kotter's case, however, he names these corresponding phases Creating a climate for change (unfreeze), Engaging and enabling the whole organisation (move) and Implementing and sustaining change (re-freeze) (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

In contrast to traditional models, where consultants conducted most of the change activities, action research is becoming more and more participatory, with the consultant using diagnostic instruments and interventions and the organisation becoming more actively involved in the implementation (Levenson, 2009).

The models discussed above focus on the organisation's desire to improve through resolving what appear to be limiting issues or challenges and to decide how best these can be resolved. With a significant departure from the deficit diagnostic model, the constant and relentless need to adapt by organisations requires a new approach that takes into account not only the "speed of change, the complexity of the environment, ....[but also] the unpredictability of human behaviour" (Watkins et al., 2011).

### *Positive model*

The biggest stumbling block to change is often regarded as the resistance of employees at various levels (Herzig, & Jimmieson, 2006; Kane, 2005; Kaplan & Norton, 2005). A new approach to change, based on social constructionism is emerging, which proposes that the language we use to describe our world and our experience is in line with the images we hold of our environment (Watkins et al., 2011). These images in turn create our reality. The criticism against the 'old' models is well documented by their own authors in the extensive literature related to the resistance to the change efforts and ways to overcome it. Based on five principles, social constructionism being one, appreciative inquiry (AI) focuses instead on 'the generative and life-giving forces', that is, that which works rather than that which does not. The premise is that by focussing on images of wholeness, energy is released to make the image a reality, thus bringing about change avoiding resistance in the first place. AI in change processes does not necessarily change the tools that are used, but the approach with which they are used, fundamentally reshaping the way organisation 'do' change.

To access this positive core of the organisation, positive questions must be asked. This approach is followed, as opposed to the deficit basis, problem identification and resolution approach of previous models. "Humans have a tendency to evolve in the direction of questions that are asked" (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 226), the value of which comes

specifically in that AI will not only integrate practical change processes, but will do it with this fundamentally different paradigm of how the future is created. Inquiry and change happen simultaneously, as the seeds of change are implicit in the very questions we ask (Watkins et al., 2003).

Although there is no 'right way' to lead change (Senge, 2006), leading change certainly creates a demand for skills, knowledge, composure and abilities that go beyond what is normally required in a management role (Goleman, 1996; Schein, 2010). These can now be regarded as generic management competence and it is evident that all managers require a good understanding of change management principles (Doyle et al., 2000)

Change management and leadership can therefore be regarded as synonymous. Leaders now need to be able to learn about cultures, people, and most importantly about themselves. This self-learning creates a self-knowledge that precipitates self-awareness, which in turn allows for selfless leading. Encouraging others to learn, absorbing the anxiety of others and supporting them through the process becomes the key to success. Knowing what to change and how to do it is dependent, almost solely, on the leader.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

It is often assumed that leaders who drive change have initiated, and therefore embrace as well as support, its implementation. According to Saparnis et al. (2009), change is however often enforced through strategic necessity or other environmental factors and the assumed support is not necessarily the reality

### **Research purpose**

This study specifically sought to highlight some of the experiences of leaders themselves. To simultaneously narrow and deepen the focus, an interview schedule was loosely applied:

- How did you find leading a change process?
- What did you learn about yourself or your leadership during the process?
- What challenges or personal dilemmas did the change process pose for you as an individual?
- What assisted you during your personal change journey, making the experience meaningful?

## **Research approach**

In order to understand the phenomenon of the experience of senior construction leaders driving a change process, an interpretative paradigm is necessary to provide plausible and reasonable insights (Goleman, 2000; Terre Blanche, Kelly et al., 2006). The interviews focussed on the participants' experiences and the meaning they derived from these experiences. Semi-structured, conversational-style interviews were held individually with each participant at a time and place convenient for them and were therefore qualitative in nature. These interviews afforded each of these senior leaders the opportunity not only to articulate their personal experiences of driving organisational change, what challenges they faced and how they coped with them, but also what they learnt about themselves through the process.

## **Research strategy**

The phenomenological study focuses on two aspects of the phenomenon, namely what it is the leaders experienced (noema) and how they experienced it in terms of the meaning they ascribe to it as well as the associated feelings, values and perceptions thereof (noesis) (King & Horrocks, 2010). In-depth interviews utilising a semi-structured interview schedule (Angrosino, 2007) consisting of four open-ended questions were utilised (indicated above). The four questions formed the basis of the interview schedule and provided an overall guide to focus rather than restrict the data gathering. This allowed the researcher to explore in detail, through various probing techniques (King & Horrocks, 2010), the issues of interest, and afforded participants the liberty of fully conveying the extent and complexity of their experiences, which enhanced and enriched the quality of the data.

The questions were constructed neutrally to ensure no bias or leading, even though the participants were relatively homogenous in terms of race, gender, age, experience and academic background.

The research instrument in this complex organisational structure, as an insider, proved invaluable, as the participants were soon aware that the researcher was intimately familiar with the environment and not ignorant of the context or jargon of the topic or context at hand. This facilitated the gathering of relevant data, allowing for an interview focussed on the phenomenon and the researcher not having to interrupt in order to understand the complex and dynamic context.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Research setting*

The study was set within a large multi-discipline construction company consisting of over 15 000 employees, arranged by discipline into various business units. The sector chosen for this study is technical by nature and was just emerging from a boom period at the time of the study. Although multi-national, the company is South African-based and all the participants were of advantaged South African origin and did not include any other nationals or a diverse group of leaders.

### *Sampling*

The researcher as an insider had easy access to the participants, who were members of senior management having led their own large business units (in total in excess of R1.5 billion turnover). The organisation employs approximately 15 000 people with each business unit conducting its own change processes to various degrees as well as a consolidated change effort to bring the siloed business into a more congruous organisation over the past three years (since 2008).

The researcher, having special knowledge of the context and personal knowledge of the organisation and the influential role players, their roles and positions (Bergh & Theron, 2000), used purposeful sampling (Durrheim & Painter, 2006) to select leaders who headed up a business unit or who specifically had a strategic role of heading the change process within the organisation. This included the managing director who presented the most relevant sample of having experienced the phenomenon under investigation. This resulted in selection through 'subjective' criteria set by the researcher. The relatively homogenous samples biographical details are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1: Biographical profile of the participants**

	<b>Profile</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	0	0%
	Male	7	100%
<b>Race</b>	White	7	100%
	Other	0	0%
<b>Age</b>	46–55	5	57%
	56–65	2	29%
<b>Level of qualification*</b>	NQF 8	3	43%
	NQF 7	3	43%
	NQF 6	1	14%
<b>Currently studying formally</b>	Yes	2	29%
	No	5	71%
<b>Tenure in position</b>	< 4 years	6	86%
	> 4 years	1	14%
<b>Tenure with company</b>	15–20 years	1	14%
	20–25 years	2	29%
	25–30 years	0	0%
	30–35 years	4	57%
<b>Tenure concluded</b>	Yes	6	86%
	No	1	14%

\*Based on the revised National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No 67 of 2008

As presented in the table above, these seven leaders represented a largely homogenous group of white men aged between 46 and 65, all with similar technical training backgrounds either at university or technikons in South Africa and all holding (or having recently held) similar positions within the organisation in the F lower to F upper levels of the Paterson grading bands, which are described as Policy decisions and Coordinating policy decisions respectively.

### *Data-collection methods*

The sample was invited by e-mail and/or telephone to participate and willing participants were interviewed following receipt of an introductory letter of information and informed consent.

### *Recording of data*

King and Horrocks (2010) warn that participants of 'high status' could be difficult to interview, as they are accustomed to being in control of their interactions with others. The interviews were therefore conducted in a place of their choosing to ensure their own feelings of comfort and safety at venues and times suitable to the participants and were recorded with informed consent. This also ensured the least disruption to their busy schedules. On average, each interview was rescheduled at least twice and with one participant four times.

The purpose of the interview was reiterated at the start of the interview, as the personal nature of the discussion needed to be understood by the participants before the commencement, particularly as the researcher was an insider, and information shared could make them feel vulnerable in interactions in the future. As an insider, the potentially added vulnerability was mitigated by explaining the extent of the confidentiality, gaining permission to record the interview and explaining what and how the information would be used and disseminated. The building of rapport formed an integral and indispensable part of enabling the participants to share openly and honestly.

### *Data analyses*

An independent transcriber was utilised to ensure the purity of the data, who was also required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 3 Transcriber's confidentiality agreement). Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Once recorded and transcribed, an iterative process was followed, initially to get a sense of the whole, paying only a casual attention to the content. The text was then divided into meaning units to expose the psychological meaning of experience, mindful of the phenomenon being studied (Ashworth & Chung, 2006). This process was conducted for a single text, producing some preliminary themes through mind mapping, clustering and grouping for application and review in the ensuing texts.

The task was then to understand the meaning of the units and to repackage it. This allowed for a full description of the nuances of the experiences, culminating in transformed meaning units (Ashworth & Chung, 2006).

### Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Internal credibility was ensured by presenting the findings in the form of a mind map (a sample is shown in below Figure 3.1) and presenting the interview transcript to four of the participants for ratification (Babbie, 2010) to ensure the elimination of any mistaken or inaccurate interpretations or misunderstandings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Supervisor and peer review also supported the credibility of the study. This entailed discussions regarding process and congruency of emerging findings and tentative interpretations (Shah & Corley, 2006).

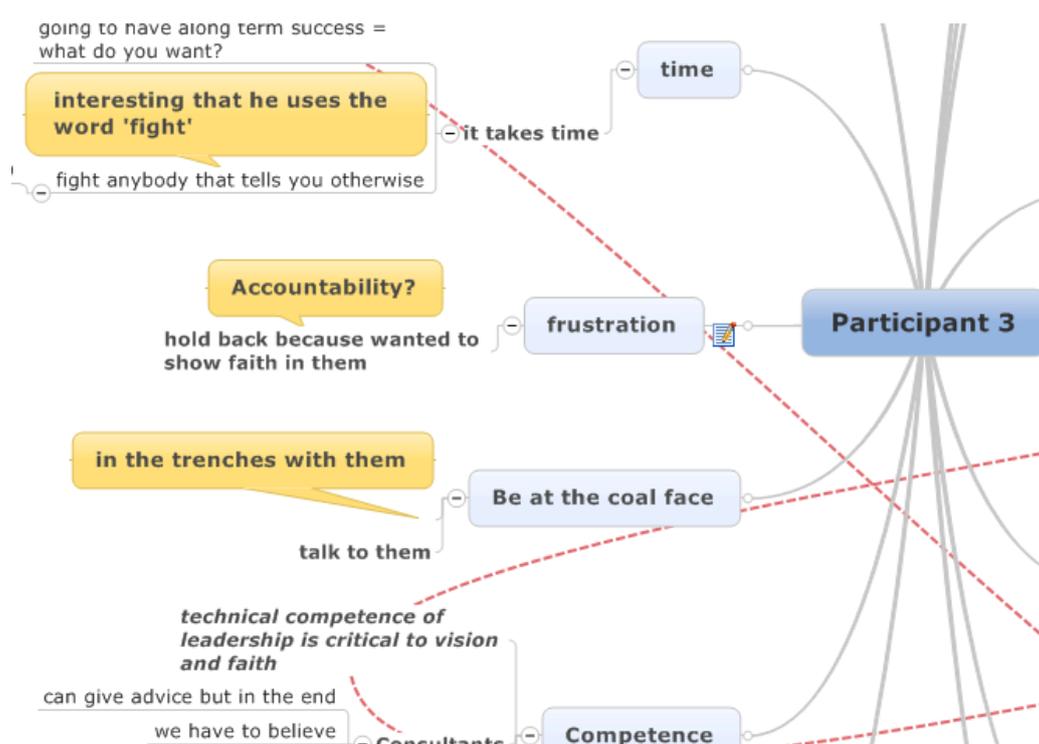


Figure 3.1: Analysis of transcripts in mind map format

An all-inclusive register of the data, how it was collected and what meanings were interpreted were noted. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were typed soon after the interview to ensure nuances and other observations were correlated with the text before the connections had been forgotten or confused. A reflexive journal (Shah & Corley, 2006) documented possible bias as well as notes to ensure that the ongoing data analysis was captured without forgetfulness and selective memory impacting the study through loss of data. These observations were noted during the interview and notes were made of any decisions to change the approach or questions during the interviews. Even e-mails and

correspondence regarding the setting up of the interviews were retained to ensure an accurate record of contacts and the interviews that took place.

The interviews were conducted with all participants within a two-month period to ensure that observations occur during the same 'space' of the change process, thereby eliminating any possible influence of longitudinal effects (Babbie, 2010).

Discussions with participants were held to discuss the provisional themes as part of member checking and ensuring credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These discussions were always in thematic terms and the researcher was always careful not to reveal, indicate or imply personal information or experiences of any participants to each other or others. The analysis process was conducted in a safe and confidential environment with discussions limited to the supervisor and then only in terms of the process of analysis and emerging themes. In this way, control over access to the data was ensured and the data were confidentially managed and analysed, fulfilling the stringent commitment made to the participants.

### *Reporting*

The findings were reported through translating the participants' words to theoretical language and concepts. The verbatim quotes from the participants were used to substantiate the themes and their relevant sub-themes and were confirmed in the discussion with literature references.

## **FINDINGS**

During each interview, which followed a very loosely semi-structured outline, the participants were asked to respond to four questions, but these were asked as and when the interview allowed and followed a path set by the participants in response to an initial overview of the study described during the invitation and repeated during commencement of the interview. These questions related to:

- their experience of leading a change process within their own business;
- what they learnt through that experience about themselves (but not limited to this);
- what was the most challenging and what dilemmas they faced; and
- what supported or aided them through the journey.

Over the past four to five years, the company has attempted a number of change processes to varying degrees of success and failure. The need for these processes was often not seen from within the business, but as the company lagged its competitors in terms of profitability and together with other external forces, it had become a necessity, understood but not necessarily embraced by the participants. One participant commented the following in terms of the necessity for such large-scale change:

*“maybe it's people's inclination not to change and therefore you stay as you are and ..... the need to change grows and if you slow to change or you stagnate as a company the quantity of change subsequently required is massive, so learning is that a leader needs to really understand and re-evaluate at all times where to go to and ... deal with change in many small steps rather than driving organisational change, that in itself maybe you've already got behind the eight ball”.*

Each business unit had gone through some form of its own change process as well as a consolidated overarching process (see Figure 3.3 for an overview of the multiple processes across the organisation). These were, to various degrees, coming to an end at the time of the interviews and a single, new, revised ‘big change’ began yet again in early 2012 and was still in process at the time of this article.

During the initial stages of the analysis, while reading both the transcripts and field notes, I noticed that most of the participants had their own theme within their interview. Irrespective of the focus of the question, whether on their own learning or growth, what came naturally and was therefore easier or most challenging seemed to be a ‘pet’ topic, which continuously re-emerged.

### **Participant 1 – Un-readiness**

The dominant theme for Participant 1 was an overwhelming sense of un-readiness. He felt strongly that particularly in this industry, managers and senior leaders are not prepared through development or training for the leadership role at business leader level. Promotions of technically competent individuals usually lead to promotions into roles for which no preparation has been accrued. This led to his overriding feelings of inadequacy and a sense of failure (*“I tried ... for two years, ... but I couldn't”*), blame (*“I blame it on”*) and reluctance, which in turn contributed to a mood disorder, and subsequently stepping out of the role and eventually out of the organisation. His own feelings bordered on despair:

*“... in terms of your development, I mean there has been absolutely nothing, ... there is no leadership development plan, ... they’ll tell you ... there’s a pipeline, there’s this, there’s that, but it is a lot of nonsense.”*

The conclusion can thus be made that the leaders in this environment are not prepared to manage businesses in a fast-changing world.

Other participants seemed to agree that there was little organisational support for development although they may have responded differently, such as the following participant:

*“[The company] didn’t have any support for, ... things like that.”*

### **Participant 2 – Overwhelmed by the number of priorities**

Two things repeatedly came up with this participant: the first being multiple processes and initiatives and the resultant needs to prioritise or focus rather than trying to do all simultaneously. This was supported by others with statements such as the following:

*“I don’t know if anyone ever managed to balance it ... people who over-committed had distinct operational losses ... but over-energising change causes huge harm and maybe that’s rushing.”*

*“The other thing that would be great is if you can focus on one thing and get that done.”*

The second was about balance, referring not only to the number of things occurring at work but also personally. He mentions looking after one’s health and family and stated the following in terms of work:

*“... it also drives you to, try and be better at the management than the other things. And then I guess you know the other things that you need to make your mind up about and to learn ..[is that] you’ve got to balance the stuff.”*

He suggested that balancing health and family are prerequisites, *“because if you haven’t sorted the first two you can’t do the third one [work]”*.

He appeared to be coping quite well, but came back to these two issues without prompts and almost against the flow of the conversation.

### **Participant 3 - Faith**

The challenges in terms of leadership, for which this participant initially felt ill-equipped, excited him and the recurring idea for him was instilling faith in his people by having faith in himself, his own ability and especially those of others. His first statement, “*literally by the seat of my pants*”, is how he describes how he managed change the first few times – by what his “*gut and brain*” told him to do.

Being able to meet the challenges and variety (in terms of county, culture and currency) that naturally face senior leaders also seems to be something that came naturally and is, he feels, a pre-requisite for success.

*“I was looking for a challenge, another challenge... I said I’m happy to stay here and I’m happy because you guys are paying me a hell of a lot of money to play golf and manage your business for you and I’m quite happy to do it. But I’m telling you now that I’m looking for another challenge.”*

This thought was also expressed by another participant, who said the following:

Referencing two other participants he felt that they ....“*had the advantage*” because of the challenge and variety they were exposed to..

He philosophically concluded:

*“It comes down pure and simple to self-confidence in your own ability. So if you don’t have that confidence then you don’t want to change anything because then I’m out of that zone and what am I going to do, you start to shake here a bit. I [and other participants he mentions by name] by the way have had the advantage, [of variety] I would never have stayed with this company if it hadn’t been for variety.”*

In contrast, another participant who felt he had not succeeded, as supported by his statement that “*I didn’t have the confidence that I could do this, I really didn’t know what to do*”. This participant subsequently left the organisation.

Participant 3 described his approach as one of inclusivity and empowerment, instilling trust and faith in his people and offering them the opportunity to describe the way forward while taking great personal risk in protecting and defending their change plans, typical of

appreciative inquiry which he instinctively and unwittingly applied. He applied 'positive psychology' approach by leading his team to determine the vision of where the company needed to go, even though many thought they were "mad". He continuously refers to "we" and how they made calculated risks and did things, never himself in isolation other than getting them together. His personal theme emerged a few minutes into the interview where faith in himself, faith in his people and giving them faith in themselves come to light. His biggest frustration emanated from this too. In order to show faith in his people, he often had to hold back his frustration with them in order to build that faith.

Empowerment of the people was pervasive throughout the interview "*bring them along on the journey*". Although he emphasised that firstly he had to believe in himself and know when he needed help. In order to gain their trust he believed in them blindly and took great personal risk in "*battling for them*". "*I had to believe that they did have the capability and I had to put a bit of faith in that*". This gave them a much needed glimmer of hope while simultaneously doing the extremely difficult task of laying off employees. All participants agreed that getting rid of people was the hardest of all the tasks required in a change process "*I suppose the hardest thing is that I had to....get rid of some people*", particularly when their values were not aligned "*it was attitude and it was their values [that] were different, their values weren't right..... it's part of those values that you got ... or those beliefs that you've got to hold on to because if you start compromising that ... I think you will lose the trust of the guys around you*". For this participant that value was truthfulness, which he insisted on "*we're not going to fire you if you tell us the truth, we are going to fire you if you lie to us*".

He backed his instincts to the extent that he was prepared to "*hand in his keys*", but he always backed up his reasoning and was prepared to "*fight*" anybody, even his boss, in order to maintain trust – something for which you also need technical competence. He regards such competence as critical to "*vision and faith*", while showing an interest in what employees are going through and being there "*in the rain*", asking what they need and taking it to them: "*yes you've got programmes and you've got quality and all those good things but it's only the people that get that right*".

He wanted the challenge and his positively deviant behaviour in having "*faith*" (a word he used 17 times during the interview) in his people proved successful, as he was one of the only 'causalities' to leave on his own terms. While believing in his people, he had to "*fight*" for them or his projects against "*them*" – a word he uses several times. This appears to have led to success and feelings of achievement.

#### **Participant 4 – Personal growth**

For Participant 4, this process brought significant personal growth and focus on learning. His openness to learning about himself as well as allowing and encouraging others to learn was significant. He found Kolb's learning cycle and specifically the 'reflection phase' very meaningful. He discovered,

*“that you need to change as a leader yourself, in order to get this done ... a watershed moment, and I was like, oops okay, so now I actually have to do something here .....for myself, and then I had to embark on a whole self-development thing”.*

Simultaneously, he highlighted how little understanding there is for change processes in terms of the time, difficulty and personal cost, and the lack of reward as a result of this understanding was also an annoyance for him. There seemed to be no recognition, no reward and no acknowledgement or understanding of any of these, which is discussed in more detail as a specific theme, under the Cross-section theme “Lack of recognition and reward”.

#### **Participant 5 – It's tough**

Participant 5 continuously referred to how tough the job of leading an organisation was. He felt it was the toughest of all jobs, *“the toughest in Johannesburg”*. He found it to be *“lonely”* and it also took its toll on his health. He expressed his feelings as follows: it was literally *“finishing [him] off”*; *“it's gotten too much for me”* and *“it then becomes hard and exceptionally lonely, it becomes exceptionally hard and complicated”*.

Another participant agrees that having *“done research on change”*, he has found that *“it's far more difficult to do than anything else”*.

#### **Participant 6 – Unity of leadership**

*“Unity of leadership”* is key, as throughout the entire organisation, culture, belief, values and thought must be aligned with each other in terms of the vision and course of action or else conflict (and possibly failure) is inevitable. This participant stated the following:

*“behind change there needs to be unity in the leadership structure to ensure change is successful and leadership structure starts at the very top of the organisation [the shareholders]”.*

*“different paths mean conflict and you also have your own behaviours, ... different agendas, distrust so already we are dealing here a lot with the speed of trust and loss of trust, private agendas, all those sorts of things would be very damaging to change. So there’s got to be unity of thought as a background to change unity, and change.”*

This vision must be embraced by the people as well, not only leadership, and only then can the course of action be determined. This participant stated that one must be absolutely sure that that is where one wants to go and *“hang your jacket on it”*, and elaborated that how one is going to get there must be very carefully plotted because changing course or *“tack”* along the way is very, very costly. He stated that the *“stepping stones”* must be carefully plotted and thought through and that one must be prepared to *“stand in the wind”* – one must stick to it.

The dominant theme is on the ‘how’ of change. Having the vision is one thing, but here leadership must be aligned and the people must embrace it. Once that is done, one must keep on track. Leaders should plot the path carefully (stepping stones), thoughtfully and inclusively, because changing that path later is extremely damaging.

### **Participant 7 – Competence and young talent**

According to Participant 7, getting rid of old thinkers, while extremely tough on one as a leader, is probably the key to success. Culling those who are not competent is crucial to any change process, as it is these people who will hijack it in the long run because their incompetence prevents them from supporting anything that will expose their comfortable hiding place. This participant referred to these thinkers as *“some old dogs, if I can use the word in the best possible way, who were close to retirement”*. Their covert resistance is very difficult to deal with and should therefore not be left to eat away at the changes intended for the benefit of the business and the people in it. This lonely process takes an inordinate amount of time and takes a huge toll on one personally in terms of balance between personal and business life, but ruthlessness is essential, which was his biggest learning:

*“But that was huge learning ... I think what it really highlighted to me was ... if I ever had to take part in something like that again that you really have to be ruthless.”*

Having young bright new blood is important to ensure the business moves forward. Participant 7 stated the following:

*“where it really came to the fore was by allowing younger, smarter people to come through, it highlighted the incompetence of other people,”*

*“If you brought through a couple of younger, smarter.....people, we were doing lots of work but we still had the old guard floating around which is why I come back to what I said earlier, could have dumped them, boom, would have made a huge difference, so you had this, this turmoil between the old and new people,”*

*“You have to fire half ... and today I think a lot of those no’s are gone but few of them are still there and people are still saying to me they can’t understand it, everyone else is leaving but these people are still here.”*

**Cross-sectional themes**

Having analysed each of the participants transcripts the cross section themes that emerged were grouped and can be depicted in tabular as shown below in Figure 3.2.

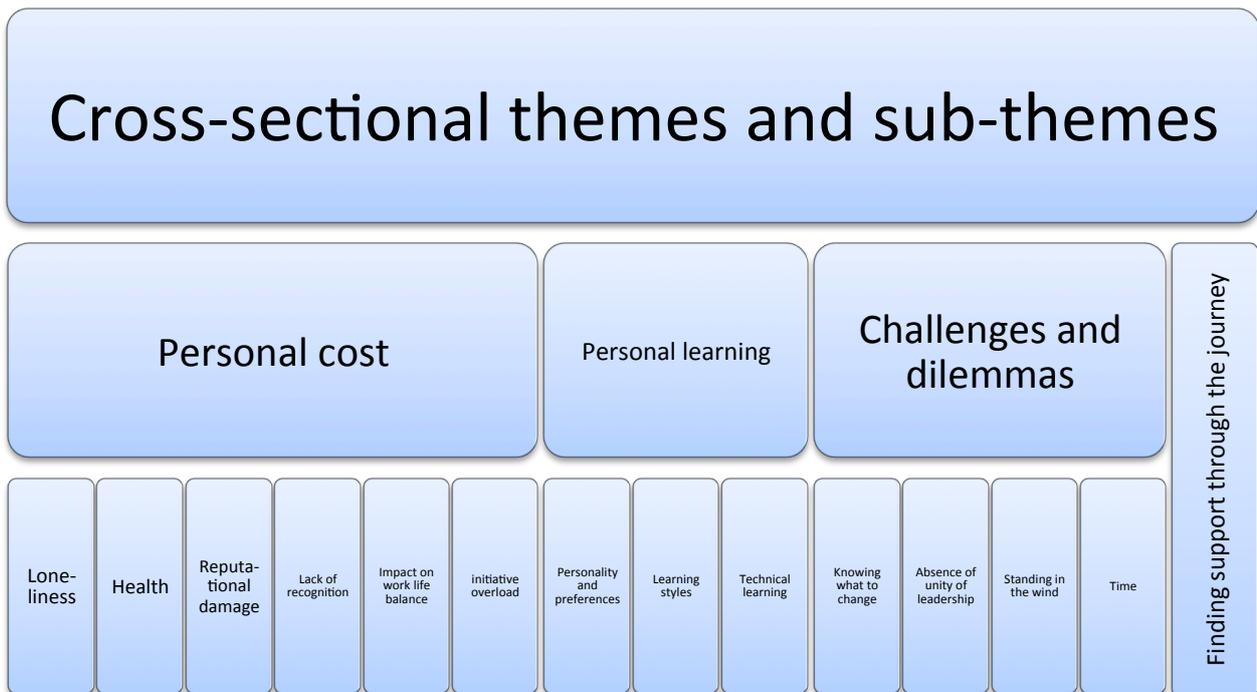


Figure 3.2: Cross-sectional themes from the data

## Personal cost

The most prevalent theme was undoubtedly the sense of personal cost, which revealed itself in terms of health, career and reputation. Some losses were of a more technical nature, but there was only a single mention of this.

### *Loneliness and pain*

The greater cost came in terms of relationships: “*Some of the guys that might have been your friends are no longer your friends*”, as ‘loneliness’ or feelings of being alone ‘against’ either the employees or the shareholders in protection of the employees “*actually made you ended up quite lonely*”. Other statements supporting this included:

*“I guess it was lonely, lonely place again”*

*“it’s lonely”,*

*“it then becomes hard and exceptionally lonely”*

*“that’s quite a lonely position to be in”*

Such feelings can naturally be quite painful:

*“Because I find it too painful”*

*“why change it at the cost of personnel, this question of headcount reduction, I mean you know, I know thousands of people in this business and to stand up and say to him, [or] her you going to have to look for something else, why do that I mean, why do that?”.*

The personal pain of reducing staff and having to let people go was unanimously regarded as the toughest “*and most traumatic of all*”, because getting rid “*of some people, that wasn’t very pleasant*”. Some even regretted the perception this created about them, as they were regarded as hard, callous and unfeeling (“*the thing that upset me quite a lot was people just thought that I had absolutely no feeling*”) but felt that they were not. Having honest conversations and having to make the tough decision, while a necessity, remains very hard to do, but “*you really have to be ruthless*” – a strong word used by two participants, because they “*keep thinking about ... bloody wives and children and dependants and all of that sort of nonsense you know and, you can’t do that in business ... you got to be very, very ruthless*”.

### *Health*

Four of the participants reported health or psychological issues as a result of the demands of leading change:

*“[The organisation] never tells you that you’re going to damage yourself and burn out and forget that you should have a life, they’re not going to tell you that because it’s not in their [the shareholder’s] interest to tell you.”*

Leaving the organisation shortly (within the next month), one participant added that he thought he *“would run out of steam”, “you know I was all over the place, all over the place”,* while another who had recently left at the time of the interview claimed *“it took me two months to actually figure out what, where I was in the world and to realise what the business had sucked out of me for the last few years ... and it was life threatening actually I’ll tell you that much”* or even more dramatically *“because emotionally it’ll kill you”*. Another participant shared that he now had *“high blood pressure at a stage I was at you know, I went on to Ciprallex, mood stabilisers, ... I was actually in quite a deep depression”* and still another shared that *“at a point in this [change] process I went to see a cognitive therapist and said that I was battling with things”*.

One participant concluded that *“this change process could have been done differently and there wouldn’t have been the huge personal cost”*.

#### *Reputational damage*

In addition to the physical and emotional damage, leaders will and should voice their concerns about the direction the company is taking. This can be seen in a negative light and brings with it reputational damage, as they are seen as trouble makers or not supportive of the process, as explained by one participant:

*“... the dilemma between having to tow the line and not tow the line and being seen to be obstructive perhaps because of a lack of understanding of what you trying to do here” ... “I was a bit of a black sheep in trying to hold the middle line”*.

With these ‘labels’ (one participant referring to another outspoken participant as .... *“one rotten apple is enough”*), reputational damage is incurred and the leader can even be worked out of the organisation, short-circuiting careers and causing reputational damage in a very small industry. In response to being asked how far he should stick his neck out, a participant answered:

*“you know more recently watching some of the change that has been done ... attempted ... and knowing from my experience that it’s not going to work and you know just quite how far do you take it?”*

One participant stated, *“I’ve always gone to projects that were in trouble, and fixed them”*; however, while being sent in to ‘fix’ problem businesses and contracts because he is a natural *“change leader”*, he subsequently became associated with problem businesses by the very people who sent him to fix them. *“But now when the change is finished what does that mean for me, where am I sitting right now? I have no idea, you know.”*

#### *Lack of recognition and reward*

One participant felt very strongly that he had been taken advantage of and had been used and that the appropriate rewards and recognition were not given, largely due to a *“total lack of understanding”* of what the role of the leader requires, but also how it impacts the business. He described the problem as follows:

*“... through all of this you’re not getting credit for anything”* [specifically in] *“the leadership position ... [you should not] expect accolades, accolades come very few and far between”*.

In contrast, another participant felt that *“there is absolute recognition from up the line”* but contradicts his own statement later by saying *“you’ve got to have such strong conviction that you’re doing the right thing because at the end of the day the recognition for change is primarily negative”* [with a] *“certain amount of resentment build[ing up]”*.

#### *Impact on work-life balance*

Six of the seven participants mentioned how their work-life balance was disrupted, as change takes not only many extra hours in a day but also takes a very long time (years) to complete, something which nobody seems to understand. One participant described it as follows:

*“it must have taken three days a week at least ... you’ve got to balance the stuff – you can very quickly lose [the work life balance], working all the time ... with everyone demanding a piece of you.”*

Reflecting on his journey, one participant suggested that *“there needs to be a much bigger understanding for a work-life balance because ... the amount of time one spends trying to drive something that is not going to work anyway or it’s going to take the time that it takes, you can’t make it go quicker”*. The desire is *“to spend more time thinking and I would spend more time delegating and more time checking up”*. This results in little time for thinking,

reflecting and planning during the working day, “so the only time I’ve got to physically sit down and read, do work and that is at night”, which is difficult because “allowing time to reflect, observe, change, those Kolb cycle elements takes time”.

One participant stated:

*“There’s overload at work then there’s another side, there’s family and friends and, and you get to a point where you actually have to say to yourself what am I doing here? What am I doing?”*

Another participant’s therapist commented “you know normally when I deal with a client I would talk about a work-life balance ... She said there’s no point in me talking to you about a work-life balance because you’ve got no life.”

Still another participant commented:

*“It also requires you to prioritise stuff. It requires you to delegate if you can and it also requires you to just plainly ignore some other things which other people really don’t enjoy but you have to” – this to make time for other things, allowing for more balance in his life.*

#### *Initiative overload*

Three participants wondered whether too much was attempted at once.

*“If you can focus on one thing and get that done [then] deal with change in many small steps rather than driving organisational change.”*

*“People who over-committed ... had distinct operational losses and other operational losses. Rushing the change ... didn’t produce the outcomes ... over-energising change causes huge harm and maybe that’s rushing ... maybe in retrospect we tried too much too soon”.*

*“I mean jumping from one form of change to another and then to another sort of had a ping-pong ball effect.”* (See Figure 3.3 for the number of change processes.)

#### **Personal learning and growth**

A little reticent about sharing personal growth, the areas that were highlighted included learning about their own personalities, preferences and styles, secondly about their learning

styles and finally some 'technical' learnings regarding change management and other skills required for leading a business through change. The fundamental key was however being open to learn in the first place

*"and open[ing] yourself up to learn from everyone ... whether it's the driver or the tea lady or a person in a far more senior position", or*

*"you can learn from each other".*

*"I learnt a lot about myself in that process.... and I have quite a lot more peace about who I am"* and another concluded that knowing this is crucial to the change journey.

*"I found if you don't have peace in yourself, with yourself, if you're not comfortable with you, warts and all,... don't start a change process."*

*"first of all it's growth as a leader and you realise that you're growing and you're learning and then you can see the fruits of that".*

#### *Personality and preferences:*

Every participant learnt more about himself, five feeling that without being in such a challenging role, they probably would not have learnt these aspects of themselves, the other two experiencing confirmation of who they are and the way they lead.

At least three mentioning the Insights Personality Profile ([www.insights.com](http://www.insights.com)) as a helpful intervention in learning about themselves and their team members and other alluding to it. This organisationally led initiative provided a common language for their own development as well as developing their understanding of others.

*"And you cannot only be hard-assed and red all the way.... driving a change process requires you to switch between being understanding and almost to the point of accommodating and soft.... to being completely on the other end by just saying this is what it is, here's the details";*

*"I learnt for myself which again goes into my private life ... that profiling thing.....I'm a red-yellow....and [now] I'm able to override the red thing that wants everything done today";*

*"I mean it will sound a bit strange .. at my age but, I certainly matured more, I think I became more concerned [about others], I'm a red";*

*"irrespective of profile, whether red, blue, green, yellow."*

One of whom came to the insight that *"So then learning that you can actually change those colours, even if when you test them they don't change but if you cognisant of that then you*

*can and with the ability to reflect you can actually think.. well, was that a green moment or not and should I have been green, how could I have done that better?"*

The realisation that he was a natural change leader placed one participant continuously in difficult jobs and when he got stuck he discovered *"that you need to change as a leader yourself, in order to get this [change] done"*.

One participant realised he needed to be more adaptable in his communication style

*"I have a way of explaining something which is pictorial.... the one thing that I had to adjust, is to make sure that, when you address an audience that you address all the types in the audience"*.

Selling himself better aided another participant in ensuring he painted a fuller picture of progress, while another participant, unable to make the shift to sell himself better, found himself worked out of the 'system' within months. The former stating that

*"because you need somewhere to talk about [your ideas].....I gave away what I referred to as rough diamonds .....what you do in your own business becomes somebody else's idea .....so I learnt to sell myself better"*.

Another found that he *"learnt to become a lot more resilient"*, while another discovered a development area - *"I didn't know it before but I can be quite intolerant"* and yet another that he *"take[s] the most difficult course [of action]"*.

Three participants mentioned that they learnt to slow down or that learning was reinforced.

*"I'm a believer that you don't have to make key decisions fast at all, you can think about them and discuss them and I prefer that route,.... acting with calmness and confidence was reinforced";*

*"to put it in context, I learnt to slow down";*

*"I would probably have tried to slow it down a bit"*.

### *Learning styles*

Understanding of their own learning styles was also indicated by three participants as helpful in terms of their own development. Learning about Kolb's learning cycle, finding specifically the 'reflection phase' *"very meaningful and helpful....a thing I didn't have"* and for another *"my learning is that this, in the business and in all adult learning, the real learning comes*

*from working in teams”, realising that this had been missing he concluded that he “wont make that mistake again”.*

While another had a similar thought *“engaging with people that can help you to develop yourself”* was noted.

#### *Technical learning and others*

Technical learning refers to aspects outside of the intrapersonal – learning mentioned above and includes the importance of, systemic approaches, the importance of having a clear vision, change management and team.

*“learning [a] systemic approach”;*                   “

*“I learnt all of this stuff, I mean I was just a contractor”;*

*“an understanding of some of the principles of leadership .... some of the principles of change management that I had forgotten about or didn't know about actually ..... I just didn't know about ..I then had to go try them out and that was the other thing .. that I then discovered ... one of the biggest revelations for myself and I try and teach it to everybody was when I discovered the Kolb learning cycle”;*

*“a learning is that a leader needs to really understand and re-evaluate at all times where to go to and deal with change in many small steps”* [rather than episodic change].

Having a competent team of *“highly intelligent, motivated”* people around you, *“without them you wouldn't get anywhere”*, while simultaneously reading a lot, albeit in the evenings helped in his journey. Bringing in this ‘new blood’ is referred to by another participant as *“vertical growth”* and as *“bringing up the IQ”* by another – vertical referring to *“more intelligence, [better] qualifications and new thinking [while] balancing ... the old experienced versus the new innovative”*.

### **Challenges and dilemmas**

#### *Knowing what to change*

Any change process naturally has to have some direction. All participants, bar one, knew instinctively what to change, *“most of it by trial and error”* because they *“just knew immediately”*, *“literally by the seat of my pants by what my gut and my brain said I should do”*. They described this knowledge as follows:

*“The biggest challenge that I saw was I could see what was wrong. And I could see what needed to be changed and it got quite frustrating that other people wouldn’t do as they were told, you know.”*

*“I just had a vision and a passion that this place needed to be different and it needed to perform again.”*

In contrast, one participant did not know *“what you are meant to do, it takes you two years to find out what to do ... [and then later I] reassessed my life and I’ve stepped aside”,* not wanting the role of change leader any more, as he *“couldn’t handle the pressure [and will not] ever get myself into that situation again”* and now has *“a lot more peace”* about who he is.

#### *Absence of unity of leadership*

Once the direction is clear, the leader must be prepared to *“hang his jacket on it”* as *“you can’t falter”*. One participant stated that one must *“try and align those ideas and opinions so that you move in the same general direction”* because *“unless there’s unity from that [shareholder] level down to the business unit level I think change will be troublesome”*. He continued that the *“biggest dilemma I faced was disagreement with a member of the leadership of the business ... because it’s covert”*. If the alignment or unity is missing then *“those different paths mean conflict”*.

Another participant worded this as follows:

*“That leads to other conflict, different agendas, distrust so already we’re dealing here a lot with the speed of trust and loss of trust, private agendas all those sorts of things would be very damaging to change. So there’s got to be unity of thought.”*

Without such unity, a participant felt that you *“chop and change your strategies”* and *“then you make decisions to change ... the course or stop the process or curtail the process, you’ll have your biggest scarring damage and losses of almost anything”*.

In one participant’s words:

*“You’ve got to have such strong conviction that you’re doing the right thing ... because people also need something to hang their jackets on and when you change direction all their jackets are now on the floor again and because*

*you've decided you've changed direction you have to go all the way back to the how, the participation, the buy-in and again our leadership, I don't think believes in that and then you get the scarring, the damage, more misalignment and I don't think we've realised how damaging these course-directional changes have been and therefore with our non-alignment with [the shareholder] behaviours, values ... there have been course-directional changes and that has caused significant problems."*

In another participant's words, a more subtle reference to unity which is fundamental in understanding the context within the organisation:

*"if the profile and the personalities of the leadership around you are right for it then you can do it and if the profile and leadership around you are not, it becomes exceptionally hard and complicated."*

#### *Stand in the wind*

Because the damage caused by changing direction is so extreme, you are *"permanently having to fight against ... another system that doesn't understand that they are actually to blame"* so you have to *"be prepared to stand in the wind"*.

One participant added:

*"And be prepared to stand up to ... and be prepared to fight that and say you will have a short-term disaster but you're going to have a long-term success –what do you [the shareholder] want?"*

One participant went so far as to say:

*"Here are my keys I'm out of here and fortunately that's never happened, it's never happened but I've had to fight hard to maintain that sometimes and it hasn't always been easy, to me it's part of those values that you've got to, or those beliefs that you've got to hold on to because if you start compromising that, then I think you will lose the trust, of the guys around you."*

The result of standing in the wind or standing firm in what you believe to be right is the loneliness that comes with taking a stand.

## *Time*

Five of the participants felt strongly that “no-one” understood the length of time it takes to implement change. They said:

*“There is absolutely no understanding for the length of time [the change process] takes”. [I felt] “as if I was in a race”, and the pressure mounts because “people want change and the leadership wants change and they want it fast because the shareholder is not waiting”; “shareholders invariably aren’t patient enough”. That “means that you’re almost permanently failing” because “the quantum of change is too much” which increases the pressure and possibly the rate of failure as “change processes take five years, eight years” but this is not understood by anybody.*

So, although some successes were experienced, one participant stated:

*“To my mind ... perhaps [it was] a bit slow and maybe not slow enough and, and maybe the speed of change is something to talk about ... I learnt to slow down ... to think about this thing ... “you need extreme patience in change because when you communicate ...get people to buy-in you’ve got to communicate again and again and again and again and reconfirm and reconfirm.”*

Another participant said:

*“Some people believe that the very fast decisions are the behaviour[s] to be demonstrated ... I’m a believer that you don’t have to make key decisions fast at all. You can think about them and discuss them and I prefer that route and I’m reinforced in that belief as well”.*

In other words, leaders need to “slow things down, to be calm, spend time together”.

One participant explained as follows:

*“There’s a process that you have go through and it takes time and you’ve got to believe that and, ‘fight’ anybody that tells you otherwise, no matter who it is. You know if it’s your boss, if it’s your owner, [or] the shareholders and they believe that you don’t need that time they’re wrong”.*

### **Finding support through the journey**

The company makes use of a coaching service provider who interviews the leader and decides on a suitable 'match' of coach from their database or network. Three participants referred to the *"meaningless matching"*, as *"there's a lack of understanding in my opinion ... on what a coach is and what a coach should be"*. The participants felt this was particularly ineffective and one suggested that the relationship with a coach needs to *"develop trust, deep understanding, insight you can only have it once you have a very high level of connectivity"*. This, they felt, could not be achieved through this artificial pairing. The majority of participants agreed that support through the process outside of the organisation is critical – some only in hindsight, while others had access to support through a coach during the process and found it extremely helpful.

One expressed that coaching was so essential that *"if I hadn't engaged with him I think I would have left the company"*. Another *"had three different coaches"*. One participant who did not have a coach thought that *"in hindsight I would definitely have got a coach to work with"* although another participant remarked that simply *"allocating a coach is not a support structure"*.

Self-awareness is a pre-requisite to being aware that help is needed and can therefore not be underestimated. One participant stated that *"to be able to have that, to say I'm not afraid to go and call for help"*. Whether help was sought from a coach or their family and friends, the participants consistently felt that without a strong, sound and stable support system, the toll would have been much higher as stated clearly by one participant *"I guess it was lonely but I think without that support base I really would have battled"*.

### **DISCUSSION**

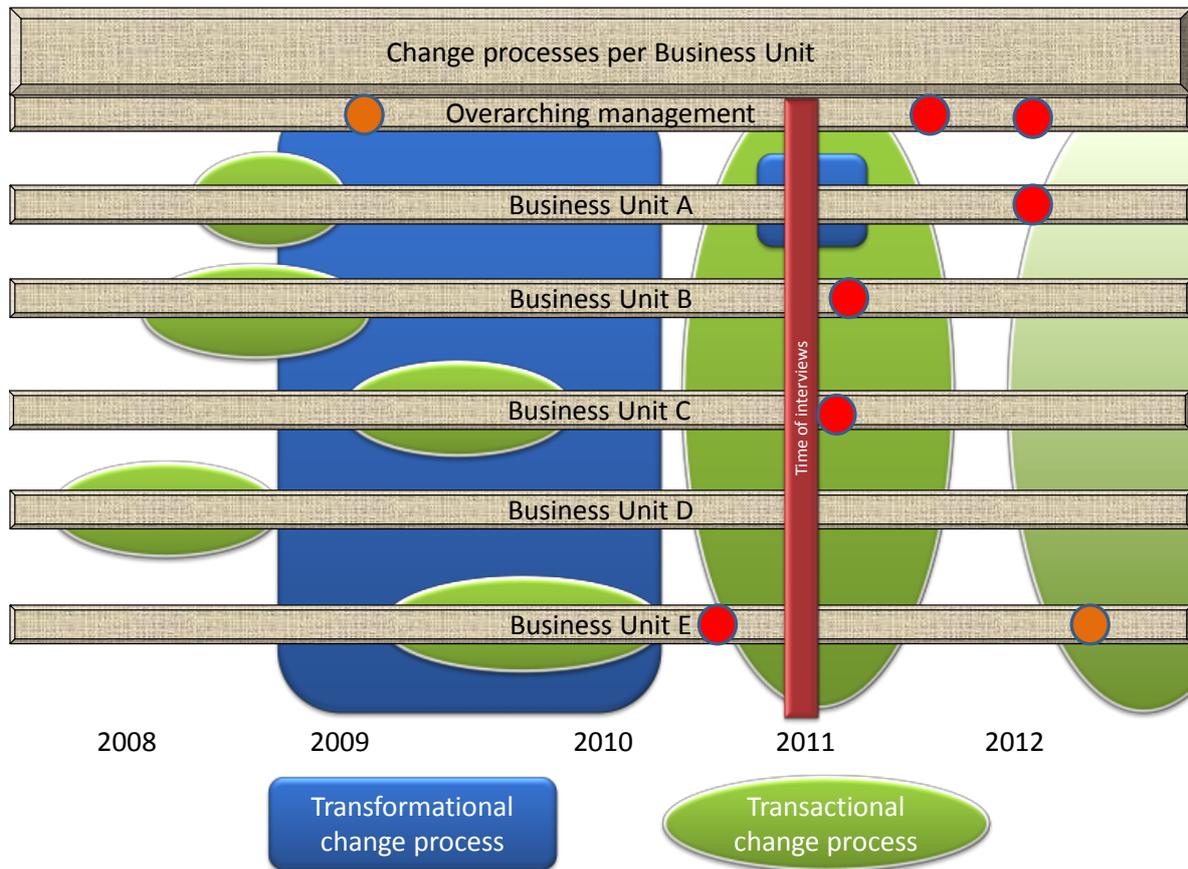
The purpose of the research was to explore the experiences of senior leaders while leading change processes in their businesses, what they learnt about themselves, the personal dilemmas they faced and what supported them through the journey. The research was fundamental in beginning to understand their experiences while taking care of their employees and realigning the organisation – definitely an onerous task. The study revealed significant pain and scarring while also highlighting their feelings of at worst being taken advantage of by the shareholders and at best being misunderstood by employees.

While the findings showed considerable overlap in their experiences, each participant found one particular focus that he repeatedly returned to. Two of these were positive experiences

of believing and growing their people. These two individuals also appeared to be the least scarred by the process – one as the only individual that still remains within the organisation, and the other having retired relatively unscathed, as seen in Figure 3.3. This, from a positive psychology view, shows the ability of these participants to experience a sense of coherence, resilience as well as balancing of the paradox of leadership (Henning, 2009). The experience of the other five, as casualties of the process, support the findings of Cilliers (2012, p. 2), as they experienced feelings of having depleted “emotional resources, a sense of depersonalisation ... as well as a lack of experienced organisational support”, particularly relating to the preparation and development for the role of leadership, or change leadership, in this instance.

The forethought necessary for change processes was by their own admission largely absent. This could be as a result of the lack of development preparation through the organisation but is also not necessarily uncommon (Grout & Fisher, 2007). This could potentially explain the high failure rate of the change process (Aitken & Higgs, 2010; Epperson, 2006; Grout & Fisher, 2007; Kotter, 1990; Young, 2009); however, their previous successful performances could indicate that the attributes necessary are present, particularly with those that instinctively knew what needed to change (Schein, 1990). These change processes refer only to the small single business unit interventions, not the large cross-divisional processes indicated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 below attempts to depict the various change processes (transformational and transactional) that have taken place in the various business units over the past four years and as can be seen, they have been extensive and many. Each horizontal line depicts a different business unit (five). What began in 2008 as individual business improvement processes (small green ovals), has been circumvented by large cross-business transformational and transactional changes (large blue rectangle followed by two large green ovals). In addition, the red dots indicate participants who have exited the organisation, and the orange other leaders not interviewed. The number of red dots highlights the cost in terms of lost expertise and experience caused through these processes.



**Figure 3.3: Multiple change process per business unit**

Distancing themselves from significant organisational decisions by continuously referring to ‘they’ could indicate a disassociation from the change process thereby foregoing their own sense of coherence and ownership of the change process and its consequences. (Watkins et al., 2011). As a result, there was continued conflict between leadership levels and particularly the shareholder interests and the leaders’ view of what was best for the business, effectively eliminating any ‘unity of leadership’ that could have and should have supported the leaders and the process.

Taking on additional responsibility is not unusual and in itself has an impact on work-life balance. The already-strained relationship with demanding shareholders does therefore not allow leaders to say ‘no’ to the additional responsibility. The overload of initiatives and organisational chaos that follows (Abrahamson, 2000) in turn causes more anxiety and, seemingly inevitably, failure. The only participant who directly referred to ‘saying no’ to the excessive responsibilities found himself exited within two weeks, albeit after more than 30 years of stellar performance.

The single biggest conflict between senior leaders and shareholders related to the amount of time it takes to effect a change within an organisation. Schein (1990), referring to culture, regards it as the hardest thing to change, while Allcorn and Godkin (2011) and Kotter (1990) regard changing organisations as the hardest thing a leader specifically has to do. Shareholders expect to see the effects and benefits of the change within a couple of years and hold the leader to that. This appears unrealistic when embedding the change, as changing a culture can at least five to ten years (Argyris, 2001; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Schein, 1990). The tenure of the leaders in this study was far below that period, so even if they had successfully led the change, they would not be there to ensure that it is entrenched.

The personal cost to the leader has been shown to be excessive with six of the seven leaving the organisation, not necessarily on their own terms. Perhaps the quote by Joseph Jaworski, "We do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe" (Jaworski, 1996, p. 178), explains the dichotomous outcomes in terms of tenure. A positive deviance was resultantly exhibited by two of the participants who had a lower personal cost, and their longevity (indicated in Table 3.1) in the position within the organisation also supports the differing approach.

The challenging role of leading change processes clearly provided opportunity to improve self-awareness whether by choice or otherwise. A pre-requisite for effective leadership according to Schein (1985) and later confirmed under the auspices of emotional intelligence (Turner et al., 2005). The use of a psychometric tool in the 'Insights Learning and Development' assessment (Form 207, ref 18/11/97, HPCSA) proved to substantiate the tools' claim to provide a common language for people development in business as this was widely referred to and provided the single most common area of development; self knowledge, met favourably by those who used it. This may confirm that such a tool goes a long way to providing personal and team learning, enhancing communication between members and insight into own behaviour, leadership style and the differences within the team, a pre-requisite for learning (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009). The second common learning was regarding as the more 'technical' matters of models, processes and dynamics, most of whom admitted to not having been equipped with this necessary knowledge prior to the start of the multiple change processes. A common gap amongst leaders according to Grout and Fisher (2007). It would bode well if these skills were taught, practiced and honed, prior to taking up such high level of leadership.

The paradox of being seen as uncaring and the loneliness (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012; Kane, 2005) created through the leadership role, exacerbated by a change process, was particularly painful. In addition, these processes impacted their reputation from a number of angles in terms of ability to execute change processes, lead and care for the organisation. Balancing the need to be ruthless when having to reduce the headcount within the organisation and being seen as callous and uncaring were particularly hard for them to deal with. Managing follower relationships can be daunting and causes additional anxiety to both leader and follower (Greyvenstein & Cilliers, 2012), but are critical for successful change to take place.

The support of the leaders through this process came mainly from their personal support structures outside of the organisation as the alienation between organisation and leaders grew over time. A coach that is neither part of the personal nor organisational support seemed to be the one aspect that did or could have supported them through the process. Those that made use of coaches explained how valuable they were, while those that did not suggested in hindsight they should have engaged. Interestingly, measuring the impact of coaches on the business has however proved problematic both directly and indirectly (Levenson, 2009). Interestingly, the two participants who displayed 'positive psychology' approaches made use of already established support structures and not of anything the organisation provided, perhaps as their own emotional intelligence made them previously more readily aware of their need of others and their increased social skills, demonstrated in their approaches at building rapport and building relationship in the first place (Goleman, 2004). One of these two did indicate that in hindsight it would have been wise to engage an external coach as well.

Coaching the individual holistically can also support the arguments made by Argyris (2001), Cilliers (2012), Collins (2001) and Schein (2010) that leaders must have a level of self-knowledge and awareness in order to be successful. Those that engaged a coach and were open to learning found immense personal growth through the process (McGovern et al., 2001) – if not new growth, then at least a confirmation of their strengths and occasionally even their areas for development. Argyris (2002) suggests that often leaders are not even aware they need to learn new behaviours and even if they are, they do not have the capacity to do so, and therefore need some outside support and insight from elsewhere, possibly an executive coach – an avenue that remains underutilised (McGovern et al., 2001).

The almost contradictory statements that leaders must be ruthless while caring and leading their people could be understood in the light of the accountability resting squarely on the

leaders' shoulders. Through their reluctance to cut people, particularly long standing non- or under-performers, the impact of the below-par performance is eventually all carried by the leaders, and they ultimately pay the price. The retrospective view was that this needed to be done quicker and deeper than is comfortable for them to live with. Shifting this responsibility elsewhere could possibly save not only the organisation but the leader as well. Who would take this responsibility then and how would they identify the relevant individuals remain difficult questions to consider.

Current processes are clearly not sufficient (Epperson, 2006; Schein, 2010) or perhaps are not suitably implemented. A new look at what change processes involve, specifically what attributes are required and the extraneous demands it places on the required 'super' leaders, may provide a better understanding of what needs to be done before these extreme responsibilities are placed on their shoulders.

### **Limitations**

The researcher focussed only on one organisation in one industry sector, being construction. The construction environment, specifically in the South African context, is remote and fraught with limited communications and human resource processes such as planned long-term development of leaders to prepare them for the tasks as change leaders. The extent of the pressure faced by the leaders could therefore be mitigated through additional support. In contrast, this limitation may also have contributed more meaningfully to the study.

The very homogenous sample limited the study and a more diverse sample could perhaps give very different experiences, although the researcher is not convinced that this would be the case, given the large proportion of processes that fail, which is strongly supported by the literature.

### **Practical recommendations**

Emanating from the themes of this study, shareholders need to be more conversant with the abounding change literature, specifically as it relates to the duration and impact of these change processes. Provided leaders are supported and open to learning and growth, they will be more able to lead change successfully without the immense personal cost, although leadership will inevitably always be 'tough'.

Finding relevant support for leaders and providing mechanisms to enhance their emotional intelligence could support both leader and thereby the change process, employees. This

could in turn facilitate a better work-life balance potentially diminishing both the strain emotionally and on their health.

### **Suggestions for further research**

Only the key recommendation is mentioned in this section, as the recommendations are expounded in Chapter 4.

As a result of the very limited demographic sample and the specifics of the industry, consideration could be given to further studies conducted not only with a less homogenous sample group but also in more diverse industries, perhaps in particular where there is a larger, more mature human resource strategy that better enables and prepares middle managers prior to taking senior leader positions with change, with which leadership has now become synonymous.

In conclusion, in spite of the limitations of this study, it contributes to the literature by uniquely exploring the leader's personal life-world during their leadership of large change processes. A better understanding of the toll, time and tutorage it takes could provide better support for leaders, possibly resulting in a lower 'fatality' rate of both leaders and the processes they attempt to drive.

### **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the empirical approach, fundamental relevant literature standpoints and the empirical study were discussed. The findings were drawn through interpretive phenomenological analysis, providing conclusions, recommendations as well as limitations of this study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study was to begin to unravel the experiences of leaders as they manage and lead change in their businesses. In the literature review, the history of leadership was briefly described along with change, change models and change leadership.

A phenomenological approach uncovered the pain, loss and scars that leaders sustain during the role as leader of change as well as their personal learning and the dilemmas they faced. What follows are the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

#### **4.2 CONCLUSIONS**

##### **4.2.1 Conclusions regarding the literature review**

The literature review found a high overlap between the works of Collins (2001), Goleman and Boyatzis (2008), Schein (2010) and Senge (2006). The need for mature, moral and intelligent leaders, both emotionally and otherwise, has become increasingly evident. The role of leading a business through change has simultaneously become equally demanding, leaving little room for leaders to be anything other than change leaders. The high failure rate of change processes supports the view that the leaders on whom it rests are often not equipped for that arduous journey.

The illusive holy grail of leadership must surely encompass Collin's Level 5 leadership paradoxes and Goleman's five components of emotional intelligence, and be flexible enough to adapt situationally to Senge's various roles of leadership. Furthermore, the prolific change processes, frameworks and models that abound have yet to provide these super leaders with sufficient tools to complete the task. It is then little wonder that the cost is so high.

#### **4.2.2 Conclusions regarding the empirical study**

Farmer (2008) insists that there are very few places for managers or leaders leading failed change processes, which is by far the majority, to hide. The continuous discarding of these leaders diminishes not only the individual but the organisation as well – a cost not even Sirkin et al. (2005) would be able to calculate with their DICE model.

There is a need for an understanding of these demands that will better equip those that select, coach, train and groom leaders for the new modern leader with the extensive attributes required to not only survive personally but also ensure that the organisation flourishes in spite of processes that can literally ‘rip it apart’ (Wheatley, 2006). Shareholders particularly need to understand specifically the time it takes to change and entrench those changes before the next process will become inevitable. The unity of these layers of the organisation is essential for success and alignment must be there as a pre-cursor to any change process.

Tinkering and small continuous changes seem to be far more desirable and less strenuous, lending support for the surge of continuous improvement processes that could possibly mitigate against the damaging large-scale, episodic changes that organisations are seemingly so keen or perhaps doomed to embark on.

#### **4.3 LIMITATIONS**

The researcher focussed only on one business in one industry sector, being construction. The construction environment, specifically in the South African context, is remote and fraught with limited communications and human resource processes such as planned long-term development of leaders to prepare them for the tasks as change leaders. The extent of the pressure faced by the leaders could therefore be mitigated through additional support, which is discussed under recommendations.

As a novice researcher and an insider, the perspective of the researcher was specifically from a neophyte’s point of view. In spite of attempts to bracket through journals and objectivity and although not her intention, varied interpretations could be possible through different lenses, though this epitomises the nuances of qualitative research. Interpretive data analysis and specifically interpretive phenomenological analysis is however based on the researcher’s personal experience as well as those living it, whereby the researcher develops insights into their world (Goleman, 2000)

The rapport and confidential nature of the interviews together with the insider perspective supported the understanding of the complex organisation and dynamics, which allowed the free-flowing conversational approach (Goleman, 2000).

#### **4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Failing to take care of the leader ensures that the loss of continuity and extensive loss of experience through their exiting of the organisation may become inevitable. The financial cost as well as the impact on their followers cannot be underestimated. Choosing the right leaders and supporting them through the process must therefore be considered a priority.

The traditional change curves could also be mapped onto the leaders' experience to see whether their experience of change also includes shock and denial, followed by anger, fear and eventually acceptance. In addition, tracking leaders' experiences of change processes based on the principles of appreciative inquiry could yield an interesting comparison.

#### **4.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

A study into positive deviance could possibly support the experience of one participant, who found that because his personal theme was to trust himself and others, this was indeed how he experienced the process. A socially constructed image of a trusting, high-functioning and honest team became his reality and therefore his success, in spite of the toll it took.

In spite of the limitations of this study, it contributes to the literature by uniquely exploring the leader's personal life-world during the leading of large change processes. A better understanding of the toll and time change processes take will allow for more comprehensive support and understanding for leaders, ensuring they will be better supported and possibly resulting in a lower 'fatality' rate of both leaders and the processes they attempt to lead.

Mapping the five components of emotional intelligence described by Goleman (2004) onto the transcripts and comparing those with the meaning of the participants' experience and the organisational as well as personal performance could uncover interesting correlations.

Cilliers (2006, p. 38) found that "each organisation, its leadership's and team's coping with change are unique, complex and largely influenced by the personality and interactional style of the leader as conceptualised within the systems psychodynamic stance". In this regard, these various styles could be explored in future research to establish whether there is any

one style that could be more successful regarding leading episodic or transformational change within organisations.

#### **4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This final chapter focussed on the conclusions drawn from both the literature review, despite there being little information specifically on the leader's experience, and the empirical findings of the study. The limitations of this study are many and as a qualitative inquiry could not and should not be generalised, but can be repeated to support or oppose its veracity and particularly extend its scope beyond the particular environment in which it was conducted.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Permission For Study From

#### Sharene Koopman

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**From:** Eugene Erasmus  
**Sent:** 19 May 2011 10:09 AM  
**To:** Sharene Koopman  
**Subject:** RE: permission-letter.doc

Hi Sharene,  
Your e-mail below and authorisation letter attached refers. I am excited that you will base your study on interviews with our Management and therefor have no problems in granting you such permission. The only condition I would like to place on this is that the work is made available to the Group, because I am sure it will be useful.  
Regards,  
Eugene

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**From:** Sharene Koopman  
**Sent:** 18 May 2011 12:20 PM  
**To:** Eugene Erasmus  
**Subject:** permission-letter.doc

Dear Eugene

I trust you are well.

I am not sure if you remember but I am busy with my Masters in Industrial Psychology, currently the second and final year. I need to conduct a research project to complete the dissertation in partial fulfilment of the qualification.

You will see from the attachment that my subject relates to the experiences of senior leaders (as opposed to employees covered in most research) in driving organisational change.

The population group includes the BU MDs, Vince and yourself. It includes voluntary participation in an in depth qualitative one-on-one interview as the process of data collection. Naturally all data will be treated as strictly confidential in line with the Health Professions Council's ethical guidelines. In order to complete the research I will obviously need your approval to conduct it in your organisation.

If you need more information, I can chat to you or send you the approved proposal. If you are happy with this information, please could you sign the attached for me for record purposes.

I will be very grateful for the opportunity to complete this and hopefully in the process add value not only to the participants but also the organisation as a whole.

Warm regards

SHARENE KOOPMAN  
Business Unit HR Director

Footer hidden for purposes of  
confidentiality

Header hidden for purposes of confidentiality

Ms S Koopman  
BU HR Director  
Mechanical & Electrical

Dear **Ms Koopman**,

Permission Letter for a research study to be conducted:

Research Title:

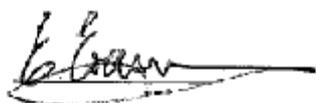
**“An exploration of the experiences of senior leadership driving large scale organisational change in a South African based construction company”.**

**Purpose of the Research:** This qualitative study will attempt to explore and better understand the experience of senior leaders and the issues they face while leading a change process in a large construction company. An indication of where the leaders are personally and how this process impacts on them as leaders and individuals, given that they are required to embrace as well as lead others in this change process, will be explored.

Thank you for your request to recruit participants from within [redacted] for the above-named research.

I have read and understood the information regarding the research and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,



Footer hidden for purposes of confidentiality

## **Appendix 2 Information leaflet and informed consent form**

**Date:** 19 May 2011

**Study name:** An exploration of the experiences of senior leadership driving organisational change in a large multi discipline construction company

**Researcher(s):** Sharene Koopman

**Sponsors:** The Company

**Purpose of the research:** This qualitative study will attempt to explore and better understand the experience of senior leaders and the issues they face while leading a change process in a large construction company. An indication of where the leaders are personally and how this process impacts on them as leaders and individuals, given that they are required to embrace as well as lead others in this change process, will be explored.

**What you will be asked to do in the research:** You will be asked to answer several questions relating to your experience in driving the change currently underway within the Operating Group.

**Risks and discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research although sharing personal struggles and conflicts could be discomforting but the extent of sharing will be determined by the participant.

**Benefits of the research and benefits to you:** An opportunity to discuss your experiences and voice your opinions

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your position or your role in the organization or the nature of your relationship with the company either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, the company, or any other group associated with this project.

**Confidentiality:** All information you supply during the research will be held in the strictest confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Sharene Koopman either by telephone at 011 681 2323 or by e-mail [sharene@absamail.co.za](mailto:sharene@absamail.co.za). This research has been

reviewed by the Research Committee, University of South Africa Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study please contact Prof Marie De Beer at Debeerm@unisa.ac.za.

**Legal rights and signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in a study to investigate my experience of leading the change process currently in our business conducted by Sharene Koopman. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant : \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3 Transcriber's confidentiality agreement

**Title of research study:** An exploration of the experiences of senior leadership driving large scale organisational change in a South African based construction company.

**Principal investigator: Sharene Koopman**

**Contact phone number: 082 371 4787**

#### Transcription services

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as the transcribing typist of this research study, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio files and documentation received from **Sharene Koopman** related to her master's study on An exploration of the experiences of senior leadership driving large scale organisational change in a South African based construction company. I understand that the information revealed by research participants who participated in this study was provided in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of audio-recorded interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audio or computerised files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by **Sharene Koopman**
3. To store all study related audio files and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study related documents to Sharene Koopman in a complete and timely manner;
5. To delete all electronic files containing study related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcribing typist's name (printed):	
Transcribing typist's signature:	
Date:	