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A Critical Analysis of the Leadership and Management of Change Resistance in a Virtual Team within a Higher Education Department

E822-21J Extended Proposal (EP)

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Contents

Part B

Abstract

Despite many Higher Education departments transitioning to virtual teams since Covid-19, few studies in this context have been published. This dissertation proposes a qualitative, descriptive case study that will utilise interviews and questionnaires to explore how to support staff in a University department perceive and experience the move from a co-located environment to a permanently virtual team. The extended literature review interrogates how current frameworks help leaders mitigate change resistance when coordinating the transition from co-located to virtual teams. A conceptual lens utilising habitus, capital and field is presented.

Keywords: Change Resistance, Change Management, Higher Education, Virtual teams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Covid-19 and the Rapid Move to Virtual Teams

I am a manager within a UK-based Russell Group University. I am part of the middle management team responsible for ensuring all staff within the Faculty adhere to all relevant Quality Assurance policies and frameworks. This EP focuses on the leadership of support staff, which is further detailed in Chapter 5. Staff not student-facing within the Faculty are now transitioning from working in a co-located office to working permanently in virtual teams; consequently, multifaceted organisational change is required to build a virtual working infrastructure.

The leadership team's decision to move staff to virtual teams has been influenced by Covid-19 lockdowns, the first of which occurred in March 2020 and triggered a rapid switch to working remotely. At this point, the team had never worked virtually before, and there was no infrastructure or cultural norms to support the move. This created difficulties in establishing effective working methods that ensured staff could communicate and share information effectively. The team returned to working co-located whenever the government permitted, so no longer-term plan for establishing communication norms in virtual working was devised. Consequently, I explored effective communication within the research questions.

In the 2022-23 academic year, virtual working will become a permanent feature of the University's norms for staff that are not student-facing, which includes the Quality Assurance team. For this reason, one of the EP's research questions aims to establish how leaders can effectively mitigate change resistance in virtual teams. The permanent move to virtual teams must be managed to mitigate change resistance from support staff, as they have historically rejected change initiatives, which has caused operational disruption. This is outlined by Fugate *et al.* (2012), who argues resistance can be described as an action or behaviour of an individual that can compromise or disrupt change management objectives.

The broader context surrounding the proposed research subject is the University's need to become more adaptive to the increasingly competitive market. Since the occurrences of Covid-19 and Brexit (Courtois & Veiga, 2020), fewer international students are applying to study, due to travel restrictions, increased globalisation has occurred due to the increasing number of universities beginning offering their Degree Courses remotely, and funding is becoming increasingly more difficult to secure for students (Ahlburg, 2020). The leadership team’s justification for the change is that, because of the pressures these factors place on the University's income and funding, moving non-student-facing teams to working virtually is a sound financial decision. The University of London (Fitzgibbon, 2019) report significant reductions in overhead costs when they introduced virtual working initiatives. Virtual teams also ensure that operations are not hindered in the event of subsequent lockdowns or travel restrictions. However, managing the permanent transition from co-located working to virtual teams is challenging for leaders in my organisation because they are unfamiliar with the environment and challenges presented by losing face-to-face communication with their team (Lagowska *et al.,* 2020)

1.2 Extended Literature Review and Proposed Conceptualisation

The issue of change resistance has been prominent for some years. Lawrence (1969) argues that leaders must work to understand resistance in order to plan and deploy successful change initiatives. This correlates with research that explores low success rates in change initiatives; *IBM* (2008) studied over 1000 CEOs and public sector leaders, concluding that only 41% of projects achieved successful outcomes. Decker *et al.* (2012) observed failure levels of 28% to 93% at maximum. Both studies conclude that resistance to change is a common cause of failure over 50 years after Lawrence's study.

Additionally, there is sparsity in peer-evaluated research on change resistance in virtual teams, demonstrating the need to further research in this area and develop effective change management frameworks that mitigate resistance. Therefore, Chapter 2 will review critical research within change management frameworks and the leadership and management of virtual teams to interrogate the key themes relating to change resistance in virtual teams. Chapter 3 will then explore the proposed paradigm, key concepts of habitus, field and capital, and the research methodology, which justify the positionality of the research.

1.3 Developing the research questions and research proposal

The research proposal development began during the Covid-19 pandemic when I led a virtual team for the first time. At this point, I lacked prior knowledge or frameworks to support staff through the transition away from working in a co-located office. As I began to explore change management frameworks, the sparsity of literature around virtual teams and change resistance in Higher Education environments became apparent, which influenced me to begin writing the research proposal. The research questions have been developed through submission of TMA01 and TMA02, where I established a significant gap in the literature for Higher Education contexts and began interrogating the concepts of culture, identity, communication and power.

The proposed study seeks to approach the issue from an interpretive paradigm, deploying qualitative data to understand how to support staff working in non-student-facing roles in a Higher Education institution to interpret change initiatives and virtual working. The interpretative paradigm seeks to codify the attitudes and beliefs that cause individuals to resist change initiatives, and to generate data that will contribute toward creating more positive working environments in Higher Education as workers transition to permanently virtual ways of working. Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus, capital and field provide a conceptual lens for considering how the professional identities of participants will be impacted in the proposed study. Due to the rapid-changing nature of Higher Education, a case study into change resistance in support staff is proposed. It is suggested that semi-structured interviews and anonymous surveys are deployed to understand the support staff's personal, subjective and contextual perceptions.

This proposal highlights the importance of leaders establishing relationships, trust and effective communication within teams in virtual environments and recognises how these aspects are essential for leaders when guiding a team through a rapid virtual transition. The proposal will help leaders understand behavioural factors that influence change resistance and aid the development of frameworks for future change initiatives for virtual contexts in Higher Education.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review- The Topic

2.1 Introduction

The literature review aims to define the current state of research within change management frameworks and the leadership and management of virtual teams. Ensuring the research questions were precise enough to ensure an appropriate scope for the project was paramount, so they were continually reflected upon and refined accordingly after a new idea or argument was introduced (Steane, 2004).

The literature search was completed for peer-reviewed literature on education, business, psychology, and organisational behaviour, using the Open University Library, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Complete. Due to my interpretative stance, I searched predominantly for qualitative research; however, I did not rule out the quantitative data of the meta-analysis of Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2011), which is mentioned later in this chapter, as it offered valuable behavioural insights from a plethora of studies. Articles were initially reviewed for relevance, so any article that did not contain recommendations for improving virtual teams was excluded. Generally, literature written within the past ten years was used due to the rapidly-changing nature of technology, which is central to change management of virtual teams. However, seminal thinkers, such as Kurt Lewin, were still included, as they published fundamental research some time ago that remains pertinent to the topic.

When establishing search terms for change management, literature was drawn from Western contexts, reflecting my environment's context. A limitation of some established change management frameworks is that they focus on co-located teams and do not specifically mention how to adapt to virtual teams. For example, Balogun and Hope Hailey's Change Kaleidoscope framework (2002) focuses on a case study in a co-located environment but does not research virtual teams. Due to this, a separate search was completed for this subject. Additionally, literature detailing best practices and strategies for the leadership of virtual teams is included in the review.

Challenges were encountered when searching for appropriate literature on virtual teams, as there is a lack of frameworks and peer-reviewed research relevant to Higher Education contexts, which calls for more research within this area. A variety of synonymous terms, such as 'remote teams', were initially implemented, but the results failed to yield peer-reviewed literature until the search term 'virtual teams' was deployed. At this point, the search terms were modified to 'change management or resistance virtual teams.' I also searched literature based on trust in change initiatives because it is understood as a reason for change resistance.

2.2 Change Management and Change Resistance

Literature often utilises titles around change management; however, there is a distinct difference between this and change leadership. Change management consists of the operations where leaders apply to move the organisation from a present state to their desired future state (Hiatt & Creasey, 2003). Such operations are usually reactive and respond to internal and external factors that present challenges and opportunities (Kotter, 1996). Conversely, change leadership is usually proactive: it involves articulating a vision and culture for the future; thus, it is associated with larger-scale changes (Kotter, 1996). The term 'change management' will be used in correlation with the literature throughout the EMA, and 'leadership' will be used where change leadership, rather than 'change management' applies. Similarly, management refers to completing tasks (Algahtani, 2014), while 'leadership' refers to supporting, motivating, and aligning staff (The Open University, 2015, 2018, 2020).

Chapter 1 outlines the low success rate of change initiatives due to change resistance. Such resistance occurs because change can modify the culture or functionality of an organisation to the extent that the colleague no longer aligns with its culture (Abraham, 2000). The negative attitudes or reactions displayed by colleagues as a result of this are named change resistance (Piderit, 2000).

Literature commonly offers four sources of change resistance, focussed on self-interests, emotional interests, or the organisation's interest. Armenakis & Bedeian (1999) argue that change resistance is within an individual's nature and is based on their emotional reactions, which are sourced from anxiety towards change, fear of the unknown, or losing control.

Fiedler (2010) argues that resistance should be anticipated if the planned change initiative will result in a negative outcome for the individual, such as pay deductions or changes to working hours. Fiedler (2010) also argues that resistance can be incited by an individual perceiving a change as harmful to the organisation, which can be rooted in a lack of communication or mistrust in the leadership team.

The fourth source of change resistance occurs concerning an individual's professional identity. From this perspective, the change initiative threatens an individual's perceived ability to maintain their professional identity. Eilam and Shamir (2005) argue that if the change initiative does not correlate with the individual's self-identity, the change will be experienced as stressful and hence will be resisted. For this proposal, I seek to extend the research that explores the relationship between professional identity and change resistance, as it correlates with my paradigmatic position and conceptual lens, which is presented in Chapter 3.

2.3 Cultural Differences between Co-Located and Virtual Teams

One of the EP's research questions aims to establish how culture differs between co-located and virtual teams to provide awareness for leaders when planning to transition between the two. Powell, Piccoli and Ives (2004) defined virtual teams as groups of geographically or organisationally dispersed colleagues that work together using information communication technology. Similarly, Cascio (2000) notes that these colleagues often work varying shift patterns, as virtual teams can also work asynchronously due to the ability to operate in different time zones. The context of this study consists of a virtual team that is organisationally dispersed, working in a synchronous time zone.

DuFrene and Lehman (2015) and Furumo (2018) argue that existing values and behavioural norms from co-located teams cannot be simply ported to a virtual team environment because co-located teams have developed a shared culture which includes basic communication principles that are primarily based on face-to-face interaction. DuFrene and Lehman (2015) argued that team values should be established by occasionally meeting face-to-face to experience the benefits of non-verbal cues and build relationships. However, this is a limitation because it was not possible to meet face-to-face throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in Higher Education contexts due to work-from-home instructions issued by the UK Government.

Consequently, some researchers sought to establish positive virtual cultures without relying upon meeting in person. Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) argue that a positive virtual team culture can be established when leaders acknowledge change is needed from the outset of the transition away from a co-located environment, thus communicating new norms for virtual teamwork to staff. Similarly, Walther and Bunz (2005) argue that these actions from leaders will ensure etiquette is in place and mitigate the risk of staff feeling isolated or confused about how to conduct themselves. Literature suggests cultural expectations should include how the team communicates, works collaboratively, resolves disagreements, and makes collective decisions (Purvanova, 2014). Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) conclude that when individuals feel empowered by their virtual working culture, the team itself will function more effectively. However, Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) fail to identify the need for staff to engage socially. Cascio (2000) argues that when staff are embedded in a virtual working culture, they risk feeling isolated or lonely; therefore, they advocate for leaders to develop social support networks between remote e-workers, colleagues, and supervisors.

2.4 The Management of Change Resistance in Change Management Frameworks

Previously in my context, a high percentage of change management initiatives have failed due to being met with high levels of resistance from the teaching staff. The Open University 2017a) emphasises the importance of ensuring change initiatives are planned by leaders with solid knowledge of theoretical and conceptual frameworks because, like my own context, they have been subject to high failure rates since the 1970s (Ashkenas, 2013). Factors that influence the success of a change initiative are commonly studied throughout literature in the field. Verhulst and Lambrechts (2012) created a literature review of over sixty factors and found many related to people. These factors are widely known as the 'human factors' of change (Verhulst & Lambrechts, 2012). Human factors are prudent to research because resistance to change from colleagues is commonly cited as a critical reason for the high failure rates of change initiatives.

Lewin was a seminal thinker in change management, and the 3-step change model (1951) is one of the early fundamental planned change models aimed to guide colleagues through organisational change whilst maintaining the status quo. Lewin's model includes unfreezing, movement and freezing (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's concept of combining a transformational leadership style with employee involvement (Lewin, 1951) was a crucial step in developing a practical change management framework. The transformational leadership style has been noted as one of the most crucial factors for change processes (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009) across the literature search, which I believe will contribute to mitigating resistance to change in style in my research project.

Kotter's change management framework (1996) was designed for corporate settings and consists of eight steps to achieve employee buy-in to mitigate change resistance. As the framework is descriptive, it can be argued that in designing the framework, Kotter built upon the critique of Lewin's framework (1951), which was that it was too vague. Both Lewin (1951) and Kotter (1996) advocate for leaders to enter meaningful consultation with employees before making decisions at a broader organisational level. This argument is still relevant today, as recently, studies from numerous scholars have agreed that higher success rates occur from change initiatives where colleagues are actively empowered, engaged and involved in the change process (Lewis *et al*., 2006)

The change kaleidoscope (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2002) is a multi-lensed planning tool that relies on the leader to analyse the change context to establish the most critical features of the change. Hope Hailey drew experience from working as a Senior Lecturer in HR when developing the research, which complements my Higher Education Context, where staff are empowered to hold themselves accountable through bottom-up management styles. In contrast, Kotter's (1996) and Lewin's (1951) methodologies describe a top-down approach. However, these frameworks fail to deal with explicitly planning change for bottom-up virtual teams, such as my context.

Fullan (2007, p. 69) argued that change initiatives in the education context are often technically simple but socially complex due to the many internal and external influences within the landscape. The Open University (2018a) notes that leaders must possess in-depth knowledge of the internal and external influences within the context to ensure that a holistic perspective is adopted and tailored to the individual identities of the teaching staff. In self-organising contexts such as Higher Education, Balogun and Hope Hailey (2002) argue that including participatory interventions, such as focus groups, could illicit buy-in from staff rather than adopting an autocratic approach; this correlates with Lewin and Kotter, advocating for a transformational leadership approach. Similarly, Furumo (2018) agrees that in a Higher Education context, there is an opportunity for leaders to increase employee accountability through a relationship-based leadership approach when working remotely, but autocratic approaches can cause disengagement. Conversely, DuFrene and Lehman (2015) argue that the most effective virtual team leaders are those that adopt an autocratic approach at the identification and planning stage of a task and then shift to a transformational, relationship-based approach once it is underway to leverage talent and encourage proactive behaviours from staff.

Unlike Lewin, Kotter's framework (1996) deals specifically with resistance to change: the process of leading with emotional intelligence and influencing stakeholders is embedded throughout the eight steps. However, like Lewin, Kotter prioritises stakeholder management whilst creating a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996) to convince employees that the current way of working is no longer sustainable. Such an approach aims to reduce the emotional reaction that argues occurs in response to upheaval. Another critical aspect of Kotter's model (1996) is the opportunity for employees to be consulted on changes, which aims to give them a voice and ensure they feel their views have been accounted for in the process. Balogun and Hope Hailey (2002) advocate this leadership approach and argue that context sensitivity is a crucial skill a manager needs when implementing change. This approach would extend well to the context of this EP, where formal consultation with trade unions (Unison, 2019) is mandatory at the outset of all planned organisational changes. The consultation could also present an opportunity to consult teaching staff and obtain their initial feedback before committing to a change plan design.

However, Schilling *et al*. (2012) argue that the extent to which a change initiative aligns with or threatens an individual's professional identity determines whether they will show resistance. They argue this is because if a change threatens to hinder their 'perceived ability to enact a certain professional identity' (Schilling *et al.,* 2012, p. 1230) within their working environment, it will cause them to reject the change as it does not fit with their professional identity.

2.5 Pace of Change

Lewin's model has limitations, particularly in the post-Covid era of constant and rapid change. In particular, the 'refreeze' stage implies a great deal of time should be spent in the new status quo (Lewin, 1951), which would be rigid and unfeasible with rapid change now prevalent across Higher Education. Conversely, Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) recently argued that leaders in virtual teams should be ready to adapt and reprioritise work as situations change and evolve. However, it could be argued that there should be some element of 'refreezing' to allow employees to become confident in their new ways of working and establish a good practice or else leaders risk creating a culture where staff feel they are in a constant state of flux.

Change management initiatives can be seen as either a one-off project or an ongoing process. A limitation of Kotter (1996) is that their study perceives change as a one-off process, and more recently, the Higher Education context has become one of continuous change due to the occurrence of global marketisation caused by institutions in the United Kingdom becoming increasingly internationalised, and the transference of increasing costs to students (Brown & Carasso, 2013). Because the Change Kaleidoscope is context-sensitive (Hope Hailey & Balogun, 2002), it can be used to understand the most effective means of deploying change due to its more flexible nature, which complements the argument of, Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021). However, another contributing factor to the rate of change in Higher Education has been Covid-19, which has caused major restructures to teaching and learning, administrative and student support functions (Bartolic *et al*., 2022). Several significant changes had to be introduced rapidly and reactively, which presents a limitation of the Change Kaleidoscope, as it focuses solely on planning in anticipation of planned change.

When Covid-19 caused nationwide lockdowns, all department staff worked remotely, creating an opportunity to decentralise processes and become more agile by permanently implementing virtual teams. However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced leaders in my context to rapidly transfer staff into virtual teams without time to plan the change initiative. Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas (2021) argue that similar instances or opportunities for dynamic development in future will likely occur. Therefore, for my institution to remain adaptive and competitive in the exponentially competitive Higher Education market, my leadership team must regularly introduce change initiatives and ensure staff remain engaged and empowered whilst working virtually.

2.6 Transformational Leadership in Change Management

In order to effectively address the research questions, the most effective leadership approach to mitigating change management should be established. Of the four leadership styles, transactional and transformational styles were considered, due to their prevalence in the topic literature. Transactional leadership is concerned only with the management of staff, with rewards focussed solely on how well the tasks are performed: this approach does not focus on changing the culture of an organisation (The Open University, 2018c). Change management literature widely rejects transactional leadership approaches because they are negatively associated with outcomes such as ineffective team communication, a lack of professional commitment, poor professional performance, and an unwillingness to vocalise feelings towards work (Harms *et al.,* 2018).

Conversely, James Downton (1970) founded the concept of transformational leadership and framed it as a visionary approach to leading, considering colleagues' values, emotions, ethics, standards, and goals (Northouse, 2010). Furumo's research

(2018) draws links between leadership approaches and trust, arguing that teams led by authoritarian leaders reported significantly lower levels of trust than other leadership approaches. However, this argument is limited and would require further research because their study was conducted on undergraduate students across two universities that had not yet acquired relevant work experience.

When a leader deploys an initiative that involves a substantial change in an organisation's processes or policies, Jacobs *et al.* (2013b) argue that the leader plays a pivotal role in stakeholder management by ensuring all members of the organisation are engaged with the process. In doing so, the leader motivates employees to align their behaviours to aid the organisation, rather than simply looking to benefit their self-interests (Robinson *et al.,* 2013). Northouse's study (2010) explores the concept of individualised consideration, which involves transformational leaders coaching and supporting colleagues to provide them with the tools they need to be empowered, self-motivated and independent in moving toward the change initiative's planned outcomes.

However, Abrell-Vogel & Rowold (2014) elaborate that when deploying individualised consideration, if a leader is steadfast in their commitment to a change initiative, all colleagues involved will follow suit. Neves and Eisenberger (2014) expand on this to argue that leaders must demonstrate trustworthiness and show integrity for employees to buy into a change. In the Higher Education context, Andrade (2011) agrees that Higher Education leaders who invest into resources that improve working conditions and offer sufficient training opportunities encourage trust and minimise the faculty staffs' resistance to change; therefore, a transformative leadership approach should be deployed to address the research questions effectively.

2.7 Toward Effectively Managing Virtual Teams

As stated in the research questions, this EP seeks to establish how leaders can effectively communicate in virtual teams. In the early millennium, when virtual teams became more prevalent, researchers argued they were less effective than their co-located counterparts. This was due to the time delay associated with working collaboratively and communicating via virtual tools rather than face to face (Martins, Gilson, and Maynard, 2004). Malhotra et al. (2001) conducted a case study which correlated with this argument, demonstrating that virtual teams took longer to complete tasks than co-located teams. However, the exponential growth of virtual teams has led to increased research. Subsequently, researchers such as Martins, Gilson, and Maynard (2004) highlight inconsistent and inconclusive findings, an example being the term 'virtual teams' had inconsistently been applied to teams across studies, where they were co-located but in different rooms in the same building.

More recently, Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 94 independent research studies to address the research gap in managing effective communication in virtual teams, which indicated that the efficacy of communication and the performance of the team when working virtually is dependent on how competently information is shared between them. They found that in the past decade, research has shifted away from the argument of whether co-located or virtual communication is more effective because hybrid and remote working are now widely accepted as effective methods of working by leadership teams across most business and educational contexts. Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2011) note that advantages are unique to communication via virtual and co-located communication. The meta-analysis found explicit agreement on the significance of communication in virtual teams; however, the extent to which communication is needed to result in a high-performing team is still relatively unexplored on a systematic level Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2011), so it requires additional research. Contrarily, Malhotra *et al.* (2001) suggest that communication in virtual teams may be more or less significant in different scenarios. Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2011) conclude that communication exists along a continuum rather than residing at two opposites (co-located versus virtual). Future research should explore how advantages from both ends of the continuum can be exploited to create more effective norms in virtual teams.

DuFrene and Lehman (2015) acknowledge the challenge of establishing trust due to lack of physical presence, which removes non-verbal cues and makes forging strong interpersonal relationships challenging. The former literature also argues that communicating via virtual devices can reduce the team's efficacy. However, Gonçalves *et al*. (2014) investigated whether communicating virtually rather than face to face impacted the emotional engagement of team members. Their study demonstrated that communicating through a virtual platform does not affect communication from the emotional perspective; therefore, it does not negatively impact the team's performance. However, this study was only conducted with 45 participants, so this would need to be investigated on a broader scale. DuFrene and Lehman (2015) conclude that reviewing communication strategies is paramount to ensuring a virtual team is a success. They advocate for reviewing the timing and format of team meetings, establishing whether the technological support available to staff was sufficient, offering training on communication tools such as Microsoft Teams and creating virtual social spaces for colleagues to check in with each other. Such themes of trust and communication correlate with the EP's case study approach, as the researcher and a research object will regularly engage with each other throughout the study, so establishing and maintaining mutual trust is a fundamental part of the process.

Because employees spend significantly more extended periods alone when working virtually, literature places emphasis on leaders re-evaluating their schedule when moving from co-located to virtual working to ensure they dedicate more time to supporting and checking in on their staff (Kicullen, Feitosa and Salas, 2021).

Increasing the frequency of 1:1 meetings or offering regular drop-in video calls could help leaders to check that each individual's workload is appropriate, check in on their well-being, and offer support and encouragement. However, Furumo (2018) also indicates that a factor of trust in virtual teams could be gender relationships; therefore, Furumo argues that future studies involving virtual teams should explore the impact of male vs non-male leaders on the trust and engagement of staff, as there is a significant gap in research for this.

Research on how leaders can effectively manage change resistance in virtual teams is lacking and contentious. Ale Ebrahim, Mohammed Shahadat, and Taha (2009) argue that virtual teams are less resistant to change than co-located teams because they are conditioned to be more task-oriented and engage in less informal dialogue such as office small-talk. However, the Covid-19 pandemic expedited research for increased social communication on virtual platforms to mitigate feelings of loneliness, which creates a need for future research to establish whether Ale Ebrahim, Mohammed Shahadat and Taha's arguments are still valid. Cascio (2000) contends that lack of social interaction threatens the trust and integrity of virtual teams; if not addressed effectively, this can make organisations vulnerable to a culture of mistrust and power struggles. Within the Higher Education context, which has rapidly shifted to working virtually due to Covid-19, additional research is needed to understand how change resistance has been effectively negotiated and to establish what further lessons could be learned by leaders from throughout this period.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review highlights a substantial deficit in research relating to the leadership and the mitigation of resistance to change of virtual teams in Higher Education departments, mainly where they were deployed rapidly due to situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It is pertinent that this research gap is explored to understand how best to mitigate the stress and resistance caused by organisational changes where the additional barrier created by the lack of physical presence is incorporated. Predominantly, virtual team literature, such as DuFrene and Lehman (2015), focuses on geographically dispersed teams, rather than previously co-located teams wand local to the office then transitioned, which was the case for many Higher Education departments, including my own.

The literature review demonstrates the complex nature of change management; therefore, a leader's choice of a particular approach should be based on analysing their internal and external influences whilst considering several models. For effective outcomes of change initiatives, it is critical to understand the specific situation and desired results in detail and the most appropriate way to manage changes based on the approaches and models considered.

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Chapter 3: Literature Review: Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, a topic literature review addressed the research questions by interrogating how existing studies address the issues of culture, communication and pace of change when considering change resistance in adopting virtual teams. Through studying the change management field in depth and reflecting on the worldviews of salient authors, I observed patterns in my beliefs, which formed the foundation of my paradigmatic position. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a set of core beliefs or worldviews that influences key stages of the research process. This chapter will discuss the paradigm to be adopted for the EP by exploring my research methodology, ontological and epistemological approach, and the implications that were considered.

Establishing the fundamental concepts of this research proposal was complex because the field of change management is multifaceted. Various dimensions are discussed within the literature, such as the time frame for change, politics, substance and scale/scope (Andriopoulos and Dawson, 2009). Such a plethora of contradictory dimensions throughout literature led to Schilling *et al*. (2014) arguing that to understand change resistance, the two key dimensions that are explored should be the nature of the threat to professional identity and the primary source of the individual's professional identification. I agree with Schilling et al. (2014) but believe that power issues are also prevalent in change resistance, particularly within the Higher Education context, where significant changes have been made to governance structures and curriculum organisation (Cini, 2018). As a result, Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field (1977) are interrogated later in the chapter.

3.2 Paradigmatic Stance and Positionality

The paradigm choice of a researcher defines their philosophical orientation: it influences what they should study, how the data should be collected, and how the study results should be interpreted (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Accordingly, the paradigmatic choice has significant connotations for every decision the researcher makes, including the choice of methodology and methods. Thus, careful consideration was made when grounding the research design explored in Chapter 5, where I will revisit my paradigm justification within that context.

As a researcher, I reject the idea of a sole methodology that will consistently establish the truth of phenomena. I believe this rejection stems from experience gained in my previous role as a primary school teacher, where I worked with a diverse range of education professionals with differing worldviews and witnessed many successful variations of truth-making, which I respected regardless of the individual's positionality or methodology. When my career advanced and I began to work in Higher Education leadership, I began to favour the analysis of individual beliefs, motivations, and reasoning over quantitative data or the testing of a hypothesis. My research questions did not stem from theory; rather, they were developed from curiosity. Consequently, I am of an interpretivist paradigm, where I believe reality is constructed through social mediums such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2008).

As an interpretivist leader, I believe acknowledging and respecting the historic organisational culture of the research environment is essential (Schein, 2004). I accept Schein's argument (2004), which establishes organisational culture as a set of shared basic assumptions that a group invent, discovers, or develops and are taught to all members as the correct way to think, feel and act. Through conducting the proposed research, I wish to engage with the shared history developed within the higher education department to understand the beliefs, values, expectations and assumptions.

I take particular interest in how people arrive at their decision to agree or disagree about what they believe is true socially. This interest correlates with the overall aim of the research proposal, which is to understand and recognise how participants experience the process of changing to a virtual team. However, in Higher Education institutions, there has historically been a culture which values individual effort and achievements (Bendermacher, Wolfhagen & Dolmans, 2017). I aim not to focus my interpretivist lens on individual responses but also groups, as I aim to observe Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977) to analyse whether groups of colleagues within the research environment construct a shared reality or agree on notions of truth. Therefore, I believe the meanings that we construct have power beyond the individual people who create them. The data collected will be thematically grouped (discussed in Chapter 5) to highlight behaviours which cause resistance, so leaders can develop a theory that could explain the patterns and inform the planning of future frameworks.

Ontology can be defined as a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relation of being (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). My ontological perspective aligns with relativism, in which 'people perceive and interpret social facts...within multiple realities’ (Corbetta, 2003, p. 25). I believe the nature of reality is that multiple truths cannot be established using objective rules and measurements, which causes me to reject positivism, as I wish to study multiple realities shaped by context (Girod-Séville & Perret, 2001).

When considering epistemology, I believe that truth is created by meaning and events, so to understand what has shaped an individual's experience and the context that shaped it, I need to engage with them. By doing so, I aim to understand how approaches to change leadership and management across various literature in different Higher Education contexts and demographics can reduce staff resistance and strong emotional responses; therefore, my epistemological perspective is positivist. I believe I will need to interpret staff responses to different change management approaches rather than follow a more scientific approach (Byrne, 1998). Such an approach will help me better understand how to develop practical approaches to navigating staff through a change in their unique realities and, by doing so, develop my understanding of mitigating change resistance. A limitation of this approach is that researchers can often lack scientific rigour in their approach and generalise data, so I aim to address this by drawing on the conceptual frameworks I researched in my literature review in Chapter 2.

I approach this proposal with the positionality of an insider due to working as a Quality Manager within the proposed research environment. Insider positionality involves intentionally aligning the researcher's self-interests with their research (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). This approach aims to build credibility with participants by promoting equality between them and myself. However, potential disadvantages can include compromised researcher objectivity (Chavez, 2008). This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

3.3 Key Concepts: Habitus, Capital and Field

Pierre Bourdieu was a late 20th-century critical sociologist and anthropologist that created theories of human behaviour central to the issues of power and identity. Bourdieu argues that philosophical discourse derives from interaction between an expressive drive and the censorship produced by the social field from where it is generated (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu observed resistance as an unconscious act, and his research showed that resistance could occur when a change fails to correlate with an individual's unconscious core belief system. Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) made the case to develop a theory that analyses the dynamic flow of interpersonal relations and how these unconscious thoughts form a social reality. Bourdieu used the terms habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1977) to create the outline, which helped me to understand the interconnectivity of power, culture and identity when forming the research questions.

Bourdieu argues that habitus is constantly evolving and is generated by a complex network of internal and external social dispositions that influence the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Such social dispositions are adopted through socialising in group environments, such as work organisations, families or religious groups (Bourdieu, 1977). These influencing factors informed the research design construction, which will be explored in Chapter 5. The concept of habitus emphasises constraints and possible actions (Bourdieu, 1989), which can create a perception that habitus is formed by behavioural routines or expected ways of behaving. Bourdieu's work creates an opportunity in which this EP can propose a possible transformation of the research environment's habitus: due to its fluid nature, I am keen to study whether leaders can influence the habitus of the research participants by their leadership actions.

More recently, Jacobs, Witteloostuijn and Christe-Zeyse. (2013) argue that, similarly to Bordieu's theory of field and habitus (1990), groups of employees within an organisation habituate cultural norms to create a professional identity. In addition, Jacobs, Witteloostuijn and Christe-Zeyse (2013) observed professional identity as interwoven with an individual's identity because the extent to which an individual feels their beliefs align with those of the organisation directly influences their reaction to the change initiative (The Open University, 2017b). Therefore, if the taken-for-granted expectations of an organisation are not complied with, individuals become dissociated and experience change resistance.

Schilling *et al.* (2014) argue that change resistance is instigated by threats to the individual's professional identity. Their concept contests that these differences in individual reactions correlate to the level of influence or power that they are given in shaping the change initiative. Schilling *et al.* (2014) argue that when managers gradually introduce change and allow individuals time and space to become associated with their new professional identity, the likelihood of change resistance decreases; however, if this autonomy is not granted, the individual is likely to reject the new professional identity as they see it as being imposed upon them. The Open University (2018b) defines this in Bourdieuian terms as an individual's capacity to construct a new habitus that is appropriate to the modified field in which they operate; consequently, this influenced my decision to explore the concepts of habitus, field and capital to develop a lens for the proposed study.

I reject Foucault's concept of power as an omnipresence beyond agency or structure (Foucault, 1998) in favour of Bourdieu, who sees power as formed in culture and symbolic gestures. Bourdieu (1986) claims that habitus is connected to the issue of power relations by individuals' capital. He cites economic capital, social capital and cultural capital as central to the discussion of power.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital correlates with my positivist epistemological stance because it offers a lens that focuses on identity and power relations by analysing social relations. Social capital can be defined as an accumulation of resources that produce an individual's network of relationships, where they find reciprocated recognition. Bourdieu simplifies it as ‘membership in a group’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21). Social capital can be amassed and utilised collectively, for example, by a team of colleagues, or individually, and is mainly deployed for physical or figurative gain. This concept is pivotal to the conceptual framework because, in the context of this proposal, social capital encompasses the perception of social relations that increases the capability of a leader to advance their interests in the organisation. In all forms, capital is ascertained by class and social context (Bourdieu, 1986). Hence, cultural capital is inclined to convert an individual's wealth and assets into an integral part of their makeup as an agent, then into a habitus.

Although existing studies have significantly contributed to the understanding of organisational change, little literature exists on how organisational change in Higher Education is implemented through exploiting capital and how these new norms allow leaders to maintain the status quo and consolidate their positions in the social structure (Lockett *et al.,* 2014). With this in mind, the data generated from the EP will inform future planning of change frameworks; as a result, leaders will have an opportunity to exploit their capital resources as they utilise change management frameworks to better align with the field and mitigate change resistance.

Bourdieu's field materialises as the rules of a social group with a collective interest and habitus; however, the group often experiences a power struggle over social or cultural capital and material resources. Therefore, Bourdieu argues that conflicts or resistance are common when habitus, capital and field are mutually considered since individuals will be from different backgrounds and possess varying habitus. Individuals possess capital when they enter a field: this can be thought of as the resources that a person is equipped with to take advantage of whatever a field has to offer, such as financial resources, job status or social standing. Those agents with more capital are more likely to reproduce past practices, while those who are more marginal can try and change existing structures within the field to support and legitimise their habitus.

I will apply the lens of habitus, capital and field to my proposal because I believe that leaders cannot fully understand the attitudes and behaviours of colleagues who resist change without considering the social and cultural factors that underpin their experience. However, I am conscious that although the research participants share the same work environment, their individual habitus will be unique due to their differing social and family environments. Consequently, this underpins my relativist ontological approach, as I reject the existence of absolute truth in favour of multiple existences of truth. I believe these truths are constructed in the individual's mind and from their unique viewpoints as realities- with part of this formed by their habitus (The Open University, 2015, 2018, 2020).

3.4 Methodology

The proposed research aims to understand how to support staff in non-student-facing roles in a Higher Education institution by interpreting change initiatives and virtual working. This will help leaders to understand the behavioural factors that influence change resistance and aid the development of further frameworks which support appropriate change initiatives for virtual contexts in Higher Education. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Higher Education contexts were predominantly centred on co-located working environments, so consequently, a sparsity of literature relevant to managing the transition toward virtual teams in Higher Education exists. Chapter 2 demonstrates that literature gaps are also present surrounding change resistance in virtual teams in Higher Education, which suggests that collecting data from university support staff will provide valuable insight into how leaders can effectively deploy transitions to remote working. Furthermore, Lozano *et al.* (2013) argue that university leaders should feel empowered to design and carry out new change initiatives to ensure the institution continuously improves.

A weakness of existing change management research, when considered in my context, is that most pieces, such as those from Balogun and Hope Hailey (2002) and Kotter (1996), deploy longitudinal and ethnographic studies and collect data over time. Due to the rapid changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and literature gaps which now exist in Higher Education exist; as a result, it would be valuable to deploy a case study such as that within the proposal, so that insights into the context can be gained whilst institutions are still deploying the changes to virtual teams.

The proposed research methodology is qualitative and will investigate the perspectives of Higher Education support staff regarding their attitudes to changing to working remotely. Savela (2018) argues that quantitative data is characteristically reductive in an education environment, so it detaches the researcher from the subjects; therefore, I reject quantitative methodology due to my insider positionality. I believe a qualitative approach will effectively address the research questions because it allows for a rich explanation and description of the support staff's experiences and attitudes. The qualitative methodology also allows for the identification of unanticipated phenomena and influences (Maxwell 1996). The research instruments will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Jacobs, Witteloostuijn, and Christe-Zeyse (2013) argue that there are stark cultural and institutional differences across different contexts: this means that something that worked successfully in one organisation could fail in another. For this reason, Yin (2009) advocates for the use of a case study approach in change initiatives, as they establish why change processes are needed, and how they can be deployed.

Creswell (2014) perceives case studies as a deep dive into a program, event, activity, process, or social group constrained by time and activity. Gillham argues that the scope of the case itself must be understood before a case study can be established. Gillham (2010) specifies a case as ‘a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context’ (Gillham, 2010, p. 1). Consequently, a case study approach is often used to analyse organisational behaviour within one specialised environment (Merriam, 1988). Although such a narrow scope can be seen as a weakness, I feel it is appropriate for this EP because the study of organisational behaviour is complex (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010). Additionally, the Open University (2015) states that focussing a study on one context can prove helpful to others working within the Higher Education context.

I propose to conduct a case study because I seek to attain a highly detailed understanding of all dimensions of a phenomenon in its natural context (Stake, 1995). Data collected will be qualitative and form a social inquiry that focuses on individual perceptions and experiences of change (Hodges, Kuper & Reeves, 2008).

Types of case study are often debated throughout literature because there are discrepancies around how their purposes are defined. Thomas (2011) acknowledges the existence of experimental, exploratory and descriptive formats. However, Yin (2017) explores the experimental type at a level of depth that generates an argument that the approach can also be descriptive. I decided to deploy a descriptive case study: this sociocultural approach aims to gather a detailed description of the group involved and their actions, thoughts, and opinions (The Open University, 2021). Such a descriptive approach correlates with my interpretive paradigm.

3.5 Conclusion

In Chapter 2, the literature review established key issues of power and professional identity within the field of organisational change, which influence change resistance in Higher Education. With these issues in mind, this chapter has explored how the concepts of habitus, field and capital to provide a lens for analysing change resistance. The Chapter established an interpretivist paradigm, which is combined with a relativist ontology and positivist epistemology. A descriptive case study was proposed, which will enable a study that promotes cultural transformation and influences successful organisational change. The following chapters will therefore interrogate the research design, exploring how this has been informed by existing literature, the conceptual framework, and my paradigmatic position.

(Word count: 2979)

Chapter 4: Research Proposal

The proposal is titled: Critical Analysis of the Leadership and Management of Change Resistance in a Virtual Team within a Higher Education Department, which aims to address a gap in Higher Education Research for change management techniques in remote teams. The dissertation subject was conceived in Stage 1 of the study, where I learned about the interconnectivity of resistance, identity and organisational change (The Open University, 2018b). At this stage, I was interested in researching how Higher Education leaders could mitigate change resistance in co-located environments after exploring Burke's resistance manifestations (2011) and its relevance in my context. This resulted in the research title focussing on change resistance.

However, whilst studying Stage 2, the Covid-19 pandemic caused all Higher Education staff within my team to rapidly transition to remote working, which made the study of organisational cultures and change (The Open University 2015, 2020) pertinent. This is because none of my team's leaders had experience establishing communicative and cultural norms when transitioning to online working, and change resistance was experienced as a result. I acknowledged that if I were to become an effective leader, I would need to understand how to effectively manage a newly established virtual team. As a result, I formed an initial research question: how does the role of leadership change when transitioning from managing co-located to virtual teams? However, when developing the literature review, I realised that this question needed to focus on establishing practical communicative norms after reading the meta-analysis of Mesmer-Magnus *et al*. (2011), as this would help to underpin the research question which ascertains how culture differs between co-located and virtual teams.

From taking an interest in sociological concepts behind culture and communication, I aligned with a relativist ontological position, whereby 'people perceive and interpret social facts... within multiple realities' (Corbetta, 2003, p. 25). At this point, I acknowledged that knowledge can extend beyond quantitative data and that insightful research can include thoughts, feelings and intentions: this began to establish my interpretive epistemology. Grix (2002) explains an interpretive worldview as varied and constantly changing, along with a perpetual reality constructed from individual, lived experiences. I began considering how I could access multiple subjective perspectives and their reactions to a change management initiative within a research environment.

In Stage 3, my research interest shifted more towards understanding context-sensitive frameworks such as Balogun and Hope Hailey (2002) in greater depth, as they helped me to understand the enablers and restraints relevant to the newly-established remote context. At this point, I began to search for frameworks that managed change resistance in remote Higher Education teams and noticed a distinct gap in the research, which marked the beginning of this dissertation's development.

Final Research Questions:

- How is communication established by Higher Education managers when shifting from a co-located to a virtual context?
- How does culture differ between co-located and virtual teams?
- How can resistance to change from support staff be minimised when working remotely?

(Word count: 490)

Chapter 5: Research Design, Research Methods, and Methods of Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore and justify the proposed research design and how it has been informed by the topic literature, conceptual framework and paradigmatic position. It will then detail the proposed research methods, the participant group to be included, ethical considerations and methods of analysis. Ethical considerations for each element of research design and instruments are explored within the individual subheadings, while the broader ethical considerations for the EP are discussed within its subheading.

5.2 Research Design

Change management is a multifaceted research field where issues of power, identity, and external and internal factors can impact the change initiative (The Open University, 2018d). Because of this, both quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodological approaches exist within the field. I propose to conduct a qualitative study, as it will analyse the experiences of support staff and allow me to correlate behaviour and attitudes that form change resistance. Underpinning the qualitative data collection with frameworks and methodology explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 will enable a balanced, critical investigation into how to support staff perceive change (Creswell, 2014) and explore the role that factors mentioned in conceptual theory (Chapter 3), such as individual identity and power issues play in influencing change resistance.

I conclude that qualitative data is the most appropriate means for this proposal because it will collect descriptive data that will explore behaviours towards change through thematic analysis to enable the broad subject of change management to be applied to a specific scenario in higher education. Qualitative methods will also highlight the underlying attitudes that underpin the participant's attitudes, which can be challenging to comprehend (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Chapter 3 highlights the complex and multi-dimensional nature of change management studies- particularly when exploring the concept of change resistance. Therefore, a case study is the most appropriate research approach for this EP because it will investigate the compounded and constantly-changing human relationships and interactions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, the case study approach will allow me to exploit my position as an insider (which will be explored later in this chapter) because it will allow me to embed myself within the inner workings of a group to understand the everyday reality of how staff feel towards the change initiative (Gillham, 2010). This, in turn, provides the unique context that Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) deem compulsory for a case study, given the lack of research on the change resistance of virtual teams in Higher Education contexts.

The proposal of a descriptive case study was established in Chapter 3. When considering the case and bounding it (The Open University, 2021), the focus is on the University I work at, and the focus group consists of the support staff working within my team, who will be permanently moving from a co-located team to a virtual team. When assessing possible approaches to setting research questions, the study does not involve the testing of a hypothesis, as the context has limited theory available as guidance, so explorative, open-ended research questions were utilised, in which I do not have complete control over the events (Yin, 2017).

5.3 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a process designed to answer research questions by creating patterns that are dynamically derived from a data set, as opposed to merely summarising or categorising codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006): this selection correlates with the paradigmatic discussion in Chapter 3, where an interpretivist stance was established. Ryan and Bernard (2000) reject thematic analysis as a stand-alone method, in favour of utilising it within commonly deployed analytic methods, such as case studies. During the proposal development, I highlighted the nuanced nature of qualitative data and my inexperience in conducting research studies as a risk; consequently, I reflect that analysing the case study data thematically will help to structure the behavioural data that is gathered, which literature cites as complex to code (Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007).

Thematic analysis is flexible and allows researchers to deploy within many research settings; however, a limitation of thematic analysis emerges when researchers do not underpin the approach with their epistemological assumptions (Attride-Stirling 2001). I believe deploying a thematic analysis will complement my positivist orientation (as discussed in Chapter 3) and reveal the social, cultural, and structural contexts that influence the research participants' experiences.

I propose to utilise Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (2006) as its recursive nature allows the researcher to revisit the earlier steps when new data or themes emerge. I feel this approach favours the cyclical and fast-changing Higher Education environment and will prompt me to continuously reflect upon the case study. The coding framework will be inductive, as I wish to gather data and analyse trends to answer the research question. From this, I will develop a theory that could explain the patterns and inform the planning of future frameworks, as discussed in Chapter 3. The data will also address the gaps in current literature.

5.4 Proposed Research Participants

Eligibility criteria will be based on job role; participants will be drawn from the pool of support staff in an operational department of the Higher Education institution where I work due to the unique case presented earlier in the chapter. To ensure staff have no additional accountability that could act as a conflict of interest, eligible staff will be working within the University's officer pay grade. Colleagues within the officer pay grade carry out administrative work which bears no line management or project management responsibility. Anonymised results of the data generated by the research instruments will be shared with participants upon request.

Fusch and Ness (2015) define saturation as the point where the number of participants of a qualitative study produces enough information to replicate the study when the possibility to acquire additional new information from the data has been reached, and no further coding is feasible. I accept Guest, Bunce and Johnson's (2006) argument that saturation occurs at around 12 participants who are part of a homogeneous group. The proposed participants are part of a homogeneous group as they work in the same role within the University; as a result, I propose to include 12 participants in the study.

I will act as the principal investigator of the study and take charge of the day-to-day functions, including how data collection activities are completed. It is anticipated that a research assistant will also support the proposed study, which will be subject to available funding. The research assistant would be responsible for proofreading and fact-checking research documents, in addition to assisting in the analysis of data.

Candidates will be asked to register their interest as participants via a Microsoft Forms questionnaire, allowing them to remain confidential to their colleagues, as I will only see it as the researcher. It will also allow me to check that the individuals declaring their interest are eligible by ascertaining their job role within the questions. Microsoft Forms will be selected as the platform for registering interest because all University staff are trained in using it so that it will raise no barriers to participation.

As an ethical measure, survey participants will work in roles at officer level and bear no line management responsibility to mitigate any influences on the data caused by subjectivity issues from those with managerial responsibilities (Dick & Collings, 2014). Issues of power will be discussed later in this chapter.

Although I agree with Millum and Garnett (2019) in that offers of money are not consent-undermining coercion when used in an ethical study, participants will not be compensated for their participation in the proposed study due to the studies being conducted within a work environment, whilst in work time. Additionally, resourcing limits mean no budget is available to reimburse staff. Although there is no financial incentive, this is not deemed a risk to engagement levels as participant data will constitute the meaningful engagement that change management frameworks (Kotter, 1996) cite as paramount importance within Chapter 2.

5.5 Research Instrument Selection

Each Higher Education institute provides its own context in which academics and support staff work; variables include whether the university belongs to the Russell Group, its level of internationalisation and the university's individual policies. Therefore, generating reliable, qualitative data in my context provides challenges that must be accounted for when considering research instruments (Briggs *et al.*, 2012). As a result, I propose to deploy two research instruments to enable the corroboration of data (Fielding, 2012) and increase the credibility of its subsequent interpretations. Additionally, the use of multiple instruments ensures that the issue is not explored through a singular lens, but numerous lenses that will lead to the understanding of multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Two data collection methods are proposed to be deployed in the form of semi-structured interviews and anonymous surveys. After consideration of budget, timescale and resources that will be available, I decided that limiting to include two instruments would be the most manageable.

5.6 Research Instrument 1, Semi-Structured Interview

Aside from the purpose of data collection, I propose to deploy semi-structured interviews to mitigate the risk of observer bias, which could occur due to my inexperience as a researcher. This inexperience means there may be some unconscious biases that I have not yet discovered, which could threaten the integrity of data collection if my observations are not carefully controlled. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) describe the presence of an observer as necessary; however, that presence in and of itself alters the study environment. Combining some predetermined, open-ended questions with Likert scale questions based on the research questions will create standardisation; and, combined with the corroboration of data from deploying two research instruments (Fielding, 2012), will mitigate observer bias.

When planning the semi-structured interview, a framework of questions and topics will be mapped (Appendix 1), which will be explored when deployed (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The question framework will consist of core questions and some associated questions related to the research questions. This guide will be piloted and refined before introducing to the study.

To ensure interview data is accurately captured, audio recording would be an appropriate choice; however, this is sometimes contentious between the researcher and respondent, so I will explain the reason for wishing to record and ask each study participant whether they permit interviews to be recorded, as part of the consent form (Appendix 1). Doing so reduces the ethical risk of power that my position as a middle leader may generate.

5.7 Research Instrument 2, Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing

The second research instrument selected for the EP is an anonymous questionnaire via computer-assisted self-interview (CASI). CASI utilises a computer, mobile phone or tablet device to host a survey without requiring a researcher to ask the questions or note the answers. Deployment is suitable where the researcher aims to ascertain sensitive data whilst ensuring participants are answering confidentially (Olsen & Sheets, 2008).

Consideration of CASI as a research instrument highlighted a limitation in questionnaires whereby their remote nature meant participants' emotional responses could not be fully captured or coded, which is a critical facet of this study, particularly given the interpretivist paradigm established in Chapter 3. However, I chose to combine this research instrument with face-to-face interviews to account for this limitation.

I saw some immediate advantages in utilising CASI rather than a paper-based questionnaire, including a higher response rate, the ability to send email reminders for completion, and the lower costs associated with its production compared with other data collection methods (Brown, Vanable & Eriksen, 2008). However, the primary motivation for using a computer-based survey was that participants could answer the questions and share their opinions anonymously. Because the subject of change is contentious and multifaceted, anonymising the survey reduces the risk of social desirability bias, whereby self-preservation traits cause respondents to underreport socially undesirable responses and overemphasise their socially desirable responses (Krumpal, 2013). As a result, the introductory paragraph to the CASI (Appendix 2) explains that no one will have access to responses except the researcher.

As all proposed participants are transitioning to entirely virtual working, they are computer literate and have all received training on the CASI software I propose to deploy. Consequently, this removes the barrier to participation that could have been caused if participants were not confident in using the technology.

When analysing the data, I propose utilising the CASI software's computerised assessment, which automatically conducts consistency checks and highlights emerging patterns. The CASI software codes the data into groups (Schroder, Carey & Vanable, 2003), which will correlate with the thematic analysis selected earlier in the chapter. However, the nature of CASI means that no interviewer will be present, which means there is a risk that a participant may misinterpret a question or have a question about its meaning. If no interviewer is present, there will be no one to answer, potentially causing bias in the questionnaire results. To mitigate this, I propose to include an email address within the CASI instructions so that participants can seek clarification on questions.

When considering ethics, if the CASI were to be stored on the University's network, there was a chance that people outside the research team would access the colleague's responses. To overcome this, I decided to deploy an internet-based CASI, where all responses are stored on a remote database (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012) which complies with general data protection regulation (GDPR) legislation (*ico.org.uk,* 2022).

5.8 Ethical Considerations

The chapter presents relevant elements of ethics within each subheading, and the overarching ethical considerations for the research proposal will now be explored.

Ethical concerns present several pertinent issues in educational research, as researchers must ensure any moral issues have been addressed before research and that informed consent has been considered (Gregory, 2003). An informed consent form will be designed to secure each participant's consent prior to the commencement of research. The form will provide research details, clearly lay out the role of participants, their rights and obligations, confidentiality, and anonymity, and they have the right to withdraw from the research anytime, providing details on how to do so.

Because the EP proposes to study my team's support staff, I am positioned as an insider to the research. As such, I will draw upon my colleagues' cultural understandings and trust, combining positive working relationships (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010) and my advanced knowledge of the context. However, I am aware that my unconscious bias will be a limitation, so I will need to remain critical of my work by creating time for critical reflection and feedback opportunities from colleagues, where I can understand a broad range of perspectives.

An additional ethical consideration is that of power, which is explored conceptually in Chapter 3. As a manager, my position deals me with a power which could be used to exploit the individuals I hold influence (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Therefore, it is paramount that when prospective participants are asked whether they would like to participate in the study, they feel no obligation to participate due to the fear of compromising their professional position. As a result, I will closely observe British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (*BERA,* 2018) to ensure participants know that when they give informed consent, they can withdraw at any time or for any reason. To reinforce this, I propose to read out the informed consent form at the beginning of each interview.

Due to the wide range of stakeholders present within Higher Education institutions, levels of professional responsibility vary, which must be considered when analysing ethical concerns (Felzmann, 2009), for example, data handling and maintaining anonymity (Davis, Gallagher & Tisdall, 2008). Ethically, I must inform all colleagues involved with my Quality Assurance work about my research and where it will likely affect their role. I have consulted my manager on policies and procedures specific to the department and institution to ensure that I am not only compliant with broader ethical considerations, such as those set by BERA (2018), but with those specific to my context also.

Because I work at the middle management level, I would ensure the consent form declares that the survey and interview results would be anonymous, as I am conscious that my position could create power issues. Consequently, this could result in a situation whereby, if someone were invited to be a respondent and chose to withdraw, they could be worried there was a negative consequence, thus only participating due to a feeling of obligation or fear. I will ensure staff know that research participation is entirely voluntary and will not be treated unfavourably if they choose not to participate.

5.9 Sampling, Validity and Reliability

When establishing sample sizes and frequency, I scrutinised the epistemological and methodological questions about the nature and purpose of the research (Stanley *et al.,* 2012): the research questions create a unique case that is complex but offers a singular instance due to all participants being part of the same team that is experiencing the same change initiative. Practical issues, such as the time available were then explored. I concluded that I would conduct weekly CASIs and semi-structured interviews over four weeks to reflect on trends highlighted in the thematic analysis after each weekly cycle.

Because the CASIs and interviews have both been designed to gather qualitative data on the research questions when thematically analysing the findings, each issue will be examined in turn. After each cycle, the data will be summarised for each participant, offering the thematically coded findings that form an overall account of the attitudes of the whole group. When repeated over the four cycles, this analysis will demonstrate how attitudes and themes of the individuals and the group have changed over time. However, it is vital to remain true to the interpretivist paradigm by avoiding generalisation of the data because the research aims to capture participants' unique and individual experiences.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the many ethical concerns that arise when proposing a research study within the field of Higher Education. It also explains how ethical considerations were made throughout the research design process, tailored to my paradigmatic position and the proposed research environment. The reasoning of how the design correlates with my paradigmatic position and positionality is offered.

(Word count: 3007)

EP Postscript: Narrative Critical Reflection

The EP concept was conceived through developing an interest in change management through the study of Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Masters Programme, combined with the influence of Covid-19, which highlighted gaps in the understanding of change management in Higher Education when moving to remote teams. I was passionate about studying at Masters Level because I work closely with academics who think like researchers- applying a critical lens to the world around them. Before beginning Masters level study, I struggled to empathise with this lens or understand the concepts of ontology and epistemology that rooted their worldviews. However, from studying E822, I learned that critical thinking skills extend far beyond studying theory from journals and existing studies; instead, they are genuinely developed when an individual begins to interrogate the worldviews and assumptions of themselves and others. I am now more confident in engaging in conversations where I offer a critical perspective on my work environment, which has added value to my role as a Quality Manager, mainly in Programme Approval meetings, where I use my specialist knowledge of accreditation and external bodies to interrogate the thinking of Programme leaders when presenting new material.

When considering my professional development plan (PDP) and the rapid changes Covid-19 caused in my context, the most significant area I have benefitted from in studying this module has been applying the module material to my professional practice. As a result of this dissertation study, I have developed knowledge of the applicability of several change management frameworks and have deployed them successfully to change initiatives within my role.

I received feedback from TMA02 stating I should explore more recent literature. Initially, I found that my research questions were too specialised as they focussed on all literature, specifically around Higher Education. Subsequently, I encountered difficulty in retrieving relevant peer-reviewed literature on the subject. Therefore, I widened the literature search to include change management frameworks from other contexts and justified this by highlighting the lack of relevant research in my context.

I also worked hard to develop my critical writing when writing the EP. Upon submitting the first draft chapter, in a feedback session, my tutor highlighted some instances within the draft where I had introduced an argument but had not explained how the evidence supports my point. Upon receiving this feedback, I perused the PEEL analysis structure; notably, when proofreading the EP, I ensured I could highlight where I had made a point, provided evidence, explained it and then linked back to the origin of the EP. As a result, this helped to ensure I had critically analysed the methodology of the key topic and conceptual literature.

The submission of this dissertation will be amongst my proudest achievements as I believe it demonstrates resilience beyond what I imagined I possessed. Throughout the past three years of study, I have worked full-time, changed my profession from a primary school teacher to a Higher Education manager, moved home three times and lived through the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought untold personal difficulties.

(Word count: 503)

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Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview study. The aim of the interview is to gain an insight into attitudes towards change, to inform the leadership team how we can improve the way in which we support staff through change initiatives. It is important to emphasise there are no right or wrong answers; rather, we are keen to gain an understanding of your honest thoughts.

Participation in the interview is voluntary and will not affect your role, regardless of whether you choose to take part or not. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview for the purpose of accurate note making. All responses will be kept strictly confidential, and you may decline answering any question or stop the interview at any time, for any reason.

Do you have any questions at this point?

Do you consent to the audio recording of the meeting?

This framework signifies the foremost themes to be explored with interview participants. General prompts will also be utilised where needed, such as "Could you please explain this further?" and "How does that look for you?"

---

1. **How effective do you think communication between managers and the team is, when working in the co-located office?**

   Example Prompts:

   - What means have managers used to communicate with you and the team?
   - Were you provided any resources or support? If so, were they effective?
   - What do you think could be improved?

2. How effective do you think communication between managers and the team is, when working virtually?

Example Prompts:

- What means have managers used to communicate with you and the team?
- Were you provided any resources or support? If so, were they effective?
- What do you think could be improved?

3. How have the managers supported you in moving from a co-located to virtual team?

Example Prompts:

- How have the managers engaged with you?
- How have you been consulted?
- What did managers do to gather your feedback?

4. How has moving from a co-located to a virtual team impacted you?

Example Prompts:

- What have the pros and cons been?
- What have you found easy/difficult?

- How do you feel about the shift?

5. What are the main differences between the culture when working co-located and virtually?

Example Prompts:

- What do you do to engage with your colleagues?
- How do managers give colleagues the opportunity to connect?

6. Conclusion: Is there anything else that you would like to comment on that I haven't already asked you about?

Thank you very much for your time and the information you shared today.

Appendix 2: Anonymous Questionnaire Invitation

Dear [name]

I am currently studying on the Masters module 'E822 Multidisciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth' at the Open University. My studies are being supervised by a tutor and am following research protocols and ethics guidance recommended by the University and BERA. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- How is communication established by Higher Education managers when shifting from a co-located to a virtual context?
- How does culture differ between co-located and virtual teams?
- How can resistance to change from support staff be minimised when working remotely?

I invite you to complete a survey by questionnaire in your department, [xxxxxxxx]. The questionnaire is estimated to take no longer than 30 minutes and can be completed at work or at home. This is to be completed online and is fully anonymous. I would appreciate the return of the questionnaire by [date]. This has been agreed with [gatekeeper name]. If you have any questions before you decide whether to participate, please let me know.

Information collected through the survey is anonymous, stored on a secure online server where only the researcher will have access, and will be kept confidential. No paper copies of the data will be held.

If you do not consent to participation in the study, simply do not complete the questionnaire. It is not possible to withdraw your consent because the questionnaires are anonymised.

If you do wish to participate, please complete and return the questionnaire when convenient. If you would like more information about the questionnaire before completing it, please contact me on [contact details].

Yours sincerely,
Amanda Lassu

Appendix 3: EMA Reflection Grid

Category	**Feedback received, targets achieved and areas of development worked on**	**How did this shape my dissertation?**
Knowledge and understanding	TMA02 Feedback: 'You appear to only identify informed consent as a possible ethical issue. More thought was needed for this section' Develop my knowledge of ethical issues within educational research Improve the quality of my literature searches to find more concise, relevant literature	I investigated a range of ethical issues using BERA guidance, and the university's policies, and included considerations in my EP. I completed the 'Becoming an Ethical Researcher' badged OU course and thoroughly explored BERA guidance. I partook in an OU library event to aid my understanding of the advanced search function in the Open University online library
Critical analysis and evaluation	At the outset of the module, I set myself a PDP	I consciously ensured that I provided evidence,

	target utilising the PEEL approach to critique research	explained why this was important for my argument, and then linked it back to my research questions. I found this helped to make my writing more concise. In TMA02, my tutor gave the following feedback: 'You write in an honest and straightforward manner. Well done'
Links to professional practice	TMA 01 Feedback: '…you have referred to the introduction of new technology, the pace of change and emotional intelligence. All of which could be a dissertation in themselves…you need to avoid the trap of trying to do too much literature wise. PDP Target: To consider how this research will impact my career trajectory	I decided to narrow the scope of my study to focus solely on resistance to change, and how leaders can mitigate it. Developing knowledge around change management has given me the opportunity to be

		involved in a major change initiative at work, and has presented the opportunity to apply change management frameworks in practice.
Structure, communication and presentation: Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings and ideas for different audiences.	I set myself a PDP target of making it explicit how the sections link together by signposting.	As part of my dissertation plan, I made a chapter plan and regularly referred to it and updated it as the work developed. I also regularly proofread my EP to ensure that opportunities to signpost back to other chapters, or opportunities to introduce themes were exploited.

Appendix 4: Certificate to Demonstrate Completion of *Becoming an Ethical Researcher* Course


OpenLearn | Free learning from The Open University

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cpd

Statement of participation

Amanda Lassu

has passed the free course including all mandatory tests for:

Becoming an ethical researcher (2018-2021)

This free course explored the ethics of planning, carrying out and reporting research which involves human participants.

Issue date: 12 September 2021

Becoming an ethical researcher

The Open University

www.open.edu/openlearn

This statement does not imply the award of credit points nor the conferment of a University Qualification.
This statement confirms that this free course and all mandatory tests were passed by the learner.

Please go to the course on OpenLearn for full details:
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/becoming-ethical-researcher-2018-2021/content-section-overview

COURSE CODE: EE831_1

Appendix 5: E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.
For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all "no" you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details			
a.	Student name	Amanda Lassu	
b.	PI		
c.	Project title	Critical Analysis of the Leadership and Management of Change Resistance in a Virtual Team, within a Higher Education Department	
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Don Bradley	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	x
		Masters in Childhood and Youth	

f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Leadership and Management
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	10th October 2022
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	12th November 2022
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in *If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.*	England, United Kingdom

Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?		√
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research?[1]	√	
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.[2]	√	
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? [3]		√

[1] You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

[2] This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

[3] Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation

5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? [4]	☑	
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?		☑
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	☑	
8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?	☑	
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?		☑
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		☑
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		☑
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		☑

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/).

and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

[4] Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.