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MASTER IN

MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

MASTER'S FINAL WORK

DISSERTATION

DRIVING EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

IN CONSULTING

MARIA PEREIRA CAMBOIA

OCTOBER 2024

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SUPERVISION:

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Abstract

Organizations face quick constant change, and this phenomenon is an inevitable and topmost main concern across all organizations. Changes are common to all industries, as different work environments require to adapt and innovate. However, consulting industry faces challenges not only on their own industry but from others since they deal with different clients every day. Managing change goes from processes to people and employees' importance in managing change is paramount. Thereby, in this study, it is analyzed the influence that leadership communication and perceived organizational support have on employees' commitment to change and what is the role of organizational identification in these relationships.

The methodology used was quantitative, employing an online questionnaire survey technique for data collection. A total of 204 responses were collected. Based on reliability of normative and continuance areas of employees' commitment to change variable, it was necessary to adjust the research hypothesis to focus only on the affective part.

The findings indicate that leadership communication positively influences consultant's affective commitment to change. The positive influence of perceived organizational support in employees' affective commitment to change was also identified. Nevertheless, while leadership communication and perceived organizational support showed to have a direct positive effect on affective commitment to change, organizational identification does not mediate the relationship between these variables. These findings suggest that companies should prioritize fostering effective communication and enhancing how employees feel support to help reduce resistance to change and increase their commitment.

Keywords: Organizational Change Management; Employees' Commitment to Change; Leadership Communication; Perceived Organizational Support; Organizational Identification; Consulting Industry.

Resumo

As empresas enfrentam mudanças rápidas e constantes, e este fenómeno é inevitável e uma preocupação prioritária em todas as organizações. Mudanças são comuns em todas as indústrias pois cada ambiente de trabalho exige adaptação e inovação. No entanto, a indústria de consultoria enfrenta desafios não apenas em seu próprio setor, mas também em outros pois lida com diversos clientes diariamente. A gestão de mudanças abrange tanto os processos quanto as pessoas, sendo a importância dos colaboradores crucial nesse contexto. Assim, neste estudo, é analisada a influência da comunicação da liderança e da perceção do apoio organizacional no comprometimento dos colaboradores para com a mudança, bem como o papel da identificação organizacional nessas relações.

A metodologia utilizada foi quantitativa, adotando a aplicação de questionário online como método de coleta de dados. O questionário teve um total de 204 respostas. Com base na fiabilidade das áreas normativa e de continuidade da variável de comprometimento dos colaboradores com a mudança, foi necessário ajustar a hipótese de pesquisa para se concentrar apenas na parte afetiva.

Os resultados indicam que a comunicação da liderança influencia positivamente o comprometimento afetivo dos consultores para com a mudança. Também foi identificada a influência positiva da perceção do apoio organizacional no comprometimento afetivo dos colaboradores para com a mudança. No entanto, embora a comunicação da liderança e a perceção do apoio organizacional tenham mostrado um efeito positivo direto no comprometimento afetivo para com a mudança, a identificação organizacional não medeia a relação entre essas variáveis. Esses resultados sugerem que as empresas devem priorizar o fortalecimento de uma comunicação eficaz e a melhoria da perceção de apoio pelos colaboradores para ajudar a reduzir a resistência à mudança e aumentar o comprometimento.

Palavras-chave: Gestão da Mudança Organizacional; Comprometimento dos Colaboradores para com a Mudança; Comunicação da Liderança; Perceção do Apoio Organizacional; Identificação Organizacional.

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1. Introduction

In work environments that are becoming more and more competitive, organizations nowadays face quick constant change, requiring companies to constantly adapt and innovate (Chychun et al., 2023). Leaders are constantly facing changes on how organizations operate and employees' attitudes toward work and their jobs are being transformed (Armenakis et al., 2000). Delivering a meaningful and sustainable idea of change is challenging for two reasons (Stouten et al., 2018): the lack of consensus in scientific literature and the difficulty in learning from experience. According to Hameed et al. (2017), even when organizations put great efforts in the change process, only 30% of them are successful and the reason behind the high failure rate is often associated with employees.

Regardless of the extensive knowledge available, there will always be challenges in navigating organizational change (Herold et al., 2007). As organizations face changes, they must consider not only how the organization's performance will be affected but also how these changes will impact their employees (Rita Men et al., 2022). Successful organizational changes requires a capable change leader and commitment from employees (Al-Ali et al., 2017). Employees are particularly important as they are directly involved in the process and their commitment to the company motivates them to work aligned with the organization goals (Chaudhry & Joshi, 2013). Employees' commitment to change has a critical role for the long-term organizational growth (Armenakis et al., 2000; Herold et al., 2007). Several factors can influence this individual's attachment: leadership communication play an significant role influencing employees to work toward a common goal and facilitating organizational change (Diharto, 2019); perceived organizational support is important to understand the social exchange between employees and their organization (Arnéguy et al., 2018) making them more likely to engage and support the change (Kebede et al., 2022); organizational identification, which reflects how strongly employees feel a shared identity and consistent bond with their organization (Edwards, 2005), serves as a key factor in driving their commitment to change (Zhou et al., 2022).

Management consulting companies, due to its special qualities, can be an attractive industry to investigate the role of how employees are devoted to commit to changes. The challenges faced by consulting firms can surge from their own industry – customer preferences, technology and competition – but also from their clients' industries (Seyed Kalali & Heidari, 2016). Consultants work on different projects and the dynamics of consultant-client vary significantly based on the specific project context requiring them to continuously adapt (Pemer & Werr, 2013). Moreover, consulting industry is known by the diversity of their top-quality job candidates from different academic and professional backgrounds (Richter et al., 2008). The variety of backgrounds give individuals a different way of reacting to change which enriches the present research.

The objective of this research is to explore the influence that leadership communication and perceived organizational support have on employees' commitment to change in consulting companies and what is the role of organizational identification in these relationships. The methodology used is quantitative, employing an online questionnaire survey technique for data collection. In terms of practical implications, companies can use the information to better know where to act when wanting to enhance their employees' commitment for planned or unplanned changes.

This dissertation is composed by 5 chapters. The first chapter comprehends the introduction where it is presented the importance and objectives of the study. The second chapter refers to literature review where provides a comprehensive analysis of existing research for the different variables (employees' commitment to change, leadership communication, perceived organizational support and organizational identification) and presents the research hypothesis. The third chapter mentions the research design, methodology and procedures used for data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter presents the findings from the data analysis. Lastly, the fifth chapter summarizes the key findings, discuss their theoretical and practical implications and provides suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organizational Change Management

Within a competitive business environment, continuous changes and challenges demand that companies adapt and innovate (Chychun et al., 2023). Adapting to emerging trends and embracing organizational change is not merely a strategic choice; it is an essential response to the ever-shifting demands of the market on the persistent evolution of technology, shifting consumer needs, grand challenges posed by environmental crisis, and evolving work methodologies (Al-Ali et al., 2017; Cole, 2011). According to Kebede et al. (2022), while an organization's production capacity and financial strength remain crucial to their competitiveness, it is important to focus on their readiness to embrace change and innovate. Change, an inevitable and a topmost main concern across all organizations, presents a confronting reality as it forces individuals to face uncertainties and fears (Mansaray, 2019).

Companies are currently navigating through the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) era, a time that demands organizations to accelerate their development efforts. This acceleration is necessitated by the rapid expansion of the four dimensions of change: type, speed, volume, and scale (Diharto, 2019). In this era, change is not merely a choice but an unavoidable reality—a reality that calls for agility, foresight, and a willingness to continuously evolve (Chatterjee, 2020). Firms should not allow these factors - the uncertainty of change and the unexpected fluctuations - or even the employees' resistance to change (Damawan & Azizah, 2020) to deter them from actively pursuing and preparing for change.

A highly influential and canonical framework is Lewin's Change Model (1947), comprising three stages—unfreezing, change, and refreezing—that stands as a cornerstone in managing organizational change (Hamdo, 2021). The first stage, unfreezing, acts as a catalyst for change by disrupting the existing equilibrium within an organization; the second stage represents the implementation phase, where new practices, processes, or structures are introduced and integrated into the organization; and finally, the third stage, refreezing, aims to solidify the changes and embed them into the fabric of the organization. Lewin's change model

serves as a roadmap for understanding and managing change processes within organizations (Hussain, 2018). Another important and well-known change management model is Kotter's 8 Steps Change Management Model (Agazu et al. 2022). This model comprises eight sequential steps: create a sense of urgency, establish a strong guiding coalition, form a clear and strategic vision for change, effectively communicate the vision, enable action by removing barriers, generate short-term wins, continuously build on the change and institutionalize the change. Both Lewin's Change Theory and Kotter's 8-Step Change Management Model remain relevant and widely used in contemporary organizational change management practices. While both theories were developed several decades ago, other studies conducted by Haas et al. (2019), Tran et al. (2020) and Miles et al. (2023) determined that their principles and frameworks continue to offer valuable insights and guidance for navigating change in today's dynamic business environments.

Errida et al. (2021) analyzed 37 organizational change management models that are valuable tools for guiding organizations through the complex and dynamic process of change and reduced all the factors included in these models into 12 categories: (1) clear and shared vision and strategy of change; (2) change readiness and capacity for change; (3) change team performance; (4) activities for managing change management; (5) resistance management; (6) effective communication; (7) motivation of employees and change agents; (8) stakeholder engagement; (9) leadership and sponsorship; (10) reinforcement and sustainment of change; (11) approach and planning change; (12) monitoring/measurement. Despite their distinct names, each category address critical factors for the success of organizational change initiatives. Not all organizational changes succeed because some difficulties can emerge (Specht et al., 2017), and as a result, only 30% of the organizational change processes are successful (Hameed et al., 2017). Managing organizational change is not possible without a change leader/agent and commitment from employees (Al-Ali, et al., 2017). The continuing changes of today's constantly adapting organizations amplify the significance of individual change readiness (Seggewiss et al., 2018). The importance of employees in managing change is paramount. Employees are not just passive recipients of change; they are active participants who can significantly influence the success or failure of change initiatives (Neill et al., 2019). In this world of handling organizational changes, organizations need to create a supportive environment to embrace the change and achieve sustainable outcomes.

It is evident that successful change management relies on the synergy of several interrelated factors (Stouten et al., 2018). Literature presents some of those factors such as leadership communication (Husain, 2013), organizational identification (Kim et al., 2013), perceived organizational support (Eisenberg et al., 1986: Eisenberg et al., 2001) and employees' commitment to change (Mangundjaya, 2015; Potnuru et al., 2021; Conway et al., 2023) are one of those interconnected elements that play a crucial role in the effective implementation of change.

2.2. Employees' Commitment to Change

The body of literature addressing how to best initiate and manage change is substantial and extensively documented (Haas et al., 2019; Mansaray, 2019; Agazu et al., 2022; Chychun et al., 2023). As organizations plan for the change, they must consider not only how the organization's performance will be affected but also how employees react to the change and will be impacted (Rita Men et al., 2022). However, it's important to recognize that despite the wealth of knowledge available, there will always be challenges inherent in navigating organizational change (Herold et al., 2007). An essential component in reducing this challenge is employees' commitment to change that has been proved to be an asset for organizations (Seggewiss et al., 2018) and an important variable in effective implementation of the change (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993).

Employees play a crucial role in the success of organizational change, as they are responsible for implementing and sustaining it. Their commitment to change drives them to invest the necessary effort to ensure its effectiveness (Chaudhry & Joshi, 2013). If organizational commitment in general is the individual's psychological attachment to an organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Yücel et al., 2024), commitment to change, in particular, is the glue that provides vital bond between people and change goals (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Rita Men et al., 2022). Commitment to change reflects not only those positive attitudes but also alignment with the change, intentions to support it and willingness to work on behalf of its successful implementation (Herold et al., 2007; Helvacı et al., 2018). Through commitment, researchers and practitioners understand the importance of the change implementation processes in modeling employees' attitudes and behaviors towards change (Reed & Johnston, 2014).

Individuals that strongly commit to their organization are more willing to accept organizational changes (Kwahk et al., 2008; Diharto, 2019). This commitment is often manifested in their adherence to new guidelines, procedures, plans, and technology (Sulastini et al., 2023) and it correlates with elevated levels of performance (Thao et al., 2024), motivation (Kim et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2022), and job satisfaction (Ming et al., 2023).

Precise measures and analyses of commitment allow organizations to shape their strategies and it's known that this concept encompasses various forms, each providing a unique perspective on the depth of an individual's commitment to the organization – affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). *(1) Affective commitment* reflects the emotional bond an individual forms with their workplace that contributes for them to work above and beyond their formal job requirements, driven by a passion of what they do and a desire to contribute to the overall success of the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Pimenta et al., 2023). Affective commitment is often associated with positive organizational outcomes such as a reduced likelihood of turnover (Moreira & Cesário, 2021). *(2) Normative commitment* is characterized by a perceived moral or ethical obligation to stay committed to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). This form of commitment, as highlighted by Harini et al. (2022), emerges from a psychological attachment to an institution and the internalization of its values. *(3) Continuance commitment* is the individual's commitment when having the perception of the costs associated with leaving their current organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Mutmainnah et al., 2022; Yücel et al., 2024). It is also known as "calculative commitment" with the calculation involving factors such job alternatives, and potential loss of benefits or privileges (Khun Loo et al., 2017). The three types of commitment provide a comprehensive perspective of the complexity of the relationship between employees and organizations.

According to Chaudhry et al. (2013), affective commitment is associated with compliance, collaboration and supporting of the change and is considered the most significant factor for change. Affective commitment to change can be distinguishable from the others as it refers to the "want to" part of commitment instead of the "have to, and/or ought to" (Rita Men et al., 2022). More specifically, it comprehends the desire to support a change and the

employees' emotional connection to their employer, facilitating employees' coping strategies (Pimenta et al., 2023).

Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) highlighted that the most common fact leading to unsuccessful change projects is often attributed to a deficiency in commitment among individuals involved in the process. This underscores the critical importance of understanding and addressing commitment because when employees are committed, they possess a deep understanding of the underlying reasons driving the change initiative (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2018).

Employees' commitment to change is often fostered by leadership communication, which clarifies the purpose and rationale behind the change (Lewis, 2006; Husain, 2013), by perceived organizational support, as employees who feel supported by their organization are more likely to engage with and embrace change initiative (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020) and by organizational identification that fosters a sense of belonging among employees (Gomes et al., 2022).

2.3. Leadership Communication

There are numerous definitions of leadership as this area has been widely explored in organizational studies (Schneider et al., 2014). In an earlier study, Chemers (1997) defined leadership as a process of social influence in which one person recruits support for a common task. Along similar lines, Northouse (2010) states that leadership is a process of influence that occurs in groups involving common goals. In a more recent approach, leadership is characterized as a political skill encompassing the ability of an individual to "lead" or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Tang, 2019).

Leadership in the contemporary VUCA era presents growing challenges. Leaders are tasked with preparing their teams to confront rapid and unpredictable changes, necessitating a high level of readiness and adaptability among their human resources (Diharto, 2019). The reason for focusing on communication is that, among all the functions performed by leaders, it has the greatest potential to influence a large number of employees, and therefore facilitate change (Chaudhry et al., 2013). Effective leaders are crucial to achieve positive outcomes during

change progress (Al-Ali, et al., 2017). Mansaray (2019) stated that leadership is highlighted as a key element in driving positive changes within organizations, where leaders guide employees toward achieving organizational goals. During the change process, according to Hussain (2018), leadership has five key activities: motivating change, creating a vision, developing political support, managing their transition, and sustaining momentum. Nadler et al. (1998) recognized leaders as "Champions of Change" as it is their responsibility of effectively managing the process of change and sustain the operational trustworthiness of the organization.

Communication is not just a practice for leaders but a significant component of effective leadership (Mulyana, 2021). Employees will rely and trust on their leader through effective communication (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2018) as it is through this that leaders influence beliefs, actions, and emotions of others to embrace the path of a common goal (Cohen, 2004; Lewis, 2006). According to Luthra (2015), leadership communication involves systematically and meaningfully sharing information using excellent communication skills to inspire and encourage individuals or groups.

According to Mayfield (2016), leadership communication occurs when a leader's articulation of talk or actions is recognized by others as capable of progressing important tasks or significant problems. This communication can be used to motivate and commit employees and Klein (1996) also believed that the difficulties arising from change processes can be easily managed when having a good communication strategy. Ouedraogo and Ouakouak (2018) stated that effective and appropriate communication plays a crucial role in change initiatives to determine the success of such programs.

It is essential to recognize that leaders' communication can't be static, especially in the context of change management. As the change program progresses through Lewin's three stages of unfreeze, change, and refreeze, communication needs to evolve accordingly (Goodman & Truss, 2006). In a parallel manner, Shculz-Knappe et al. (2019) gave emphasis that inadequate and incomplete communication of information can result in employee resistance which constrains the implementation of the change and increases its costs.

The success of organizational change accomplishments is intertwined with the level of commitment employees exhibit and the effectiveness of communication from leadership.

Coulson-Thomas (1992) stated that commitment begins in the boardroom and leaders can't expect subordinates to commit to their job if they don't commit to theirs (Tang 2019). Leaders must effectively communicate and motivate employees in achieving the organization goals. If employees feel embraced, they will show commitment and loyalty to the organization (Mansaray, 2019).

Employees' commitment will depend on how much he/she knows and understands about the strategic issues of the company and well-managed communication from leaders during the change phase avoids confusion and clear understanding of the processes (Husain, 2013; Ortega et al., 2023). The effectiveness of leadership communication is widely recognized as a basis in influencing the various dimensions of employee commitment (Yue et al., 2022), as it enhances employee's understanding, clarity, and acceptance of change initiative (Hussain, 2018), so following these ideas it is reasonable to test the succeeding hypothesis:

H1: Leadership communication positively influences employees' commitment to change.

2.4. Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support refers to "the degree to which employees believe that employers care about their happiness and value their contribution to the organization" (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020, p.2). Prior research has highlighted its significance in understanding the social exchange between employees and their organization (Arnéguy et al., 2018). According to Social Exchange Theory, it is assumed that employees who perceive support and care from their supervisors/organization will develop a sense of attachment to the organization and feel a sense of obligation to "return the favor" by working toward the goals of the company (Blau et al., 1964; Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2023). Eisenberger et al. (2001) considered the reciprocity norm and defended that perceived organizational support induces a sense of obligation in employees to prioritize the organization's well-being and contribute to its objectives and this sense of indebtedness could be fulfilled through heightened commitment to the organization and increased efforts to support its goals. Ensuring support for employees within companies is paramount for fostering a positive work environment and achieving organizational success (Liang et al., 2023).

According to Eisenberg et al. (1986), the organizational support theory can embrace three primary forms of favorable treatment perceived from the organization: fairness, supervisor support, organizational rewards and job conditions. When employees believe that their organization supports their career growth and addresses their career needs, this support becomes a crucial resource for managing stress and concentrating on work goals. This positive perception of organizational support is associated with an employees' readiness for change (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020).

It is important to ensure a strong organizational support as this cultivates emotional attachment among employees, driving increased motivation to contribute to organizational goals, especially in times of crisis (Suthaorn et al., 2023). Depending on the level of support within the organization, employees may either resist or embrace the change (Kebede et al., 2022). Purwaningrum et al. (2020) conducted research that illuminates the considerable impact of perceived organizational support on individual behaviors amid periods of organizational change. Individuals adapt their behavior to endorse and facilitate change when they perceive that the organization values and appreciates their efforts (Sheikh, 2022).

Positive perception of support from colleagues, supervisors, and the organization is crucial if an organization aims for its employees to demonstrate positive behaviors amidst change (Katsaros, 2024). Existing literature suggests that employees cultivate a sense of belonging to organizations that prioritize their well-being and make them feel valued. This sense of appreciation fosters organizational commitment (Sikandar & Arif, 2023). When employees perceive a high level of organizational support, it impacts their commitment and readiness for organizational change and they are more likely to respond by actively supporting and preparing for the change initiatives (Kebede et al., 2022). Within this context, employees' perception of receiving favorable treatment from the organization ought to strengthen their commitment during turbulent periods. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived organizational support positively influences employees' commitment to change.

2.5. Organizational Identification

In the literature, three conceptualizations of identification have emerged as particularly influential over the past two decades: identification with the work, occupational identification, and organizational identification (Ranganathan, 2021). The focus of this study is on organizational identification as it has become clear that it is an essential element to organizational effectiveness (Hameed, et al., 2017) and is important in studying the positive attitudes and behaviors toward change (Fuchs & Edwards, 2011; Hameed et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2014; Gomes et al., 2022).

The definitions of organizational identification maintain its essence as various authors converge in the same foundational question: "Who are we as an organization?" (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2015; Gomes et al., 2022, p.6). Mael and Ashforth (1992, p.104) defined it as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member". Organizational identification, referring to the degree to which employees feel a sense of psychological oneness and unity with an organization, is a psychological state that mirrors the inherent connection between employee and organization (Edwards, 2005).

Ashforth and Corley (2008) settled the idea that the terms identification and commitment are distinct concepts, but their alignment creates a symbiotic relationship that yields organizational advantages (Gomes et al., 2022). Reinforcing this, Meyer and others studied commitment and got to the conclusion employees feel committed when they identify with the values and strategies of organizations (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). An employee who identifies strongly with the organization is more likely to exhibit higher levels of commitment (Zhou et al., 2022) and Haslam et al. (2006) discovered strong support to suggest that identification is a condition for commitment. Thus, when an organization chooses to implement changes, employees who strongly identify with their workspace will commit to the change believing that the effort is necessary and beneficial (Michel et al., 2010). Thus, employees who have a strong sense of organizational identification are more likely to reveal higher levels of commitment to change initiatives (Edosomwan et al., 2023) as they have merged

their self-identity with their organization will also align their self-interest with the success of the organizational change (Neill et al., 2019).

Identification is influenced by various factors, with management communication emerging as the most pivotal (Chreim, 2002). The role of leadership communication in fostering commitment to change among employees is widely explored and was also mentioned before. In this dynamic landscape of organizational change, an often-overlooked aspect is the intermediary role played by organizational identification (Chreim, 2002). Communication serves as a catalyst for strengthening member identification within an organization. Leader's persuasive words inherently contribute to organizational identification (Mayfield et al., 2020). It enables employees to articulate and exchange their subjective interpretations of the organization's fundamental elements, including its norms, values, and culture (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999).

Effective communication serves as a cornerstone for leaders in fostering employees' organizational identification (Neill et al., 2019). By openly communicating information about the reasons behind organizational changes, the intended goals, and the expected outcomes, leaders empower employees to understand the rationale behind the changes and feel committed to achieve organizational objectives (Chaudhry & Joshi, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between leadership communication and employees' commitment to change.

A high level of organizational support fosters a sense of alignment with the organization values among employees impacting their commitment to change (Kebede et al., 2022). This sense of belonging or support has a strong positive effect on organizational identification (Suthatorn et al., 2023). The feeling of being valued and appreciated make employees have more confidence in their organization and develop a collective identity (He et al., 2014). Employees show positive behaviors when their identification with the organization is high (Edosomwan et al., 2023). This association elucidates that when employees perceive support that meets their need for recognition and approval, they align their identity with the organization, fostering a deep commitment that drives desired organizational outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 1986). With this in mind, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employees' commitment to change.

With all the hypotheses presented, it is now time to unveil the model underpinning this study (Figure 1). This model serves as the structural framework guiding our research analysis.

Figure 1 - Research Model
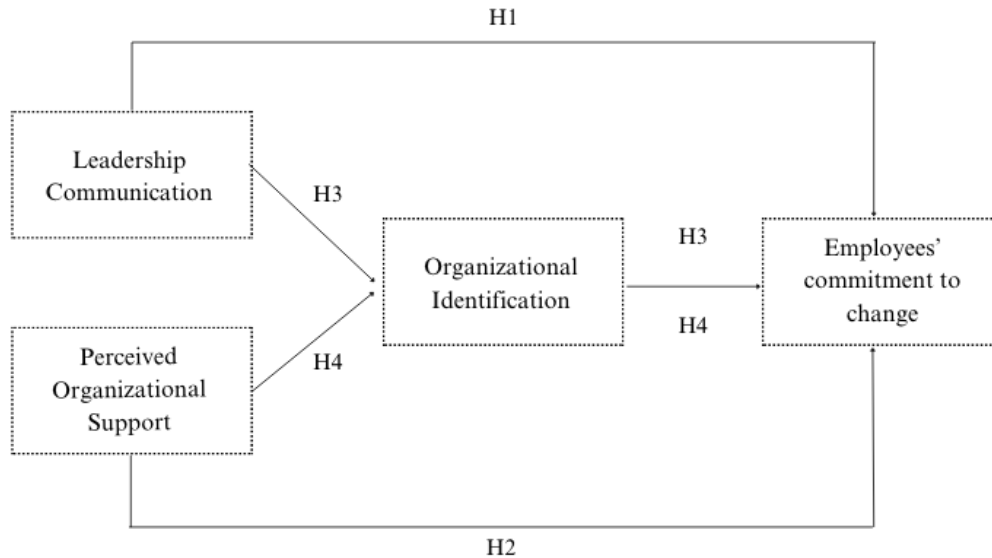
Source: Self-elaboration

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research type

This research has the primary objective to understand how leadership communication and perceived organizational support influence employees' commitment to change. It also aims to understand the role of organizational identification in this process. To achieve this objective, this study adopts a quantitative research design, by which variables can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures to identify any significant associations (Creswell et al., 2017. The data were gathered through a survey, in order to propose possible explanations for specific relationships between variables and to develop models representing these relationships (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2. Data collection

This study identified management consulting companies as a prime area for data collection, aiming to capture a wide spectrum of perspectives involved in managing change (Seyed Kalali et al., 2016). This is because consulting firms encounter constant challenges not only with their industry but also from the industries of their clients, creating a complex and dynamic environment to deal with change. Therefore, this study included a diverse range of consultancy firms, covering sectors such as IT, financial consulting, and marketing consulting, and representing different regions including America, Europe, and Asia.

Data was collected using a survey method and based on the literature review about the different variables, a survey instrument was developed and built on Qualtrics. To mitigate the potential for biased responses, it was employed a strategy of interspersing questions related to the different variables throughout the survey, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). To evaluate its adequacy, a pre-test of the initial survey version was conducted with six participants. Consequently, feedback from the respondents was taken into consideration, and adjustments to the wording were made to clarify the questions.

The survey was made available to participants during May and June 2024, allowing for an extended data collection period to maximize participation and ensure a diverse range of responses. Social media has been pointed in multiple studies as a valuable way to reach and recruit large numbers of respondents (Zindel, 2023). In this way, the spreading of the instrument was made using LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and direct emails to consulting companies to reach a broad audience of consultants. During the process, several shares were made to remind participants to respond.

3.3. Measures

All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), and the full questionnaire can be observed in the Appendix I. The scales of the present studies present good Cronbach's alpha values, ranging from 0.79 to 0.94.

Employees' commitment to change. This eighteen-item scale was taken from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) study and reflects all three components of employee commitment. An equal number of six items measure affective commitment (e.g., "This change is a good strategy for this organization"), normative commitment (e.g., "I do not think it would be right of me to opposite this change") and continuance commitment (e.g., "I feel pressure to go along with this change").

Organizational identification. The six-item scale used was found in Mael & Ashforth (1992) study. An example of the items on this scale is: "When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult".

Leadership communication. This variable was measured with a six-item scale created by Schneider et al. (2014). An example of an item from this scale is "My supervisor is sensitive to the need of others.

Perceived organizational support. Eisenberger et al. (2001) created a six-item scale that was employed to measure this variable. This scale comprised items such as "The company takes pride in my accomplishments".

3.4. Sample characterization

A detailed characterization of the sample, with a total of 204 respondents is provided in Appendix II, where it is possible to observe that the majority of the sample is female (63.24%) and relatively young, with the largest age group being is 20-29 years old (68.14%). Most individuals hold a bachelor's degree (48.04%), followed closely by those with a master's degree (41.18%). The majority of the sample is from Europe (70.10%) and Asia (13.22%). Respondents primarily work in the Information Technology sector (32.84%) and in the Marketing and Sales Consulting sector (16.67%). Managerial/Administrative (18.14%), Sales/Marketing (16.18%), and Operational/Technical (14.22%) are the predominant roles. The greatest percentage of employees are within the company for 1-3 years (45.10%).

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1. Reliability analysis of the scales

In research the accuracy and consistency of measurement instruments are paramount. Reliability refers to the extent to which an instrument consistently measures a construct. A reliable scale will produce stable and consistent results over repeated applications under similar conditions. This is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, ranging from 0 to 1, with values of 0.7 or higher indicating acceptable internal consistency and reliable measurement of the construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

According to the test results (Table I), the Cronbach's alpha for the Commitment to Change scale shows different behavior for each type of commitment. Affective Commitment scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.790 indicating good reliability and internal consistency. Regarding Normative Commitment and Continuance Commitment both have a low Cronbach's alpha (0.338 and 0.648, respectively). Therefore, these dimensions will not be considered in the subsequent analysis, focusing solely on the affective aspect of commitment (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The Cronbach's alpha values of Leadership Communication, Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Identification indicate good internal consistency, with 0.909, 0.848 and 0.816, respectively.

Table I - Cronbach's alphas of the variables

Variables		Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Commitment to change	Affective commitment	0.790	6
	Normative commitment	**0.338**	6
	Continuance commitment	**0.648**	6
Leadership Communication		0.909	6
Perceived Organizational Support		0.848	6
Organizational Identification		0.816	6

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

4.2. Analysis of central tendency and dispersion

This section analyzes central tendency and dispersion to highlight patterns and variations in our data. The responses given by the respondents were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, so

it is assumed that the theoretical midpoint is 3. The data in Table II, suggest that respondents have a generally positive attitude across the variables. Affective commitment to change (3.72) is notably positive and consistent across respondents. Leadership communication (3.64) and organizational identification (3.64) are positive, with some variability in how strongly these factors are experienced, followed by perceived organizational support (3.46) that shows a moderately positive value.

Table II - Descriptive statistics of the sample

Variables	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Affective Commitment to Change	204	3.72	0.61
Leadership Communication	204	3.64	0.85
Perceived Organizational Support	204	3.46	0.76
Organizational Identification	204	3.64	0.72

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

4.3. Demographic analysis of differences in variable distribution

To analyze the variables under study and their variation in relation to sociodemographic variables, the ANOVA test was applied. This test allowed us to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the means of the groups based on different sociodemographic factors. The p-value associated represents the probability that the observed differences between group means occurred by chance. A common threshold for statistical significance is 0.05 (Andrade, 2019). All the sociodemographic variables were tested, but in this section, only the variables that showed statistically significant differences (p-value < 0.05) will be presented.

In Table III, it is possible to detect some significant regional differences in employees' affective commitment and organizational identification. Regarding affective commitment to change, Africa has the highest average commitment (4.16), while the lowest is from Asia (3.39). Europe, representing the largest number of respondents, has an average commitment (3.78) slightly higher than the overall average (3.72). Considering organizational identification, the highest average identification comes from Africa as well (4.37). Europe has a similar behavior for all variables except for organizational identification where the lowest value observed is from European respondents (3.56).

Table III – Sociodemographic differences across locations

Variables		N	Mean	F	Sig
Affective Commitment to Change	America	14	3.65	3.382	**0.011**
	Europe	143	3.78		
	Africa	5	4.16		
	Asia	29	3.39		
	Other	13	3.73		
	Total	204	3.72		
Leadership Communication	America	14	3.92	1.588	0.179
	Europe	143	3.67		
	Africa	5	4.03		
	Asia	29	3.46		
	Other	13	3.28		
	Total	204	3.64		
Perceived Organizational Support	America	14	3.43	0.542	0.705
	Europe	143	3.50		
	Africa	5	3.77		
	Asia	29	3.36		
	Other	13	3.32		
	Total	204	3.47		
Organizational Identification	America	14	3.98	2.858	**0.025**
	Europe	143	3.56		
	Africa	5	4.37		
	Asia	29	3.77		
	Other	13	3.65		
	Total	204	3.64		

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

In Table IV, it is possible to observe significant variances between sectors of activity in terms of how employees perceive leadership communication, the organizational support and the identification with the organization. Concerning leadership communication and perceived organizational identification, Information Technology shows the most positive opinion, 3.99 and 3.77, respectively. Marketing and Sales Consulting shows a considerable low understanding regarding their leader communication (3.50) and how they perceive their organizational support (3.30). Considering organizational identification, Financial Consulting has the highest average identification (3.93).

Table IV – Sociodemographic differences across sectors

Variables		N	Mean	F	Sig
Affective Commitment to Change	Information Technology (IT)	67	3.84	1.206	0.309
	Financial Consulting	20	3.80		
	Human Resources Consulting	20	3.64		
	Marketing and Sales Consulting	34	3.61		
	Other	63	3.66		
	Total	204	3.72		
Leadership Communication	Information Technology (IT)	67	3.99	8.687	**<0.001**
	Financial Consulting	20	3.88		
	Human Resources Consulting	20	3.82		
	Marketing and Sales Consulting	34	3.50		
	Other	63	3.21		
	Total	204	3.64		
Perceived Organizational Support	Information Technology (IT)	67	3.77	5.268	**<0.001**
	Financial Consulting	20	3.48		
	Human Resources Consulting	20	3.53		
	Marketing and Sales Consulting	34	3.30		
	Other	49	3.22		
	Total	204	3.47		
Organizational Identification	Information Technology (IT)	67	3.79	2.637	**0.035**
	Financial Consulting	20	3.93		
	Human Resources Consulting	20	3.61		
	Marketing and Sales Consulting	34	3.51		
	Other	49	3.48		
	Total	204	3.64		

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

4.4. Correlation analysis of variables

In this part, it is provided a correlation analysis of the variables. Correlation analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between two or more continuous variables (Franzese & Juliano, 2019). This method helps to identify whether and how variables are related, providing insights into their interdependencies (Senthilnathan, 2019).

According to Table V, it is possible to detect that exists a reasonable positive correlation between leadership communication and affective commitment to change ($\rho=0.363$; $p<0.001$).

This suggests that as leadership communication improves, there is a tendency for employees' affective commitment to change to increase as well. This moderate positive relationship can be observed as well between perceived organizational support and affective commitment to change ($\rho=0.322$; $p<0.001$). This implies that when employees feel supported by the company is likely to have a positive effect on their affective commitment to change. Regarding organizational identification and affective commitment to change, the relationship is not the strongest ($\rho=0.284$; $p <0.001$), thus it is reasonable to admit that when the employees identify with the company, their affective commitment to change tends to slightly rise.

It is possible to analyze a strong positive relationship between leadership communication and perceived organizational support ($\rho=0.677$; $p<0.001$). It is plausible to accept that when leadership communication is well perceived by the employees, they tend to feel more supported by their company. Leadership communication and organizational identification also present a strong positive association ($\rho=0.545$; $p<0.001$). This suggests that when leaders communicate effectively, employees are more likely to feel a sense of identification with the company. Ultimately, it can be observed a robust positive relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational identification ($\rho=0.612$; $p<0.001$). This demonstrates that employees who feel supported by their organization are more likely to strongly identify with it.

Table V - Correlation between variables

		ACC	LC	POS	OI
ACC	Pearson Correlation	1	**0.363****	**0.322****	**0.284****
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**<0.001**	**<0.001**	**<0.001**
	N	204	204	204	204
LC	Pearson Correlation	0.363**	1	**0.677****	**0.545****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001		**<0.001**	**<0.001**
	N	204	204	204	204
POS	Pearson Correlation	0.322**	0.677**	1	**0.612****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001		**<0.001**
	N	204	204	204	204
OI	Pearson Correlation	0.284**	0.545**	0.612**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	
	N	204	204	204	204

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
ACC= Affective Commitment to Change; LC= Leadership Communication; POS= Perceived Organizational Support; OI= Organizational Identification

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

4.5. Hypothesis analysis

To test the presented hypothesis during the study, it was used the linear regression analysis and Baron & Kenny (1986) method to analyze the mediation of some variables. Regression analysis grants to estimate the form of the relationship between two variables and it assesses how an independent variable predicts a dependent variable (Allen, 1997). The Baron & Kenny model allows us to understand the process where the independent variable influences another dependent variable through a mediator variable using regression analysis between the different variables in the mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

H1: Leadership communication positively influences employees' affective commitment to change.

Considering the data from the performed linear regression for hypothesis 1 (Table VI), it is possible to observe 13.2% of the variance in affective commitment to change can be explained by leadership communication (R^2= 0.132). The regression model is statistically significant (F=30.662, p<0.001), thus, it is plausible to conclude that leadership communication

positively and significantly influences affective commitment to change (β=0.363; t=5.537; p<0.001) and, consequently, accept hypothesis 1.

Table VI - Linear regression model of Hypothesis 1

Model *Summary*[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.363^{a}	**0.132**	0.127	0.57060

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Communication
b. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

***ANOVA*[a]**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.983	1	9.983	**30.662**	$< 0.001^{b}$
	Residual	65.767	202	0.326		
	Total	75.750	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Communication

***Coefficients*[a]**

Model		Unstandardized β	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.274	0.176		15.786	<0.001
	Leadership Communication	0.260	0.047	**0.363**	**5.537**	**<0.001**

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

H2: Perceived organizational support positively influences employees' affective commitment to change.

About hypothesis 2, it was performed a linear regression analysis (Table VII), where is possible to detect through the coefficient of determination (R^{2}= 0.104) that 10.4% of the variance in affective commitment to change can be explained by perceived organizational support. The regression model is statistically significant (F=23.360, p<0.001), so, it is reasonable to conclude that perceived organizational support positively and significantly

influences affective commitment to change (β=0.322; t=4.833; p<0.001) and, subsequently, accept hypothesis 2.

Table VII - Linear regression model of Hypothesis 2

Model *Summary*[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.322[a]	**0.104**	0.099	0.57977

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Organizational Support
b. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

***ANOVA*[a]**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.852	1	7.852	**23.360**	**< 0.001[b]**
	Residual	67.898	202	0.336		
	Total	75.750	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change
b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Organizational Support

***Coefficients*[a]**

Model		Unstandardized β	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.822	0.191		14.810	<0.001
	Perceived Organizational Support	0.259	0.054	**0.322**	**4.833**	**<0.001**

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

Concerning hypothesis 3 and 4, we will test for mediation effects. A variable can be called "mediator" when it serves as a link through which the independent variable affects the dependent variable (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

H3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between leadership communication and employees' affective commitment to change.

To test hypothesis 3, it is used Baron & Kenny method (1986). Mediation can be tested in three different regression equations: 1) regressing the dependent variable (Y) on the

independent variable (X); 2) regressing the mediator (M) on the independent variable (X); 3) regressing the dependent variable (Y) on both the independent variable (X) and on the mediator (M). After performing these regressions, three conditions should be met: the independent variable should significantly affect the dependent variable, the independent variable should significantly affect the mediator, and the mediator should significantly affect the dependent variable. Baron and Kenny (1986) stated that if those three conditions are met, the mediation effect is observed. First, if the effect of X on Y (C') is smaller in the third equation compared to the first equation, it shows that M explains part of the effect of X on Y. Secondly, total mediation is achieved if X has no significant effect on Y when M is included in the model.

1) Effect of leadership communication (X_1) on employees' affective commitment to change (Y)

This test requires a linear regression model to be used. This was already performed previously in this paper when testing hypothesis 1 and it was observed in Table VI that leadership communication positively and significantly influences affective commitment to change (β=0.363; t=5.537; p<0.001. As this condition is met, the calculation of second regression can be performed.

2) Effect of leadership communication (X_1) on organizational identification (M)

To test this direct effect, a linear regression model is performed. In Table VIII, it is possible to observe that the regression model is statistically significant (F=85.191, p<0.001), so leadership communication positively and significantly influences organizational identification (β=0.545; t=9.230; p<0.001). Another condition is met, it is correct to proceed for the last step.

Table VIII - Linear regression model between independent variable and mediator

Model $Summary^b$

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.545^a	0.297	0.293

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Communication
b. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification

$ANOVA^a$

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30.802	1	30.802	**85.191**	$< 0.001^b$
	Residual	73.036	202	0.362		
	Total	103.838	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Communication

$Coefficients^a$

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.979	0.185		10.689	<0.001
	Leadership Communication	0.457	0.050	**0.545**	**9.230**	**<0.001**

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

3) Effect of organizational identification (M) on employees' affective commitment (Y) while controlling for leadership communication (X_1)

In this third step, it is necessary to perform a multiple linear regression. In Table IX, it becomes clear that in both models, 1 and 2, leadership communication has a significant effect on employees' affective commitment to change (β=0.363; β=0.296; p<0.001). The decrease in the standardized coefficient (β) from one model to the other suggests that organizational identification may partially explain the effect of leadership communication in affective commitment to change. Given that the relationship between organizational identification and

affective commitment to change has a beta that is not statistically significant (p=0.118 >0.005), the mediation effect does not occur, and therefore, H3 is rejected (Table IX; Figure 2).

Table IX - Multiple linear regression of Hypothesis 3 mediation model

		Coefficients^a				
Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.774	0.176		15.786	<0.001
	Leadership Communication	0.260	0.047	**0.363**	5.537	<0.001
	(Constant)	2.567	0.219		11.717	<0.001
2	Leadership Communication	0.213	0.056	**0.296**	3.805	<0.001
	Organizational Identification	0.105	0.067	**0.122**	1.572	**0.118**

a. Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

Figure 2 - Conceptual mediation model of Hypothesis 3
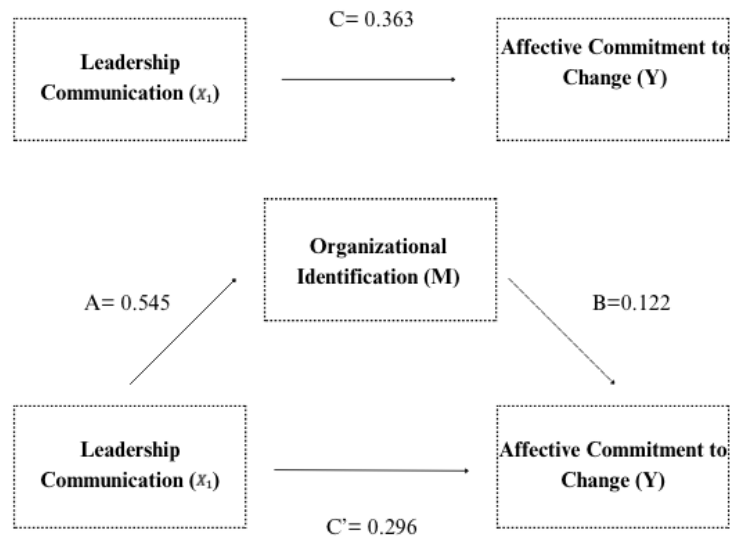
Source: Self-elaboration

H4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and employees' affective commitment to change.

To test hypothesis 4, it is used a process similar to the one performed for hypothesis 3, executing three different linear regression calculations.

1) Effect of perceived organizational support (X_2) on employees' affective commitment to change (Y)

To test this effect it requires a linear regression model to be used. This was already performed previously in this paper when testing hypothesis 2 and it was observed in Table VII that perceived organizational support positively and significantly influences affective commitment to change ($\beta=0.322$; $t=4.833$; $p<0.001$). One of the necessary conditions is met, the calculation of second regression can be executed.

2) Effect of perceived organizational support (X_2) on organizational identification (M)

To test this, a linear regression model is performed. In Table X, it is possible to observe that the regression model is statistically significant ($F=121.080$, $p<0.001$), concluding that perceived organizational support positively and significantly influences organizational identification ($\beta=0.612$; $t=11.004$; $p<0.001$). Another condition is met, it is appropriate to proceed for the last step.

Table X - Linear regression model between independent variable and mediator

Model *Summary^b*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.612^a	0.375	0.372

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Organizational Support
b. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.915	1	38.915	**121.080**	$< 0.001^b$
	Residual	64.923	202	0.321		
	Total	103.838	203			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification
b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Organizational Support

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.641	0.186		8.808	<0.001
	Leadership Communication	0.577	0.052	**0.612**	**11.004**	**<0.001**

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Identification

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

3) Effect of organizational identification (M) on employees' affective commitment to change (Y) while controlling for perceived organizational identification (X_2)

In this third step, it is necessary to perform a multiple linear regression. In Table XI, it is noticeable that perceived organizational support has a significant effect on employees' affective commitment to change in the first model ($\beta=0.322$; $p<0.001$). In model 2, perceived organizational support remains to have a statistically significant effect on employees' affective commitment to change ($\beta=0.237$; $p<0.005$) but the effect has decreased showing that the addition of organizational identification may partially explains the variance in the dependent variable. Due to the fact that the relationship between organizational identification and

commitment to change has a beta that is not statistically significant (p=0.100 >0.005), the mediation effect does not occur, and therefore, H4 is rejected (Table XI; Figure 3).

Table XI - Multiple linear regression of Hypothesis 4 mediation model

			$Coefficients^a$			
Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.822	0.191		14.810	<0.001
	Perceived Organizational Support	0.259	0.054	**0.322**	4.833	<0.001
	(Constant)	2.627	0.223		11.772	<0.001
2	Perceived Organizational Support	0.191	0.068	**0.237**	2.826	0.005
	Organizational Identification	0.118	0.072	**0.139**	1.654	**0.100**

a.   Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment to Change

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)

Figure 3 - Conceptual mediation model of Hypothesis 4
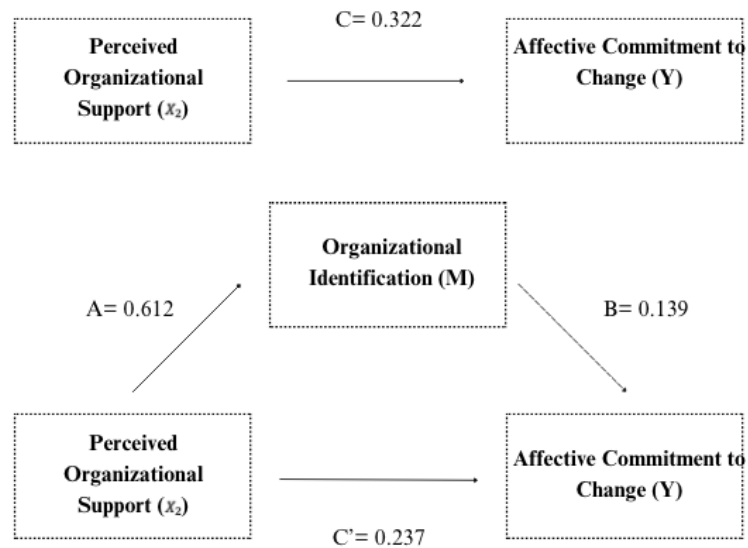
Source: Self-elaboration

4.6. Discussion of results

The focus of the study was to examine all three components of commitment – affective, normative and continuance. However, normative and continuance commitment subareas did not demonstrate the same good level of consistency as the affective commitment and, after some evaluation, the focus of the study adjusted solely the affective commitment. These results align with the work of Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) who studied the three forms of commitment but got to different conclusions regarding each one with affective commitment standing out with positive impact as predictor of both cooperation and championing (active support) of the change while normative and continuance are more closely associated with compliance rather than proactive support. This funds the idea that affective commitment is a better predictor of support for change and considered the most significant factor in change (Chaudhry et al., 2013).

Considering the first research hypothesis, it was confirmed that leadership communication positively influences employees' affective commitment to change. The way leaders communicate significantly influences employees' affective commitment and their subsequent attitudes and readiness to support and participate in the change process (Chaudhry & Joshi, 2013). In addition to these quantitative findings, data revealed that leadership communication has different reactions among the different consulting sectors and these variations observed highlight the importance of designing leadership communication according to the specifics needs or context in the different sectors (Al-Ali et al., 2017).

Regarding the second research hypothesis, the findings reveal that perceived organizational support positively influences employees' affective commitment to change. Employees who feel supported by their organizational are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment to the change process, a perspective that aligns with the findings of Purwaningrum et al. (2020). This supports Pimenta et al. (2023) research that concluded that perceived organizational support is related to the organizational commitment with a particularly strong connection with affective commitment. In a complementary analysis, organizational support is differently perceived by the different sectors and these differences can be caused by several reasons such as size and structure of the sector, client demands and/or the industry focus.

The study highlights the relationship between leadership communication and employees' affective commitment to change. However, it also emphasizes an often-overlooked aspect: the intermediary role of organizational identification. Neill et al. (2019) defend that effective communication by leaders not only strengthens employees' identification with the organizational but also enhances their commitment to organizational objectives. Based on this idea, it was more than reasonable to test the mediating role of organizational identification. Upon testing, the effect of leadership communication shows a reduction which suggests a possible mediation, but the influence of organizational identification is not strong enough to be considered statistically meaningful as mediator.

The mediation role of organizational identification was tested between leadership communication and employees' commitment to change, and also between perceived organizational support and employees' commitment to change. On the one hand, an effective communication by leaders not only strengthens employees' identification with the organization but also enhances their commitment to organizational objectives (Neill et al., 2019). Based on this idea, it was more than reasonable to test the mediating role of organizational identification. On the other hand, when employees feel recognized and supported by the company, they are more likely to align their identity with it (Suthatorn et al., 2023) and, consequently, present higher levels of commitment (Zhou et al., 2022).

In both mediation models, organizational identification is not significant. Upon testing, the effect of leadership communication shows a reduction which suggests a potential mediation, but the influence of organizational identification is not strong enough to be considered statistically meaningful as a mediator. Additionally, while the effect of perceived organizational support decreases when organizational identification is included as a mediator, it does not have statistical significance to influence the relationship between perceived organizational support and employees' commitment to change.

One possible explanation for this lack of mediation effect could be related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample, especially considering that the majority of respondents are relatively young (less than 30 years old) and have limited seniority within their companies (less than 3 years). These characteristics are significant, particularly as they align

with Millennials behavior, who are in the "stage of specifying, crystallizing and stabilizing their careers" (Ismail et al., 2016, p. 402). Given this continuous improvement, employers face challenges in terms of retention and identification. According to the literature, organizational identification also tends to grow over time (Wan-Huggins, 1998). Given the relatively short tenure of these employees have been in their companies, they may not have had sufficient time to identify with the company's culture, values and goals, which can explain the lack of mediation observed in this study. In addition, other studies (e.g. Arnéguy et al., 2018) have found that organizational identification might not act as a mediator in different contexts, as employees might view change as a threat to their current organization characteristics that form the basis of their organizational identification.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of research findings

Companies needs to adapt as the competitive business environment is constantly changing (Chychun et al., 2023) and as organizations navigate these changes, they must consider how it will affect their employees (Rita Men et al., 2022). Given this, it is important to understand the different variables that could make the change process an easier stage for the employees of different companies. The goal of this study was to investigate the influence of leadership communication and perceived organizational support on employees' commitment to change in consulting companies, exploring all three areas of employees' commitment to change – affective, normative and continuance. However, only the affective dimension has been considered, due to lower levels of internal consistency observed in normative and continuance commitment, thus respecting the establish acceptable thresholds (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Besides this, it was intended to study the mediating role of organizational identification within these relationships.

The present research confirms that leadership communication positively influences employees' affective commitment to change, highlighting how important is for leaders to consistently communicate and motivate employees to enhance their commitment to the organization and, consequently, to achieve the change process goals (Mansaray, 2019). It was

also possible to observe that employees' affective commitment to change is positively influenced by the perceived organizational support. When employees feel supported by their organization, they develop a sense of belonging and emotional attachment, and, consequently, making them more likely to support and be prepared for the change initiatives (Kebede et al., 2022; Sikandar & Arif, 2023).

Organizational identification revealed as a strong predictor of higher levels of commitment to change (Edosomwan et al., 2023) and leadership communication is important to contribute to enhance this employees' organizational identification (Mayfield et al., 2020). Despite the theoretical expectations and while effective leadership communication directly influences employees' emotional commitment to change, the study specified that the mediating role of organizational identification does not have effect between these two variables. Finally, perceived organizational support demonstrated to have a strong positive effect on organizational identification on previous studies (Suthatorn et al., 2023). Perceived organizational support had a positive direct effect on employees' affective commitment to change, but the mediating part of organizational identification does not produce any effect on the association between these two variables.

5.2. Theoretical and practical implications

In theoretical implications, the study presents valuable insights to the change management area, highlighting the importance of the relationships between leadership communication, perceived organizational support and affective commitment to change giving emphasis to existing literature (Mansaray, 2019; Pimenta et al., 2023). In practical propositions, companies should concentrate their effort on fostering effective leadership communications to help reduce the resistance to change among their employees. In this effort, training programs can be conducted to equip leaders with the necessary skills to effectively communicate. Yousfat and Mostéfauoi (2022, p.20) stated that "skill of knowing how to communicate is learned and training is truly essential to acquire the necessary techniques, tools and methods", such as highlight and understand the importance of the change, design the appropriate and effective messages, so leaders can influence beliefs, actions and emotions, inspiring and encouraging individuals or groups (Cohen, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Luthra, 2015). Not only those trainings are

important but other practices such as the ones Eisenberger et al. (2019) studied: being a supportive leader, create transparency among the different areas of the organization, care about work-family life balance and improve job conditions will help employees feel supported and appreciated.

5.3. Limitations of the study

Regarding limitations of the study, it is important to note the small sample size and the reliance on a convenience sample, along with the use of an online survey, limit the ability to generalize the conclusions. The complexity of considering a change and how employees react to it could have been better addressed by using alternative data collection methods, such as face-to-face interviews or administering the surveys directly within the company. In addition to this, as mentioned previously, the fact that the variable employees' commitment to change showed a significant low Alpha value for normative commitment and continuance commitment. With this, the study was limited to focus only on the affective commitment to avoid compromising the validity and reliability of the results (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Although is important to understand the emotional side of employees and being affective commitment the one of the most significant factors for change (Chaudhry et al., 2013), it restricts the study's depth and range.

5.4. Suggestions for future research

As suggestions for future research, it would be beneficial to understand and explore the various types of leadership communication (assertiveness, supportiveness, clarity and verbal aggressiveness) and how they impact on the different organizational variables of this study (Yang et al., 2020). With the variety and easy access to all information, different companies apply different ways of leading their employees and studying the different leadership communication styles could be a precious tool for companies to rely on. Other suggestion for upcoming research is to explore the impact of different phases of organizational change – unfreeze, change and refreeze (Lewin, 1947) – on the key variables of this study. Examining the phases and how they influence and interact with each variable is precious to understand dynamics in change processes (Burnes, 2019). Another suggestion is to consider other variables as mediators, such as job satisfaction, trust and employee engagement. Furthermore, introducing

distinct organizational cultures to the study would enrich the analysis providing understanding of how employees behave or react in different dynamics. Given the complexity of the topics at stake, forthcoming studies can offer complementary approaches with the use of qualitative methods providing a deeper understanding of the data and additional explanations for the relationships observed (Madey, 1982).

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Appendix

Appendix I – Questionnaire

Authors	Variable		Questionnaire items
Herscovitch et al. (2002)	Employee's commitment to change	Affective Commitment	I believe in the value of the change.
			The change is a good strategy for this organization.
			I think that management is making a mistake by introducing the change. *
			The change serves an important purpose.
			Things would be better without the change. *
			The change is not necessary. *
		Normative Commitment	I would not feel badly about opposing the change. *
			I do not think it would be right of me to oppose the change.
			I do not feel any obligation to support the change. *
			I feel pressure to go along with the change.
			I would feel guilty about opposing the change.
			I feel a sense of duty to work toward the change.
		Continuance Commitment	It would be risky to speak out against the change.
			It would be too costly for me to resist the change.
			I have no choice but to go along with the change.
			It would be irresponsible of me to resist the change.
			Resisting the change is not a viable option for me.
			I have too much at stake to resist the change.
Mael et al. (1992)	Leadership Communication		My manager and I can speak openly with each other.
			My manager is sensitive to the need of others.
			My manager seems to like devoting his time to me.

		I am content with the way my communication with my manager is going.
		Especially when problems arise, my manager and I talk to each other even more intensively to solve the problems.
		My manager and I share an understanding of how we would like to achieve our goals.
Eisenberger et al. (2001)	Perceived Organizational Support	The company takes pride in my accomplishments.
		The company really cares about my well-being.
		The company shows little concern for me.
		The company values my contributions to its well-being.
		The company strongly considers my goals and values.
		The company is willing to help me if I need a special favor.
Mael et al. (1992)	Organizational Identification	I am very interested in what other think about my company.
		When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult.
		When I talk about my company, I usually say "we" rather than "they".
		My company's successes are my successes.
		When someone praises my company, it feels like a personal compliment.
		If a story in the media criticized my company, I would feel embarrassed.

* Reverse score

Appendix II– Summary of demographic information

		N	%
Gender	Male	73	35.78
	Female	129	63.24
	Other	2	0.98
Age	20-29	139	68.14
	30-39	41	20.10
	40-49	12	5.88
	50+	12	5.88
Level of education	High School	16	7.84
	Bachelor's degree	98	48.04
	Master's degree	84	41.18
	Ph.D.	5	2.45
	Other	1	0.49
Location	North America/Central America	14	6.86
	Europe	143	70.10
	Africa	5	2.45
	Asia	29	14.22
	Other	13	6.37
Sector of activity	Information Technology (IT)	67	32.84
	Financial Consulting	20	9.80
	Human Resources Consulting	20	9.80
	Marketing and Sales Consulting	34	16.67
	Other	63	30.88
Current role	Managerial/Administrative	37	18.14
	Operational/Technical	29	14.22
	Sales/Marketing	33	16.18
	Human Resources	19	9.31
	Finance/Accounting	21	10.29
	Product/Service Development	16	7.84
	Customer Service/Support	15	7.35
	Other	34	16.67
Years within the company	Less than 1 year	62	30.39
	1-3 years	92	45.10
	4-6 years	30	14.71
	More than 7 years	20	9.80

Source: Self-elaboration (SPSS)