An Examination of the Relationship between Transformational Leadership, Openness to Experience and Coping with Organisational Change

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between transformational leadership, openness to experience and organizational change. Using a survey-based approach, data were collected from 202 non-academic employees (93 males and 109 females) drawn from a tertiary educational institution in Nigeria. Findings supported the hypothesized relationships. Specifically, the results indicate that transformational leadership (β = .16, ΔR^2 = .023, p < .05) and openness to experience (β = .27, ΔR^2 = .055, p < .01) predicted effective coping with organisational change. The implications of the findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, leadership style, change, openness to experience, coping with organizational change

INTRODUCTION

The world of work is dynamic and could be said to be in a state of flux. These dynamism and flux have been intensified in recent years. Globalization of markets, pressures to reduce costs, constant introduction of new advanced technologies, the need for speedy response, the importance attached to quality of service rendered to customers, and the pace of change, are all possible indicators that most organisations are in a perpetual state of change. This ongoing change in organisational status suggests that understanding how organisations operate in the future will depend greatly on understanding the people who constitute these organisations than on understanding a static hierarchy of formal roles (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). For instance, the nature of change taking place in organisations has become so pervasive to the extent that researchers (e.g., Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010; Mukherjee, Lahiri, Mukherjee, & Billing, 2012; Lieke ten Brummelhuis, Bakker, Hetland, & Keulemans, 2012) have used various terminologies such as telework, virtual work, high pace of innovation, downsizing, automation, hypercompetitive work environment, rapid change, outsourcing, new ways of working, increased merger and acquisition, and the like, to depict the ever-changing world of work. Without doubt, this dramatic change is affecting the manner in

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which organisations are structured and managed, and at the end, it usually leaves in its wake, intense uncertainty for employees (Datta et al., 2010). On the one hand, reactions to this uncertainty may be manifested in feelings of injustice, turnover intentions, stress, low productivity, and increased absenteeism. On the other hand, employees who are able to adapt to these changes may find the opportunities for growth and development and perceive these changes as challenges (Del Líbano, Llorens, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2012; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). All these give the impression that ability to cope with organisational change is important, especially for organisations that are highly characterised by change.

Drawing from Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen and DeLongis (1986) conceptualisation, we define coping with organisational change as an employee's ability to manage (minimize or tolerate) information and communication technology change-related demands at work that is evaluated as over-demanding and outweighs the employee's resources. Indeed, coping with organisational change can be very tasking for employees especially if the resources with which to deal with the situation are perceived as insufficient. Thus, given the globalization and fast development and application of advanced technology in the contemporary world of work, coping becomes imperative because it can help the organisation to effectively adapt, keep abreast to changes and constantly improve the status quo.

Considering that it is usually the responsibility of the leaders to initiate and spearhead organisational change, the leadership style that leaders adopt may be critical in determining the degree to which their subordinates can eventually cope with such change. For instance, leadership in general and transformational leadership in particular is commonly regarded as an important construct that can affect several important work-related outcomes (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). However, while the concept of transformational leadership has been extensively studied in relation to several important work-related outcomes, including employees psychological well-being (e.g., Kelloway, Turner, Barling, & Loughlin, 2012), safety behaviours (e.g., Clarke, 2013), work engagement (e.g., Hayati, Charkhabi, & Naami, 2014), employees' job performance (e.g., Bacha, 2014; Camps & Rodríguez, 2011; Lam & O'Higgins, 2012), followers' commitment to change (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008) among others, there is still much to be discovered vis-à-vis how this leadership style can affect subordinates coping with organisational change. The impact that transformational leaders can exert on their subordinates coping with organisational change has mostly existed at speculative and intuitive levels. Empirical evidence seems to be lacking in this respect. In essence, there is need for studies that could enhance our understanding of how transformational leadership style can be harnessed as a means of addressing the probable difficulties being experienced by employees in their quest to cope with the pervasive change taking place in the world of work. In addition, given that everybody may not experience and react to organisational change in the same way, individual personality may thus affect the way that they finally cope with it.

Although, ample studies (e.g., Alkahtani, Abu-Jarad, Sulaiman, & Nikbin, 2011; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Nikolaou, Gouras, Vakola, & Bourantas, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) have been conducted concerning personality and change in the workplace, only a handful of these studies (e.g., Judge et al., 1999; Nikolaou et al., 2007) have actually examined the link between openness to experience and organisational change. Moreover, even among

these studies in question, attention was only paid to managers but not the rank and file (subordinates) (e.g., Judge et al., 1999) and attitude towards change but not necessarily coping with organisational change (e.g., Nikolaou et al., 2007), hence the need to study openness to experience and coping with organisational change among subordinates. Thus, this study addresses this lacuna in the literature. The study, specifically examines the relationship between transformational leadership and openness to experience in coping with organizational change. By so doing, this study aims to contribute to the organisational change literature by providing empirical evidence linking transformational leadership and openness to experience to coping with organisational change among subordinates in a Nigerian sample. More importantly, the researchers are not aware of any previously published studies that have examined these relations among subordinates.

The remainder of this paper procceds as follows. We begin with a review of extant literature on organisational change and the development of two hypotheses linking transformational leadership and openness to experience to coping with organisational change. Thereafter, an overview of the research method is presented. Finally, the findings, implications for research and practice as well as limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Transformational Leadership and Coping with Organizational Change

It can be argued that because change is a pervasive organisational attribute associated with leadership (Parry, 1998), transformational leadership style may exert an important impact on subordinates' capability in effectively coping with organisational change. In this sense, leadership style can affect subordinates' coping ability in an organisation. That is, leadership style can sometimes aid subordinates to carry out their work roles effectively and at other times, it can impinge on it. Thus, the leadership style that is likely to produce the best results in a highly dynamic organisational context is one that can inspire followers to identify with the leader's vision of the future and to sacrifice self-interests for the benefit of the organisation as a whole. These attributes are aspects of transformational leadership. Accordingly, transformational leadership has been identified as one of such effective leadership styles that is associated with various organisational-relevant outcomes (Avolio et al., 2009). Transformational leadership is a style of leadership in which the leader seeks to help organisational members to rise beyond their self-interests for the sake of collective or group interests. They encourage subordinates or followers to challenge the existing system and norms of their organisational set-up, stimulate new perspectives and ways of doing things, and encourage approaching old situations based on the expression of new ideas and reasonings. They also serve as a source of inspiration to their subordinates or followers by articulating clear vision and engendering creative thinking. Furthermore, they tend to encourage learning by being intellectually stimulating, providing required support and coaching through extending greater meaning and challenge at work (Bass, 1998).

Transformational leadership operates from four dimensions: idealised influence (charisma) (the degree to which a leader is admired as a role model and thus, engenders loyalty from the followers), inspirational motivation (the degree to which the leader's vision is found appealing and inspiring by the followers), intellectual stimulation (the degree to which the leader challenges organisational assumptions and encourages divergent thinking from followers), and individual

consideration (the degree to which the leader recognizes the unique growth and developmental need of the followers and acts as a mentor to them) (Bass, 1998; Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In relation to organisational change, a transformational leader can take an active role in an ongoing organisational change and exhibit behaviours, such as articulating a change vision for the organisation and explaining how it can be achieved, acting as an organisational change role model and exemplifying the value of change in both words and actions, showing concern for employees' welfare and addressing issues relating to their coping with organisational change promptly.

There is paucity of research on the relationship between transformational leadership and coping with organisational change. However, a great flurry of research may be suggestive of the existence of a link between transformational leadership and coping with organisational change. For example, studies have shown that transformational leadership is associated with followers' innovation implementation behaviour (Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2010), managers' organizational innovation (Khan, Rehman, & Fatima, 2009), as well as employees' job performance and organisational commitment (Lam & O'Higgins, 2012). Kelloway et al. (2012) reported that managers' transformational leadership has a positive association with both employees' trust in leadership and psychological well-being, with trust in leadership mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological well-being. In another study, transformational leadership was also found to be associated with higher levels of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and sales productivity among subordinates (Zacher & Jimmieson, 2013). From the foregoing, "it seems

reasonable to assume, nevertheless, that because there is mounting evidence that leaders affect organisational performance in general, surely they have an impact on organisational change in particular" (Burke, 2002, p. 241). Therefore, the existing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance in particular, can be taken to suggest that it takes those who can cope effectively with organisational change to have a high level of sustained job performance.

Furthermore, in a study involving mid-level employees in Istanbul, Turkey, Yıldız, and Özcan (2014) found transformational leadership to be associated with higher levels of creativity. In another study, Herold et al. (2008) found transformational leadership to positively predict subordinates' commitment to change more strongly than that predicted by change-specific leadership, which seems to indicate in the present study that employees who are highly committed to change do so because they believe that they can cope with it. In sport context (intercollegiate athletics), Wells and Peachey (2011) also found transformational leadership of the head coach to be related to lower levels of voluntary turnover intentions of assistant coaches in the United States. In addition, in a university setting in Costa Rica, Camps and Rodríguez (2011) found transformational leadership to be predictive of greater organisational learning capability.

More recently, in a Chinese study involving participants from 20 organisations and a wide array of industries, including manufacturing, construction, finance and insurance, transportation and wholesale and retail industries, Yao, Fan, Guo, and Li (2014) found transformational leadership to be associated with reduced levels of employees' work stress and negative behaviour. Hence, transformational leadership can be regarded as

an overarching quality of a successful leader in organisational context, producing a range of positive outcomes. Therefore, given the general pattern of associations between transformational leadership and several important work-related outcomes, one would expect similar relationship between this construct and coping with organisational change. Thus:

Hypothesis 1: Transformational leadership is positively predictive of coping with organisational change.

Openness to Experience and Coping with Organizational Change

Openness to experience is a personality dimension that may also be implicated in coping with organisational change, given that it describes employees who can exhibit effective coping mechanisms, are receptive to new initiatives and ideas and, are tolerant and perceptive (Nikolaou et al., 2007). Openness to experience describes individuals who have wide-ranging interest, are imaginative and insightful (John & Srivastava, 1999). It can be thought of as the degree to which an individual has a broad range of interests and is creative, and willing to consider new ideas. These individuals are intellectually curious, creative, introspective, imaginative, perceptive, attentive, and often prefer variety and independence of judgement and seek out new experiences (McCrae, 1996; Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Such people tend to have flexible attitudes and engage in divergent thinking. As such, individuals scoring high in this trait could be said to be emotionally responsive, intellectually inquisitive, are willing to question authority and ready to consider novel ideas and unconventional values, and they experience both positive and negative emotions more enthusiastically than do closed individuals (McCrae, 1996; Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). However, people lower in this dimension tend to have narrower interests, to be conventional in behaviour and conservative in outlook, that is, they prefer to stick to the tried-and-true ways of doing things. Hence, changing the existing status-quo could therefore be welcomed and seen as a challenge rather than a problem for employees scoring high on openness to experience than those scoring low.

There are justifiable reasons to examine the possible contribution of personality trait such as openness to experience to coping with organisational change. One of such reasons is that individuals who are more open are likely to consider new perspectives of doing things (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007) than those who are less open, which may be useful in coping with change in the workplace. More so, given that individuals who score high in openness to experience are open-minded, it also seems that such individuals are likely to approach the world of work bearing in mind that things are subject to change, and thus will not always remain the same, thereby making them to be somewhat prepared to manage any eventual change that is introduced in their workplace. Besides, because evidence exists that individuals differ in their predisposition to resist or adapt to changes (Oreg, 2003), such differences seem to suggest that those who are open-minded and think divergently, such as individuals who are high in openness to experience, are likely to be receptive and not resist change and consequently be able to adapt to it.

In addition, there are some studies that help to render support to the idea that individuals scoring high in openness to experience will exhibit effective coping ability with organisational change than those scoring low. For instance, Judge et al. (1999) found that managers' openness to experience was positively associated with coping with

organisational change both for self-reports as well as independent assessments of coping with organisational change. More so, evidence from a meta-analytic study (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007) indicates that openness to experience was associated with positive coping strategies. Raudsepp (1990) also established a positive relationship between openness to experience and adapting to change. In another study, Vakola, Tsaousis, and Nikolaou (2004) isolated and tested relevant personality traits that influence individual responses on attitudes towards organizational change. Vakola et al. found positive association between openness to experience and acceptance of change. Research (e.g., Smollan, Matheny, & Sayers, 2010) has equally added to this body of knowledge, suggesting a possible relationship between openness to experience and coping with organizational change.

Admittedly, in some cases though, research has failed to demonstrate a significant association between openness to experience and organisational change. For instance, in a study involving MBA students in Greece, Nikolaou et al. (2007) found that openness to experience was not associated with attitudes to change. Similarly, Alkahtani et al. (2011) also found that there was no significant association between openness to experience and leading change capabilities of Malaysian mangers.

Even amidst these seemingly conflicting findings, we still expect that higher levels of openness to experience will be predictive of effective coping with organisational change, given that the preponderance of research so far appears to tilt in favour of a positive link between openness to experience and organisational change-related outcomes. Therefore, we expect that openness to experience will be associated with effective coping ability with organisational change, hence:

Hypothesis 2: Openness to experience is positively predictive of coping with organisational change.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Participants were non-academic employees drawn from a tertiary educational institution in the South Eastern part of Nigeria based on convenience sampling technique. Of these participants, 93 (46%) were males while 109 (54%) were females. In terms of age, 15 (7.4%) of the participants were 25 years and below, 142 (70.3%) were between 25 and 40 years, 38 (18.8%) were between 41 to 56 years, and 7 (3.5%) were over 56 years of age. As for their educational level, 2 (1.0%) had primary school certificate, 20 (9.9%) had senior secondary certificate, 81 (40.1%) had either ordinary national diploma (OND) or national certificate of education (NCE), 53 (26.2%) had a bachelor degree, and 46 (22.8%) had a post-graduate degree. In terms of job position, 73 (36.1%) were junior staff while 129 (63.9%) were senior staff. The participants have spent an average of 7 years on the job.

Measures

Demographics
Participants completed a form that asked about demographic data such as gender, job position, education, age, and how long they have worked in their current organisation.

Transformational leadership
Transformational leadership was measured with the 10-item transformational leadership subscale of the adapted version

(Ismail, Mohamad, Mohamed, Rafiuddin, & Zhen, 2010) of Bass and Avolio's (cited in Ismail et al., 2010) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The scale is a unidimensional measure of transformational leadership. Recent research has shown that transformational leadership is best measured as a single dimensional construct (e.g., Lam & O'Higgins, 2012; Michaelis et al., 2010; Wells & Peachey, 2011; Zacher & Jimmieson, 2013). Employees indicated how often their Head of Department engaged in certain behaviours or produced certain outcomes using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) response scale. All the items are positively worded. The researchers in the current study decided to precede the items with "My Head of Department" so that the employees can respond to the items in reference to their Head of Department. Sample items read "My Head of Department considers moral and ethical consequences", and "My Head of Department encourages me to think more creatively". A high score indicates higher levels of transformational leadership style of the Head of Department. The researchers obtained Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability coefficient (n = 70) of .77 in a pilot study.

Openness to experience

Openness to experience was assessed with the adapted version (Omoluabi, 2002) of the 10-item subscale of the Big Five Inventory (BFI) originally developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991) to measure personality from a five-dimensional perspective. The participants were requested to rate the degree to which each item describes them using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Sample items include "Someone who is original, comes up with new ideas" and "Someone who is curious about many different things". A high score indicates high openness to experience. Points

associated with each response on the scale are summed across items to form an overall score of openness to experience. The researchers obtained Cronbach's α reliability coefficient (n = 70) of .67 in a pilot study.

Coping with organizational change

The 12-item Coping with Change Scale developed by Judge et al. (1999:) was used to measure coping with organisational change. Example of items on the scale include "I have been an employee of transformation efforts within this organisation" and "I often find myself leading information and communication technology change efforts in this organization." Respondents used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item on the scale. Because the scale was originally developed for managers, it was modified in the current study such that it referred to coping with specific changes pertaining to information and communication technology and applicable to employees in general rather than just managers alone. Three of the items are reverse scored. The 12 items are summed to form an aggregate measure of coping with organisational change. A high score reflects effective coping with organisational change. The researchers obtained Cronbach's α reliability coefficient (n = 70) of .72 in a pilot study.

Procedure

Data were gathered through a survey package delivered in person to participants who were informed about the purpose of the study and requested to participate voluntarily. The survey package included a letter by the researchers with instructions about the completion of the survey, a general questionnaire, and demographic form. Participants were requested to fill in the

general questionnaire at their own convenient time after they received their survey package. Data were collected over a period of two weeks in order to allow the participants ample time to complete the questionnaire Caution was also taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in collection to reduce potential self-report bias by reminding them that the data were meant for research purposes only, that they should not write their name or phone number on the questionnaire, report their age in ranges and not their true age, as well as encouraging them to be honest in their responses in the letter. From the 250 questionnairesthat were distributed and collected, only 202 had complete and usable data, giving a response rate of 80.8%. The remaining 48 questionnaires with incomplete data were excluded from statistical analysis.

Research design

A cross-sectional design was used in this study. A preliminary analysis was conducted first to ascertain the demographic characteristics of the participants, internal consistencies of the measures, as well as the correlations among the study variables. Specifically, the questionnaire was subjected to validation exercise through a pilot test conducted among a sample of 70 teaching and non-teaching staff. Feedback from the validation exercise provided the basis for improving the suitability of the questionnaire before distributing it among participants of the main study. In testing the two hypotheses of this study, hierarchical multiple regression was conducted, for which the dependent variable was coping with organisational change. Predictor variables (demographic variables, transformational leadership, and openness to experience) were entered in blocks. The first block of predictors comprised of the demographic variables (gender, job position, education, age, and organisational tenure), which were entered in order to control for any potential impact they may have on

coping with organisational change. Age and education were specifically controlled for following the findings that those who are older and less educated are likely to be less positive about change (Kirton & Mulligan, cited in Wanberg & Banas, 2000). In addition, gender, organisational tenure, and job position were also controlled for because previous studies (e.g., Bernerth, Walker, & Harris, 2011; Holt, Armenakis, Field, & Harris, 2007; Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2014) found significant relationship between these variables and organisational change-related variables. The second and third blocks consisted of transformational leadership and openness to experience, respectively, which were entered in order to test their predictive capacity for coping with organisational change. However, prior to computation, we standardized the scores for transformationalleadership and openness to experience in order to forestall potential multicollincarity issues in the regression equations.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents a summary of the descriptive statistics, internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) and correlation matrix among the study variables. Table 2 contains the results of the hierarchical multiple regression used to test the two hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, all of our scales had internal consistency reliability with Cronbach's α coefficients above the .70 criterion (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), except openness to experience which nonetheless approaches it.

An inspection of the correlation matrix presented in Table 1 shows that none of the demographic variables, including gender (r = -.06, n.s.), job position (r = .09, n.s.), education (r = .08, n.s.), age (r = .10, n.s.), and organisational tenure (r = .07, n.s.), was significantly related to coping with organisational change. Transformational

leadership ($r = .16$, $p = .024$) and openness to experience ($r = .28$, $p < .001$) were however significantly related to coping with organisational change. Therefore, preliminary confirmation of our hypotheses was evident

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, scales Cronbach's α and correlation matrix among the study variables

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Gender	.54	.50	–							
2	Job position	.64	.48	-.05	–						
3	Education	3.60	.98	-.27***	.53***	–					
4	Age	2.18	.61	-.20**	.38***	.27***	–				
5	Organisational Tenure	7.02	6.37	.02	.45***	.25***	.43***	–			
6	Transformational leadership	50.75	9.65	.05	.15*	.02	.11	.03	(.77)		
7	Openness to experience	38.11	5.78	.02	.17*	.00	.15*	.06	.44***	(.67)	
8	Coping	42.88	5.63	-.06	.09	.08	.10	.07	.16*	.28***	(.72)

Note. $N = 202$, Cronbach's α for applicable scales are reported in parenthesis along the diagonal, $* = p < .05$ (2-tailed), $** = p < .01$ (2-tailed), $*** = p < .001$ (2-tailed). Coping = coping with organisational change. Gender was coded 0 = male, 1 = female; job position was coded 0 = junior staff, 1 = senior staff; education was coded 1 = O' Level, 2 = OND/NCE, 3= bachelor degree, 4 = higher degree, such that higher responses indicated higher educational qualification. Age was coded 1 = < 25 years, 2 = 25–40 years, 3 = 41–56 years, 4 = > 56, with higher responses indicating older age. Tenure was coded in years. Transformational leadership, openness to experience, and coping with organizational change were coded such that higher scores indicated greater transformational leadership, openness to experience, or coping with organizational change.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression results predicting coping with organisational change

Variable	β	Adjusted R^2	ΔR^2	F	ΔF
Block 1		-.009	.016	.63	.63
Gender	-.04				
Job position	.04				
Education	.03				
Age	.06				
Organisational tenure	.03				
Block 2		.009	.023*	1.31	4.65*
Transformational leadership	.16*				
Block 3					
Openness to experience	.27**	.061	.055**	2.87	11.79**

Note. $N = 202$. $* = p < .05$, $** = p < .01$.

As shown in Table 2, the demographic variables (gender, job position, education, age, and organisational tenure) entered in the first step of the equation as control accounted for an insignificant -0.9% variance in coping with organisational change (Adjusted R^2 = -.009, n.s.). None of these demographic variables: gender (β = -0.04, n.s.), job position (β = .04, n.s.), education (β = .03, n.s.), age (β = .06, n.s.), and tenure (β = .03, n.s.), made any significant unique contribution to the prediction of coping with organisational change. The block containing transformational leadership, which was introduced in the second step of the equation accounted for an additional significant 2.3% variance in coping with organisational change (β = .16, ΔR^2 = .023, p = .032). When the block containing openness to experience was added in the third step of the equation, it further accounted for a significant 5.5% variance in coping with organisational change (β = .27, ΔR^2 = .055, p= .001).

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the association of transformational leadership and openness to experience with coping with organisational change. Our first hypothesis stated that transformational leadership would positively predict coping with organisational change. Consistent with our prediction, transformational leadership was indeed predictive of effective coping with organisational change. This finding indicates that leaders' behaviours can have a profound impact on subordinates' adaptation to change in their workplace. This finding can be explained based on the characteristics of a transformational leader. For instance, when a leader introduces change in the workplace, and provides inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, subordinates are inspired to look at problems and old ways of doing things in new ways. Under these conditions, subordinates are more likely to align with the leader and emphasize on the positive outcomes of the organisational change instead of feeling distressed, knowing fully that the leader is ready to provide unique support to each of them if they face any difficulty while trying to cope with the change. This finding is consistent with a recent study by Yao et al. (2014) who found that transformational leadership contributed to a significant reduction in employees' work stress, given that coping with organisational change can be stressful as well. This finding also corroborates previous research that found that transformational leadership contributed significantly to increased positive work-related outcomes such as employees' job performance, organisational commitment (Lam & O'Higgins, 2012), and OCB (Zacher & Jimmieson, 2013), as well as subordinates' commitment to change (Herold et al., 2008).

Furthermore, as we predicted in our second hypothesis, openness to experience was positively associated with coping with organisational change. This finding indicates that employees scoring highly on openness to experience seem to perceive organisational change as less stressful and therefore better cope with it. Besides, employees who are high on openness to experience demonstrate effective coping ability since they are receptive to new ideas, are tolerant and insightful (Judge et al., 1999; Nikolaou et al., 2007), which is also consistent with Vakola et al's (2004) finding that openness to experience was associated with higher acceptance for change. This finding supports the results obtained in previous investigations, which indicated that openness to experience was predictive of people's ability to effectively cope with organisational change (e.g., Judge et al., 1999). However, this finding is at variance with that obtained by Nikolaou et al. (2007) and Alkahtani et al. (2011). A possible explanation for this variance could be

attributed to the student and managerial sample used by Nikolaou et al. and Alkahtani et al., respectively in their studies, whereas the present study involved non-academic staff of a tertiary educational institution. In addition, the managers that participated in Alkahtani et al's study may not have the qualities to lead a change initiative, but may be able to cope with change if it was introduced. However, Alkahtani et al did not assess their coping ability to organisational change.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The results of this study have important implications for organisational practice and research. First, the findings of this study imply that leadership training programmes designed to teach transformational leadership behaviours may be beneficial for leaders working with subordinates in an organisation that is highly characterised by change. Longitudinal research has proven that transformational leadership can be learnt through training to enhance individual and organisational effectiveness (Mullen & Kelloway, 2009). These training programmes could be designed in such a way that the impact of the leader's behaviour can be felt and harnessed by subordinates for effective coping with organisational change. Second, given that organisations require individuals who can adapt easily to change, organisations in change-prone working environments may wish to lay emphasis on selecting individuals who have higher levels of openness to experience during personnel selection process. Such organisations may use personality inventories to identify employees with higher openness to experience who are more likely to benefit from participation in change processes than those who are low. However, organisations using personality inventories identify high openness to experience individuals must put adequate measures in place to forestall faking of the personality inventories. In addition, in selecting individuals who can adapt easily to change, the organisations must also apply caution as employees willing to question the rationale behind a change may sometimes save the organisation from making a costly mistake (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).Third, given that openness to experience was more strongly predictive of coping with organisational change than did transformational leadership, management should pay more direct attention to the employees who appear to be at the receiving end of most changes introduced in their workplace by the management in question, than on the leadership style adopted by the leaders. However, more research is needed in this area before we can reach a substantive conclusion.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has a number of limitations. First, our sample size was small and obtained from only one organisation and occupational group (i.e., non-academic staff of a tertiary educational institution). Thus, the results obtained may not be generalized beyond the sample and context in which they were obtained. Therefore, future research should employ larger and more representative sample to enhance external validity.

Second, the cross-sectional design used in this study precludes making any causal inference. Future research should utilise longitudinal design to examine the possible vicissitudes that might occur in coping with organisational change over time. Also, experimental design may prove useful for drawing conclusion on causality whereby the introduction of new procedure or technology at work is manipulated and the effect on employees are observed.

Third, the use of self-report measures and a single source of data may have inflated the relationships among the variables due to common method bias. However, common method bias is likely not a serious issue here given that the subordinates did not rate themselves on all the variables of interest, but equally rated their supervisors on transformational leadership style.

Despite these limitations, the results obtained in this study can provide direction for future research in this area. Future research could explore potential psychological mechanisms (i.e. change-related self-efficacy, resistance to change, readiness for organizational change, change-specific leadership style, perceived organizational support, core self-evaluations, and the like) through which transformational leadership can impact on subordinates' ability to cope with organisational change. Such research can illuminate our understanding of this relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of transformational leadership and openness to experience as antecedents of coping with organisational change. This study has shown that leaders who adopt transformational leadership style are likely to engender effective coping ability with organisational change from their subordinates. Also, subordinates' openness to experience helps them to cope more effectively with organisational change. This study therefore contributes to the organisational change literature given that there was hardly any other study that we are aware of that has simultaneously examined transformational leadership style and openness to experience in relation to coping with organisational change among subordinates.

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