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Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology

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Driving Organizational Change In The Midst Of The Crisis: How Does It Affect Employee Performance?

Wasantha Rajapakshe

ABSTRACT : The purpose of the study is to investigate how organizational change during a crisis influence employee performance, with special references to a virtual work setting and working from home. Primary data obtained from 295 employees from three commercial banks in Sri Lanka were selected through Stratified Simple Random Sampling. Descriptive statistics, linear regression analysis and multiple regression analysis are used for data analysis. The linear regression results explore that measures/variables such as changes in a communication system; leadership; Technology and Tolerance to change have a significant negative effect on employee performance, while the multiple regression analysis shows, only the changes in communication and leadership affect employees' performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were limited to selected employees in three private commercial banks in Colombo, Sri Lanka using a self-structured questionnaire. The findings of this research rely on primary data collected from the grass root level. Also considering the response rate and sample size, there are limitations to generalize the findings. This research was restricted to four variables Changes in the communication system; Changes in leadership style; Technology advancement and Tolerance to change; impact of other factors that can influence employees' performance during the pandemic period did not fall under the scope of this study/were not covered. The impact of organizational change on employees' performance during COVID-19 is an under-researched area of study. Findings of this study can act as a guideline in future for managers to handle organizational change with lesser employee resistance to successfully manage where companies are forced to implement sudden changes.

Key Words: Organizational Change, Employees' Performance; Sri Lanka, COVID-19

1. INTRODUCTION

The changes which are required to enhance business performance according to external environmental stimulations are considered as change management. According to Kaplain, as quoted in Schaffer [1], organizational change is defined as "change management is management and management is change management." The success of the business depends on gradual changes along with environmental changes. However, changes during crisis missing the continuous gradual improvement. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis is not only impacting every human life but disruptive to every economy and every organization [2]. With the outbreak of the pandemic, although businesses are highly interconnected, the only option left for every organization is to restrict their operations without prior notice. With transformations in information technology, most organizations rapidly adapt to virtual mode which will be long-lasting in years to come. Currently, most organizations globally work remotely; although this work practice is new, off-site working is normal. This type of change in ways of working is a breakthrough that occurred during the crisis. In general, changes in organizational mission, structure, policies, and mergers and acquisitions are considered as organizational change in literature. Ashford [3] highlighted that employee tension, nervousness, stress, demotivation might be caused by unexpected changes in an organization setting [4]. Changes can take place as planned or unplanned. When unplanned changes occur, it cannot be stopped or avoided. This type of sudden conditions such as changes caused by the pandemic cannot be eliminated other than accepting. Although it is known that changes during the pandemic is mandatory, still, many employees find it hard to accept it. Some employees mentioned that work-life balance negatively affect working from home. Working at home with family, children etc., is a considerable issue for many employees. As a result, many workers try to manage time and maintain work-life balance by adjusting the number of hours they work.

XMany employees, for example, are attending a meeting during the evening. Organizational performance depends on the contribution of human capital in an organization. During the pandemic, managers become vigilant about human capital, i.e. employees, as they are the most valuable resources. Employees are the most difficult factor to control because every action is associated/reacts with employees. Thus, managers focus more on monitoring and controlling them rather than correcting their behaviour. If an organization fails to adapt to change, then it is likely to undergo failures in the current labour market. Changes harm employee productivity and morale and the ultimate consequences tend to be poor performance of employees. Joshbersin [5] identifies positive as well as negative impacts on working from home. In the beginning, job security was the main concern for employees, but now, especially with the pandemic situation, technology and infrastructure facilities have become a key concern. Employees have doubts that with working from home, they have to bear an extra cost for infrastructure facilities like Wi-Fi and IT equipment for both hardware and software. The survey conducted by Joshbersin [5] discovers that working from home is more productive than they expect, however, working in office is better for collaboration among employees. With the poor work environment at home, employees expect more emotional support from management. Moreover, employees expect frequent communication with employees, moral support, work-life balance and physical well-being. Besides, with relaxing of lockdowns, many firms have now restarted its usual operations working at office. However, the life-threatening risk of this pandemic with waves of cases raise health concerns. Therefore, employees again face insecurity, to work in office, which expose them to health risks to be infected by the virus. Work at home or telecommuting is not a new concept. Telecommuting is a type of Flexi work where employees accept and plan before practice. Success of telecommuting depends on factors like prior arrangement and acceptance by employees [6]. Even

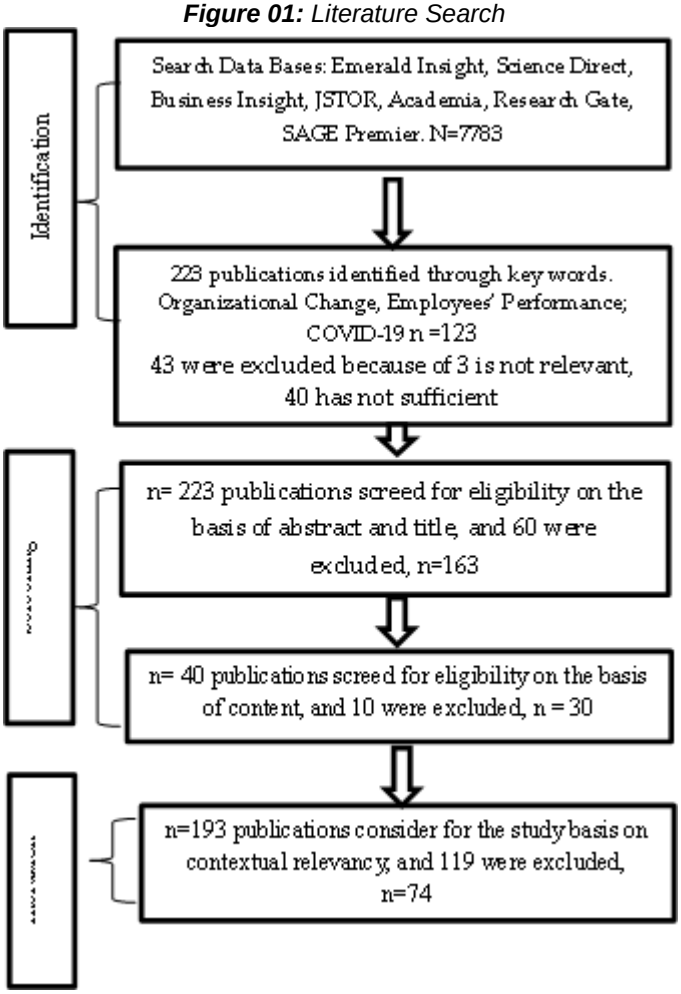
though employees accepted full-time to work at home in order to reduce feelings of isolation, organizations arrange meetings or other gatherings to facilitate employee interactions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, telecommuting becomes a forced practice for managers and employees without any prior arrangements or preparation, which completely isolated employees from colleagues as well as the entire society. Forceful telecommuting could negatively influence employee productivity because managers haven't had the opportunity to select suitable employees to carryout telecommuting. Some employees may not be suitable for off-site work, because they tend to avoid work on time and focus more on personal goals. Any changes in an organization will affect tension among employees. This tension could be due to changes in employee positions, workload, job insecurity and finally it will lead to a decline in employee performance [7]. However, with these sudden changes inevitable during pandemic situations, the above mentioned planning phase is generally overlooked and managers take ad-hoc decisions. In 2009, Erwin [8] identified in his research four phases of changes; 'recognizing the problems, planning to change, carrying out the change, and maintaining the change'. Among these four phases, planning is essential if change is to be successful. With the pandemic situation, managers are unable to plan unlike in normal situations. Considering the above, it is worthwhile to investigate the behaviour of employees during the crisis and how employee performance change accordingly. This study discusses how organizational change during a crisis influence employee performance. The finding of this study can provide a guideline for managers to plan for any unforeseen changes in the workplace during a crisis, minimize disruptions to operations and employee performance. It also explores the significant criterion to measure adaptability organizational change in times of a pandemic. In Sri Lankan context regarding limited studies related to organizational change.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Literature Search

Initially, 123 publications were identified through a thorough search done in numerous databases like Emerald Insight, Science Direct, Business Insight, JSTOR, Academia, Research Gate, SAGE Premier etc. as a part of the literature strategy. Organizational change and employee performance, productivity were used as a key word to search literature. After conduct an in-depth analysis, 53 articles basically used for the study. The summary of literature search is presented below Figure 01.

Figure 01: *Literature Search*



Source: Researcher's own work.

2.2 Organizational change

McNamara [9] defined organizational change as a wide range of restructuring, arrange self-managed teams, change technologies, mergers and acquisition, etc. Updating equipment, policies and guidelines and cultural changes as a result of mergers and acquisition are also a part of organizational change [10]. Liu [11] stated that organizations must implement changes to avoid the threat arising from the external environment and external and internal factors can be influence organizational changes. With the changes arising out of Covid-19 such as lockdown and social mobility, companies are forced to convert to virtual mode and work from home. This pandemic situation will adversely affect many countries and it will influence how a business needs to adapt according to isolation caused during Covid-19 [12]. Apgar [13] discusses to retain motivated and talented employees with the organization, where the latter should provide an opportunity for an alternative workplace. Alternative workplaces, especially working from home, can increase employee productivity as this saves time on travelling and engaging with others. Although many benefits are available, these do not fit all, i.e. not appropriate for everyone [13]. Some workers might not be ready to accept novel ways of working and thus, it can be difficult for them to adapt to the new environment. Rooted behaviours of employees and practical obstacles may not be dealt

effectively. The major challenges are to change/to make a shift in employees' attitudes and infrastructure improvement to work from home.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

This section provides an overview of two theoretical perspectives suggested by literature about telecommuting, as a background to the study and Kurt Lewin's Change Model to support the theoretical framework for this study and will be discussed accordingly.

2.3.1 Socio-technical System Theory

Socio-technical system (STS) theory describes the relations between social and technological elements. Emery and Trist [14] explains that STS focuses on work design to enhance employee satisfaction while keeping relationship among technology, employees and work environment. STS theory further describe that job design is based on technology and social needs of employees. The predominant goal of this approach is maximize social and technical needs of work design. Work at home provides some kind of freedom for employees. The basic principle of STS is least critical specification.

2.3.2 Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST)

Adaptive structuration theory (AST) describes reciprocal relationship between technology and context. It means organizational structure can influence technology and technology can influence structure [15]. Work at home and isolation provides certain changes of the organizational structure. Work at home would alter traditional office practices. This theory would be support to explain work at home environment which led to change organizational context [15].

2.3.3 Kurt Lewin's Change Model

The scenario on Covid-19 can clearly depicts through Kert Lewin's change model [16]. In the first stage naturally many people resist to change. The changes must communicate well to employees. With the sudden changes because of government decisions, organizations are unable to communicate about changes properly to the employees in the organization. There are unplanned and planned changes done. Some of the changes are unplanned and employees' awareness on the changes were not up to the level. Employees were confused with sudden changes and they were unable to bare it. In the second stage of this model, indicates that people are unfrozen. They can begin to move. It refers to transition or move into this new stage of being. Most people struggle with the reality. Training, communication, support and time can make employees familiar with the changes. Employees struggled with communication errors, new policies and procedures, technological advancements and the new management. Employees didn't get any training to adopt to the new culture and to new technological tools. They must give proper language, skill trainings and proper awareness about the changes and about new organizational culture and the structure. In third stage, refreezing symbolizes the act of reinforcing. Efforts must be linked with organizational culture and maintained as acceptable ways. Organization believes that positive rewards and individual's efforts can repeat reinforced behaviors. Through positive working environment, maintaining proper interrelationships, build strong team spirit can solve employees' issues and can boost their morale. Healthy working environment and strong relationships can make employees happy in any organization.

2.4 Organizational Change and Employees' Performance

Environment influences impact on organizational change, which in turn influence employee performance. During Covid-19, many organizations including business firms are forced to work from home and practice telecommuting to progress with daily activities. Eliyana and Ma'arif [17] expressed that changes bring in job satisfaction and motivation among employees which will lead to an increase in organizational performance [18]. However, organizational change during Covid-19 pandemic triggered uncertainty and stress among employees. Without proper guidelines, procedures and lack of communication and infrastructure facilities lead to employees' demotivation, stress and job security issues. Lack of planned changes affect employees' stress. Leadership, communication, technology, motivation and tolerance to change affect employee performance in organizational change during Covid-19 [19].

2.4.1 Communication

Communication plays a crucial role in organizational change during the Covid-19 pandemic. A proper communication system will eliminate issues caused due to lack of understanding among employees and management. If information flow discontinues, managers need to put in extra effort to enhance communication among management and employees. Many researchers identify that face-to-face communication is the best method to reduce uncertainty among employees towards changes. However, during this world pandemic, face-to-face communication is limited to a high extent. Mostly, virtual communication methods are applied/used by managers [20]. Rashid and Zhao [20] further added that, if there is no proper communication system, employees adjust to changes according to employees own way. Poor communication leads to lack of trust with management [21]. A sound communication and productivity have a positive correlation [22]. This, the changes must be communicated with employees, and hearing their grievances can increase organizational performance. Poor communication constricts success of organizational change and growth [23]. During changes, poor communication will negatively affect employee morale and consequently reduce their productivity [24].

2.4.2 Leadership

A leader plays an important role during organizational transformation/changes. Leaders can be supportive, corporative as well as can be an autocratic. Leaders can set themselves as an example for fellow workers to follow. Leaders' ability to influence employees' will positively affect to change employees' attitudes [25]. The emotional intelligence of the leader can increase employees' motivation and morale. Locke [26] indicates that effective leaders encourage employees. To become an effective leader, a strong relationship with employees is essential. Leadership style and employees' performance have a positive relationship [27]. Atkinson, [28] indicated that to successfully implement changes, leaders should demonstrate a strong leadership style. Hence, leaders' support is important to

implement organizational change effectively. Thus, the positive relationship between employees' performance and leadership quality will influence positive changes in the organization [29].

2.4.3 Technological Advancement

Technological advancement is another significant element employees' can use to tolerate organizational change. It helps employees to synthesize and reorganize their knowledge and skills to generate new ideas and enhance efficiency and productivity [30]. Most of the organizations that operate in the modern world depend on advanced technology for every level of activity. Heeks [31] argues that many organizations use information systems for human resources and customer base to increase efficiency and effectiveness of operations. Technology advancement has a direct impact on employees' performance [32]. During the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, as mentioned previously, most employees are forced to work at home. Moreover, many employees are provided with standard technology like a laptop or desktop computer and smartphones for their official activities. Technology usage for most tasks at every level of the organization provides uninterrupted service for the customers [33]. Hence, it is evident that technology adds value in terms of both employees and customers in organizational and business success [34].

2.4.4 Tolerance to change

During the Covid-19 pandemic, administrative procedures were modified/changed as a result of external environmental influences. If employees can predict consequences of changes, it will help management to set better policies ahead (in a proactive approach) and procedures accordingly. Failure to manage changes affect employees' performance and reduce organizational growth [35]. When employees' cannot grasp justification regarding organizational change, or if they cannot trust management, productivity of employees will be affected [36]. Even if employees are aware of the required changes, if they resist, the change process is unlikely to be a success. Employees hesitate to adapt in line with organizational change. If employees have a high tolerance for changes, it will help managers to implement complex changes [37]. Social isolation increased loneliness which have led to reduce cognitive performance and increase frustration/have resulted in reduced cognitive performance and increased frustration [38], [39].

2.5 Employee Performance

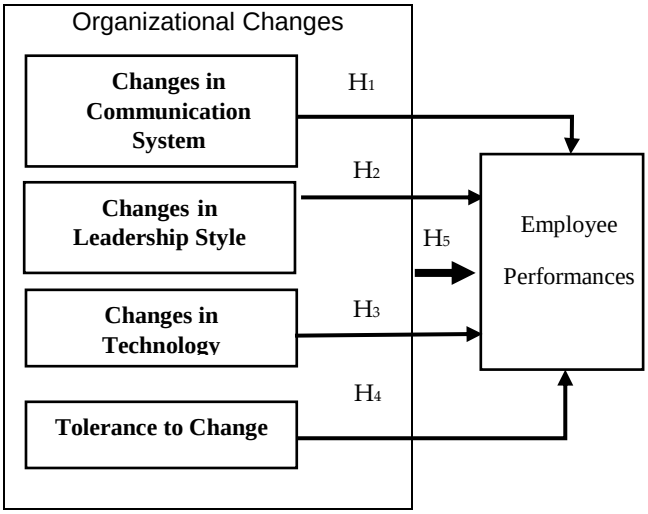
One of the most vital factors for determination of organizational success is employee performance. In order to enhance organizational performance, employees' commitment is plays a significant role [40]. During Covid-19, many organizations face a challenge to obtain employees' commitment as they are forced to work from home. According to Gruman and Saks [41], there should be a controlling mechanism in place to manage employees' performance in an organization. Organizational change can affect employees' commitment and hence can result in a decline in their performance [42]. Various research studies identify how organizational change influence employees' performance. Employees' performance and organizational change have a positive relationship [43]. Among most of the variables positively impacting employee performance, technology has become the most influential factor for employee performance.

2.6 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Figure 02 presents the conceptual framework which was derived five hypotheses as follows;

H1: Changes in communication system will negatively impact employee performance during COVID-19 crisis.
H2: Changes in leadership style will negatively impact employee performance during COVID-19 crisis.
H3: Technology advancement will positively impact employee performance during COVID-19 crisis.
H4: Tolerance to change will positively impact employee performance during COVID-19 crisis.
H5: Changes in communication system; Changes in leadership style; Technology advancement and Tolerance to change will positively impact employee performance during COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 01: *Proposed Conceptual Framework*



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Sample.

This study applies a cross-sectional deductive approach while collecting primary data from a total of 295 employees from three commercial banks in Sri Lanka. The target population included managers, supervisors, and clerical staff. The stratified Simple Random Sampling method was used to collect data from the target population (i.e. 50 managers, 150 supervisors and 95 clerical staff). Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 01. Table 01 shows that 53% of the respondents were male and 47% were female, while, 35% were single and 65% were married, indicating that the majority of the selected sample was married, male respondents. There were only 5% of respondents belonged to the age category of above 51 years. It can be identified that the majority of the selected sample were considered as young respondents. It can be identified 5% of the sample were degree holders while 65% of the sample were having Advanced Diplomas, that can be stated that the majority of the sample have completed Advanced Diplomas after high school (Advance Level Certificate). As per the responses, 10% of the respondents belonged to the

experience level of less than 1 year, 15% belonged to the experience level of 1 to 3 years category, 25% belonged to the experience level of 4 to 6 years while 30% belonged to the experience level 7 to 10 years. A combined percentage of 20% belonged to the experience level of more than 10 years. The majority of the respondents were having more than 7 years of working experience. As per the responses, it can be identified that 20% of managers and 45% of supervisors concluded that majority of respondents were at the decision-making level.

***Table 01**: Demographic Characteristics*

Gender	Percentage
Male	53%
Female	47%
Age	Percentage
Less than 20	10%
Between 21 -30	30%
Between 31 – 40	35%
Between 41 – 50	20%
Above 51	5%
Civil status	Percentage
Single	35%
Married	65%
Education	Percentage
GCE O/L	10%
GCE A/L	20%
Advanced Diploma	65%
Degree Level	5%
Other qualification	0
Tenure in the organization	Percentage
Less than 1 year	10%
Between 1 to 3 years	15%
Between 4 to 6 years	25%
Between 7 to 10 years	30%
Above 10	20%
Cluster	Percentage
Managers	20%
Supervisors	45%
Clerical Staff	35%

3.2 Measures

Employee performance [13, [17] is considered as the dependent variable and organizational changes [9], [10], [11], [12] & [18] as independent variables. The four sub-variables are identified to determine the independent variable, i.e., changes in the communication system [20], [21], [22], [23] & [24], changes in leadership style [25], [26], [27], [28] technological advancement [30], [31], 32, [33] and tolerance to change [35], [36], [37], [38].

3.3 Validity and Reliability

The content validity index (CVI) was used to test validity of the questionnaire, where the value is greater than 0.70 was recognized as valid [44]. The result of the CVI value 0.87 indicated the content validity of the questionnaire.

$$CVI = \frac{\text{items declared valid by expert}(26)}{\text{Total number of items }(30)} = .87$$

***Table 02:** Reliability Statistics of Variables*

Reliability Statistics			
Variables	Observations	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Changes in Communication System	219	.907	05
Changes in Leadership Style	219	.898	05
Technology Advancement	219	.813	05
Tolerance to Change	219	.813	05
Employee Performance	219	.869	05

To test the internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used. As shown in Table 02, the Cronbach's Alpha values of all variables exceeded the expected value of 0.7 as shown in the legend. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables are reliable.

$$\alpha = \frac{N.\bar{c}}{\bar{v}+(N-1).\bar{c}}$$

Where: N = number of items C = the average inter-correlation and V = the average variance.

Legend

Cronbach's Alpha	Internal consistency
α ≥ 0.9	Excellent
0.9 > α ≥ 0.8	Good
0.8 > α ≥ 0.7	Acceptable
0.7 > α ≥ 0.6	Questionable
0.6 > α ≥ 0.5	Poor
0.5 > α	Unacceptable

3.4 Data

In total, 295 questionnaires were distributed by email. Out of 226 retrieved, only 219 were duly filled. The retrieve rate 74% is more than 70% according to the University of Texas at Austin Center for Teaching and Learning [45] was considered as acceptable to conduct data analysis (Table 03).

***Table 03**: Response rate by survey mode*

Survey Mode	Response Rate
In person	80-85% good
Phone	80% good
Mail	50% adequate, 60% good, 70% very good
Email	40% average, 50% good, 60% very good
Online	30% average

Source: University of Texas at Austin Center for Teaching and Learning [45]

3.5 Method of Analysis

Central Tendency and dispersion of data were measured through descriptive statistics. The percentage was used to analyze personal characteristics of employees. The correlation coefficient was used to determine multicollinearity among independent variables. Linear regression is applied to predict Changes in Communication (equation 1); Changes in Leadership Style (equation 2); Technological Advancement (equation 3); and Tolerance to Change (equation 4) on employee performance and multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of organizational change on employee performance (equation 5).

$EP_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 (CC_i) + \varepsilon_1$ (equation 1)

$EP_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_2 (CL_i) + \varepsilon_2$ (equation 2)

$EP_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_3 (CT_i) + \varepsilon_3$ (equation 3)

$EP_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_4 (TC_i) + \varepsilon_4$ (equation 4)

$EP_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 (CC_i) + \beta_2 (CL_i) + \beta_3 (CT_i) + \beta_4 (TC_i) + \varepsilon_5$ (equation 5)

Where, CC = Changes in Communication; CL = Changes in Leadership Style; CT = Changes in Technological System; TC = Tolerance to Change; OC Organizational Change; ε = Error Term; EP = employee performance; α = intercept line; β = Regression line.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

***Table 04**: Descriptive Statistics on Organizational Changes and Employee Performance*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Changes in Communication System	219	2.30	1.094	Unsatisfactory
Changes in Leadership Style	219	2.45	1.213	Unsatisfactory
Technology Advancement	219	2.17	1.011	Unsatisfactory
Tolerance to Change	219	2.37	1.025	Unsatisfactory
Mean Value on Organizational Changes	219	2.32	1.085	Unsatisfactory
Employee Performance	219	3.43	1.198	Fairly satisfactory

Legend

Scale	Mean Range	Response	Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Strongly agree	Very Satisfactory
4	3.41-4.20	Agree	Satisfactory
3	2.61-3.40	Not sure	Fairly satisfactory
2	1.81-2.60	Disagree	Unsatisfactory
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree	Very unsatisfactory

Table 04 presented that, the mean and standard deviation for Changes in the Communication system (μ=2.30, sd=1.09), Changes in Leadership Style (μ=2.45, sd=1.21), Technology advancement (μ=2.17, sd=1.01) and Tolerance to Change (μ=2.37, sd=1.02) indicated that employee measure these variables as unsatisfactory. However, the mean value of Employees' Performance is 3.43 while the standard deviation is 1.19. It shows that employees assess Employees' Performance as fairly satisfactory. These results indicated that even though employees' are not satisfied with organizational change that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, they work hard to maintain productivity of their work. However, to enhance employees' performance to a satisfactory level, business organization should have a conducive work environment in place including a sound communication system and training programme for employees.

4.2 Frequency

Table 05 shows that a total of 63.5% responded as 'Disagree' with regarding the questions related to the Changes in Communication variable during the Covid-19 pandemic. The questions which are related to Changes in Leadership style variable also showed that 56% of the majority of respondents disagreed. Moreover, for changes in technology advancement variable and tolerance variable, more than 70% also received similar response as 40 respondents marked as 'Strongly Disagree (01)' and 88 respondents marked as 'Disagree (02)', respectively. On the contrary, responses related to the Employees' Performance variable indicated different results. Here, majority of participants responded as 'Agree' regarding the Employee Performance.

***Table 05**: Frequency Table*

6	Independent Variables								Dependent Variable	
	Changes in Communication		Changes in Leadership		Technology Advancement		Tolerance to Changes		Employee Performance	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Strongly Disagree	55	25.1	55	25.1	58	26.5	40	18.3	15	6.8
Disagree	84	38.4	69	31.5	95	43.4	88	40.2	40	18.3
Neutral	51	23.3	55	25.1	44	20.1	77	35.2	43	19.6
Agree	18	8.2	22	10.0	15	6.8	7	3.2	77	35.2
Strongly Agree	11	5.0	18	8.2	7	3.2	7	3.2	44	20.1
Total	219	100.0	219	100.0	219	100.0	219	100.0	219	100.0

f = frequency; % = Percent

4.3 Correlation

The correlation coefficient among all four independent variables are depicted in Table 06; where < ±0.7 indicated that the predictor variables are not highly linearly related to each other [46].

***Table 06**: Correlation Coefficient*

	Communication	Leadership Style	Technology
Communication	1		
Leadership Style	.237**	1	
Technology	.149**	.279**	1
Tolerance to change	.125**	.336**	.420**

** Correlation is significant at the 01 level (2-tailed)

5 RESULT OF THE HYPOTHESES TEST AND DISCUSSION

The current study concludes that all hypotheses developed for this study were accepted. The results of the linear regression are shown in models 1-4 of Table 07. In model 01, changes in the communication system were regressed on employee performance by causing a variance of 84.4% (R^2 = 0.844, P = 0.000), and it was found (β = -.844) to have a negative and significant impact on employee performance by 84.4%. Hence, H_1 can be accepted. This result is congruent with Kert Lewin's change model [16], which indicated that at phase one of the change, employees resist change. Hence, strong inter-communication which facilitate two-way communication within a firm is required. It is also supported by various studies and research findings, which revealed the impact of modifications in the communication system on employee performance. Many researchers argued that companies should be transparent in terms of changes to communication policies, methods etc., in the organization's system; these changes are to be properly disseminated to employees, or else negative consequences will materialize [36], [47]. These studies revealed that if changes to a communication system is ineffectively communicated by the management, it is likely to generate employee dissatisfaction, misunderstanding among workers and finally impair employee performance. It can be highlighted that face-to-face communication has a positive impact on employee performance. During the crisis, when

organizations shift to online working platforms, it negatively impacts employee performance.These results also provide extra support by showing that how poor communication or communication breakdown will negatively affect employees' feelings and cause to reduce their productivity [21], [48]. Besides, Matos, and Esposito, [48], asserted that management should duly inform regarding the organizational change(s) in advance as well as encourage employees to express their feelings about the impending changes at the workplace. Resources such as language, gestures and voice are essential for effective communication. During the crisis period, poor communication has been perceived negatively among lower-level employee [12], [49].Model 2, shows that changes in leadership style have a negative significant impact on employee performance with 56.8% (R^2=.568) variation. Thus, H_2 is accepted. This implies that leadership changes during the pandemic were negatively affect employee performance. Moreover, the results showed that the regression model was the best fit to predict this phenomenon as F = 134.174 and p = 0.000 at 95% confidence level. The β= -.754 indicated that every unit change in leadership style during Covid-19 will reduce employee performance. Evidence from the previous research studies there is an impact of changes in leadership on employee performance. The results agreed with [50], [51], [52], and have revealed that the strongest of relationship with employees will enhance employee performance while weak relationship will reduce in turn. The communication style of a leader has a positive impact on employee performance which was not supported by this study [53]. In the virtual environment, during a crisis, task and relationship leadership style will generate a positive influence on employees' performance [54]. The regression result of H_3 had shown a negative significant relationship between changes in the technological system toward employees' performance, with p-value= .000 at 5% significant level as presented in model 03. The results of the study show that the regression model was the best fit to predict the effect of technology advancement on employee performance (F. 91.034). Every unit change in technology change will significantly reduce the employee performance by 71.7% (Beta = -0.717, p = 0.000), hence, H_3 was accepted. These results are supported by various studies. Development of technology can have an impact on employee performance [32], [55], and [56]. Moreover, Dauda and Akingbade, [57] conducted a study by using panel data from 13 countries which concluded that changes in technology have an impact on enhancing employees' performance with the support of human resource management. The results of this study directly confirmed that of the present study. During Covid-19, although organizations adopted remote work with advanced technology, employees' response negatively due to lack of support in terms of infrastructure. The poor infrastructure facilities like internet, computers, relevant software, etc., have not been provided by many organizations which led to employee frustration. Hence, the organization must manage to upgrade the technological infrastructure and skills of employees' to improve their performance [58]. The findings of hypothesis 4 are presented in model 4. The results revealed that tolerance to change significantly affects to reduce the employees' performance by a variance of 68.7% (Beta = -0.687, P = 0.000). Hence, hypothesis 4 is accepted. Nikandrou, Papalexandris, & Bourantas, [59] affirmed that when organizations start to implement change/s, if employees are not willing to accept it, they will be frustrated, dissatisfied and thus, reject it. If employees do not adapt accordingly, the result is a decrease in their performance. If the employee perceived that changes are not relevant to them, they will not respond properly and have a low tolerance rate [60]. During the pandemic period, most employees (including those from the service sector) were forced to work remotely without proper training and facilities. This would be caused by a low tolerance rate and consequently harm employee performance. High tolerance to changes will increase employees' productivity as they would be capable to handle the challenging situation [37]. The results of the study are supported by Lewin's change model too. Model 5 of Table 7 shows the multiple regression results of the H_5. The value of R^2 0.862, which implies that 86.20% variation in Employees' Performance due to independent variables (Changes in Communication, Leadership Style, Technology, and Tolerance to change). In contrast, 13.80% of variation in employees' performance is presented by other additional variables. These variables though significant are not covered in this study. R is 0.928 shows that the model is successful in predicting elements to achieve employee performance. According to the ANOVA F-value is 85.931 and P-value is 0.000 which is significant at 0.01 level.

***Table 07**: Regression Results*

	Model 1 Communication		Model 2 Leadership		Model 3 Technology		Model 4 Tolerance		Model 5 Organizational Change	
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	Std. Error
CC	-.844 **	.090							-.188	.089
CL			-.754**	.060					-.796	.072
CT					-.717 **	0.063			.079	.107
TC							-.687***	.072	-.089	.083
(Constant)	5.964	.227	1.078	0.233	1.042	.263	1.007	.290	5.878	.168
R	0.844		.611		.598		.567		0.928	
R Squared	0.712		.568		.514		.472		0.862	
Adjusted R^2	0.707		.564		.509		.466		0.852	
F	143.684		134.174		107.969		91.034		85.931	
Observation	219		219		219		219		219	

*Note: *** Significant at 1% level; ** Significant at 5% level; * Significant at 10% level;*

However, this model shows that only the changes in communication and changes in leadership style have a significant but negative relationship with employee performance. The results of the model 1-4 support the conceptual framework, however, the result of model 5 revealed that only two variable has an impact on employee performance. The findings are significant with those in previous studies. If managers fail to handle changes efficiently, the negative impact will cause to impair employees' quality of life and managers' reputation [61]. The employees' frustration and stress will increase and negatively impact their self-confidence [3], [4]. The ultimate consequences could be lowered morale and productivity. Furthermore, Tavakolia [62] indicated that organizational change will also influence to downsize and lay off as well as innovations, mergers and restructuring employees could affect to reduce employees' morale. According to Jones [19], if an organization is unable to conduct a proper action plan for changes, employees tend to be disappointed which could result in poor performance. These findings are not supported some previous studies; according to Zabid, Sambasivan, & Johari, [63] change may increase motivation, satisfaction, and advantages to some of the organizations. If managers create a favourable organizational climate with a supportive relationship, it will improve leadership effectiveness, which in turn will increase employees' performance [64].

5. CONCLUSION

This study focusses on 'Driving Organizational Change in the Midst of the Crisis: How does it affect Employee Performance? The banking employees who are employed in Colombo District, Sri Lanka was the target for the study. The main objective of this study is how banking employees accept organizational change during the Covid-19 crisis. According to literature, changes with organizational factors has a significant impact on employee performance. All hypotheses were developed based on past literature. This study explores that Changes in the communication system; Changes in leadership style; Technology advancement and Tolerance to change have a significant negative impact on employee performance in the banking sector in Sri Lanka, hence all hypotheses were accepted. However, results of the multiple regression analysis show that, changes in communication and leadership only have a strong negative impact on employees' performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study align with/matched with Kurt Lewin's change model. According to Lewin's model, changing forces will either promote or discourage change. In addition, the model explains that, people at the first level are resistant to change. Hence, the change will occur when one party has a strong influence over other parties [16]. Thus, organizations must communicate the importance of changes with employees, to enable them to increase their understanding of the situation. Sudden government decision during Covid-19 period for lockdown, many organization were forced to change their work practics to virtual organizations without proper guidelines. These unplanned changes caused employee frustration and in turn led to a noticable reduction in employee performance. Therefore, the result of this study revealed that if organizations act out of preparedness and do not plan changes well in advance, during the crisis employees will be confused and resist to change, which consequently lower their performance.

6 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study has several practical implications for managers in the banking sector in Sri Lanka. This study revealed that organizational change during a crisis have a negative impact on employees' performance. The two-way relationship between employees and managers is a crucial factor during a crisis. Managers are required to learn how to transfer information correctly and timely, and lead employees during a crisis. Based on the results, it shows that employees couldn't communicate well with management in this new setting as a virtual organization. Therefore, employees were isolated and dissatisfied with the new situation. Due to these reasons, employee performance rates decreased. The organization needs to have a proper two-way communication system to avoid stress among employees, to get employees engaged in the company, and increase productivity by improving employee performance [20]. The negative impact on employee performance can be mitigated by providing proper training and organizing open forums among all staff members in the company including top management [65]. It will improve managers' leadership qualities and employees' empowerment during the crisis. Also, it can help to improve workers' productivity, better employee retention and employee-management relations. Management should develop a way to exchange information and opinions freely [28]. For this purpose, a company's corporate culture need to undergo significant transformation including an 'open door' policy. When employee involvement and empowerment are increased, they could able to freely make a decision during a crisis for effective and timely decision making. It is a vital and essential requirement of managing change [66]. The study shows that employees' performance is influenced by leadership style and it has been observed that changes in leadership style have a negative impact on employees' performance. To reduce the negative impact of changes in leadership style on employees' performance, researchers suggest applying situational leadership style [67]. According to the situational leadership style, leaders could able to change style according to subordinates' competency. If employees are empowered, managers can provide less guidance to such employees than those with lower level of competency. During the crisis, if leaders can change leadership style, it will positively impact employee performance [68]. Also, managers can apply the Participative leadership style to collaborate with workers and thereby enhance employees' performance [74]. The participative leadership style will allow managers to decide after discussing with employees as well as empowering them to make a decision [69]. Organizations do not have any other option other than virtual organization during this pandemic period. The researcher has identified that technology advancement has a negative impact on employees' performance. To improve their know-how with new technology, managers can arrange more training about specific technological tools and websites. The organization should provide training and work-related development training; this is the cornerstone for building knowledge, hands-in skills about the change and required technical skills. Therefore, the organization should provide training to all staff members across the board to enable staff to operate effectively in the new technical environment [70]. Tolerance to change can inhibit or promote

performance if employees accept it positively. It will enhance their attitude toward changes and enhance employee performance. Based on the results, tolerance to change has a negative impact on employees' performance. Thus, the study recommends it's important to have a training programme that can enhance employee morale and attitude towards changes. The organizations can provide a holistic picture/clear picture of each employee role to reduce ambiguity and conflicts in their roles which can enhance employee morale and satisfaction [71]. If employees diverge away from organizational goals and strategies due to misunderstanding, they are likely to shift away, apart from the changing environment. It is important, therefore for timely communication of modifications on strategies to employees. Also, management should provide an overall picture of the proposed changes in favour of the organization's vision and mission statements and rationale for changes [72].

7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Organizational change influencing decline in employees' performance is of significance for each type of organization, regardless of size and sector. However, this research focusses and is limited to the banking sector and emphasizes only three private banks in Colombo District, Sri Lanka. Hence, it can be recommended to expand further studies in different sectors and various industries which impact the Sri Lankan economy. This can assist to gain useful insights for a comparison with a large representative sample to obtain generalized results. The main variables in this research are communication, leadership style, technology, and tolerance to change that affect employees' performance after organization changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other than these four factors, this present study may have overlooked many other factors that can influence and have a significant impact on employees' performance during the pandemic period. To eliminate this limitation, it is recommended that future research can be carried out to focus on other related factors like organizational commitment [73]. This study used a self-structured questionnaire to collect data is also a limitation for the study. It is recommended to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews to find out the real cause/root cause to determine why employee performance have declined in a virtual working environment. Also, a longitudinal study can be conducted to eliminate the limitations of the cross-sectional design which was applied for this study.

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