Analyzing the Competences of Change Managers for Successful Change Management

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Abstract

In the era of Industry 4.0 where the world is changing fast, organizations are faced with the challenge of constantly changing their business operations to maintain competitiveness. It is imperative to carefully assess the contribution of various human factors in successful navigation through change. Organizations rely on change managers to spearhead change projects to ensure the realization of operational and organizational objectives. Change managers need relevant skills, knowledge and practical experience to ensure that they execute their change management duties effectively and efficiently. Thus, this study aims to examine the competencies of change managers required for successful management of change. The investigation began by reviewing the literature on change managers and change management. After that, it adopted a job analysis desktop review to examine change managers' job specifications in South Africa. The study was descriptive in nature. It has revealed and discussed several skills for change managers. This study contributes to teaching and learning, research, and industry application of change management. It can also assist practitioners involved in the practice of change management with skills to focus on in their career development.

Keywords
Change, Change Manager, Change Management, Competences, Skills

1. Introduction
Since change is inevitable, from time to time, organizations are confronted with change. It is worse in the dynamic and uncertain era of the 4th Industrial Revolution. The need for change in an organization can stem from external factors such as regulation or legislative factors, growing competition, and internal factors such as adopting new technology and strategic changes (Chatzoglou al al., 2017). It is further stated that during transition, it is very important to assess the impact of diverse human factors in the successful adoption and management of change initiatives. Now, Judge and Thomas (2009) estimated that about 70% of initiatives of organizational change fail. Some change initiatives are very complex and challenging and often require some behavioral changes from employees. According to Rafferty and Jimmieson, (2016) there is an inherent resistance to change on the side of employees which contributes to the failure of change initiatives. Thus, there's a need for highly skilled change managers or project managers with change management skills to assist organizations navigate through change. These change managers empower action through their leadership skills and also motivate employees to change through engagement and involvement. Change management has always been left in the hands of project managers or program managers depending on the structure of the organization. However, project managers, or project managers assigned with roles and responsibilities for change management are not always fit for the demands of organizational change projects (Crawford and Nahmias, 2010). There are common skills that have been documented in literature, however they do differ in some instances. Project management skills have also been viewed as an important set of skills required by change managers (Oswick and Robertson 2009). Fewer studies focus on the competencies of change managers in the South African context. Hence, this study aims to assess the change managers' skills preferred for the South African context as a developing country.

Objectives
- To examine the competences or skills required by change managers for successful management of change.
- To conduct a job analysis on the job specifications so as to identify and analyze the change manager's skills within the South African context.

2. Literature Review

In this current economic environment there is a lot of uncertainty, competition and dynamically changing markets (Hermkens 2021). Therefore, the business environment, operations and systems are constantly faced with change. According to Hoe (2017) organizations are usually trying to modify and adapt their processes to the changing conditions in dynamically complex and volatile commercial environment. So, organizations must make efforts to adopt numerous methods to adapt to change so as to gain competitive advantage or stay resilient in a dynamic economic environment. Organizations need highly competent individuals to help them navigate through change. Now, change managers focus more on the human side of things during transition (Hoe 2017). It is usually called the people side of change.

According to Lines et al. (2015), a change manager should possess a right set of interpersonal skills such as communication and teams and stakeholder management. Change managers require these skills to ensure that they communicate the need for change, potential impact of change as well as influencing people to embrace change. They should also be able to create clear change plans that are practical to gain acceptance from the organizations teams and other stakeholders (Lines et al., 2015). It is further stated that they must be strategic in their thinking, have deep technical competence in their field and be able to review and control the performance. Honkisch et al. (2018) stated that change managers should be conscious of cost, engage teams and other stakeholders respectfully, and engage them as they create plans. It is further stated that they should be able to discover need for amending plans, follow systematic approach to change, ensure proper documentation and records of projects. Change managers should be able examine and manage the finance or cost for change, time to be taken as well as risks associated with change (Schoonwinkel 2016). It is further indicated that change managers should heavily rely on their industry or field experiences and judgement which was engineering in this study. Their understanding of the field can improve their effectiveness in managing change as compared to someone who is not from that particular, especially highly technical fields. Change managers should also be able to develop cost-effective strategies and ensure sufficient scheduling (Schoonwinkel 2016).

Gwaka, et al. (2016) stated that "with technology, economies, demographics, governments, consumer preferences, and competition changing at fast rates, it is not a question of whether organizations should change but of how and in what direction they must change". Change managers should lead strategically, plan and control change. They have a great task to ensure that change benefits the organization rather than negatively impacting the organization. Pollack and Algeo (2016) indicated that a change managers are professionals that have organizational change skills and knowledge. Their role is to identify need for change, create and execute change management strategies and that will employees resistance to change. Furthermore, they should be have good communication and feedback, provide training, align culture, stakeholder engagement, leadership, planning, review, risk management, project management, sound basis for business, and minimize impact of technology. They also argued that further work is needed to provide project managers with the awareness on change management and its role in the success of organizational change projects.

According to Pollack and Algeo (2014) change managers must have good communication, listening, and leadership and problems-solving skills. They must also be able to do risk analysis and mitigation and provide training and coaching, team and stakeholder management, development of strategy and business case development. According to Qadri et al. (2015) change is inevitable and occurs continuously in life, however with regard to organizational change, it should occurred in a structured manner with adequate planning and management, because without these, change can be sophisticated. Change managers should develop ideas and strategies to implement change. They should have self-management skills, manage their time, take initiative, be accountable, be assertive, and self-control for proper decision making. Hussain et al. (2018) add that once change is implemented, the change managers should make certain that the change implemented is sustainable without employee resistance. Furthermore, they should provide training and support to employees and offer rewards to stimulate participation.

The study by Junkoon and Marnewick (2018) reveal that change managers are expected to have good communication, provide adequate training, management stakeholders and ensure their involvement, change management skills, provide clear vision and direction and monitoring. Furthermore, they must understand change, create plans, handle emotional and power issues, be a team leaders and possess good leadership skills. Crawford and Nahmias (2010) stated that program managers are viewed by some people to have a likelihood to manage organizational change initiatives. This might be due to that in field of change management, organizational change initiatives are usually categorized as projects or programs. Thus a reference is made to adopt project management competences, tools and

strategies (Oswick and Robertson 2009 cited in Crawford and Nahmias 2010). It is also stated that change managers should have skills such as leadership, stakeholder engagement, team involvement, communication, culture, creativity, initiative and self-management, coaching skills, facilitation skills, presentation skills, and learning and development. Furthermore, they must also possess, decision-making, problem-solving, planning, project management skills, analysis and assessment, strategic thinking and influencing skills.

According to Chatzoglou et al. (2017) in a changing environment, it is critical to assess the contribution of various human factors to the successful implementation and management of change initiatives. Managers' leadership competencies play vital role in the success of change initiatives implementation. Furthermore, experiences (personal or professional), especially educational / training for managers have a considerable contribution to the advancement of leadership competencies (Louw et al. 2012).

3. Methods

In this study, the writer used descriptive quantitative method. Referring to the objective of this study, the design is considered appropriate since it is a method used to describe or analyze the results of the study but not used for make broader conclusions (Sugiyono, 2005 cited in Apsari, 2017). It means that descriptive quantitative is a research method which uses technique of searching, classifying, and analyzing the natural phenomenon using numbers and percentages. The study began with a literature review with regard to change managers, change management and competences or skills of change managers. The skills required by change managers to successfully help organizations navigate through change were discovered and analyzed. These skills for change managers were shortlisted. Thereafter a descriptive study on the change managers' specification in the South African context was conducted. The process shown in Figure 1 was followed for this study.
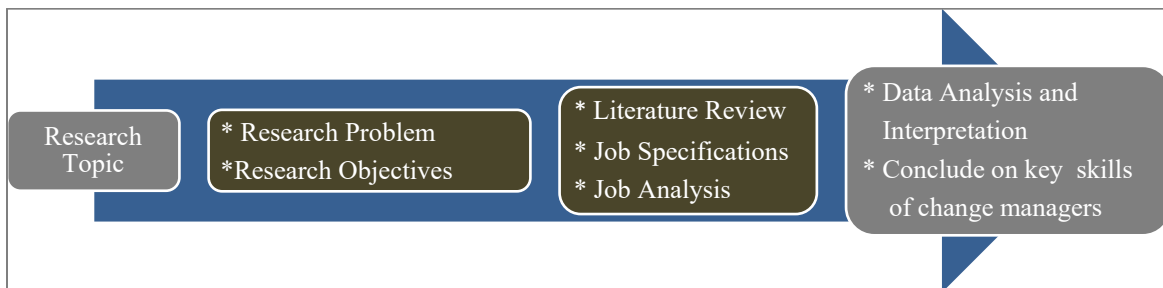

Figure 1. Research process

After the change managers job specifications were identified, the job analysis was done. This was aimed at establishing the responsibilities and skill requirements of the change manager's job and the nature of a person who should be assigned for it. This could be categorized as a desktop review methodology which uses organized or unorganized data from online platforms. This method was not only chosen on the basis that it is cheap and that data is easily accessible, but since it allows more time for a rigorous assessment of data. Finally, a basic descriptive statistics was used to present and interpret the results of this study. The job specifications were qualitative in nature, thus the searcher could use basic descriptive analysis to appease the results. This was aimed at giving an overview of the competences of change managers as well as creating the agenda and debate for future research.

4. Data Collection

The data was gathered from the job specification for change managers within the South African Context. Popular career websites within South Africa were visited with an aim of identifying change managers job specifications. However, google search was used to determine the number of the available job specification. At first 89 job specifications appeared, then 40 of them were shortlisted based on relevancy and duplication avoidance. Further shortlisting was done on job specification until 33 were found to be adequate and had eliminated all possible replication. The job specifications used in this study were accessed in August 2021 and were saved within the research file for analysis. It should be noted that until November 2022 there has not been much of a change on the number of change management jobs advertised. It is still a growing field in the South African context hence it requires more attention in terms of research. Figure 2 below presents the sources of job specification and a percentage of specifications extracted from each career website.
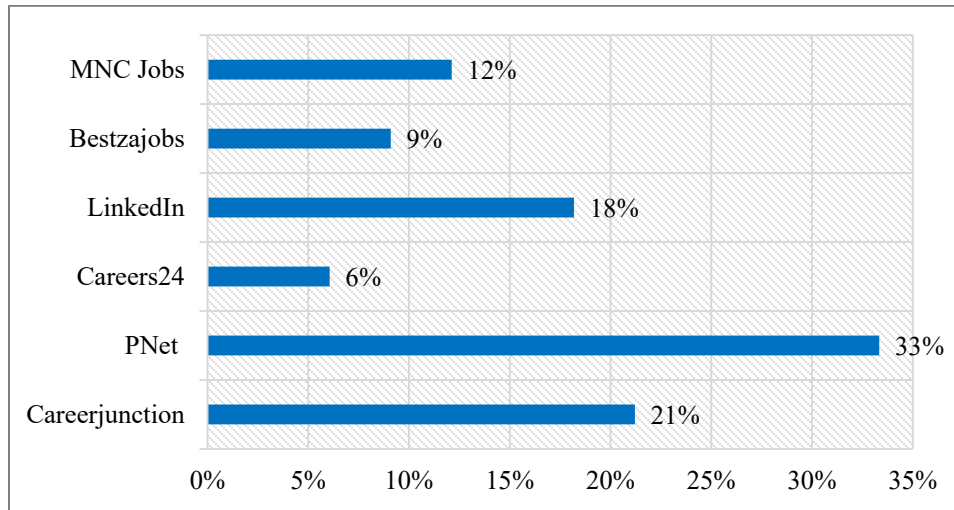
Figure 2.   Sources of job specifications

Based on Figure 2 above it can be noted that 33% of job specifications were extracted from PNet one of the commonly used and preferred jobs sites in South Africa. It was then followed by Careerjunction with 21% and LinkedIn with 18%.

5. Results and Discussion
This section presents the results of the analysis of job specifications. It presents and discuss results related with the industry, education, field of study, years of experience and change managers' skills.

5.1. Industry
The results show that the bank and technology industry are both 21%. It is not surprising to see technology at a higher level compared to others, since we are at the pinnacle of the 4th Industrial Revolution where several technologies are developed and improved. These technologies are mostly disseminated by the technology industry into other industries. The banking industry was also at the same level as the technology industry. This might be due to the pressure that the traditional banks are getting to maintain their clients who might join the internet-only/digital-only banks that are offering them alternative ways to facilitate the online transactions and banking in the absence of physical branches (Louw and Nieuwenhuizen 2020).

It was noted that, industries such as energy, manufacturing, education and hospitality did not appear on the job specifications for change managers that were analyzed in this study, whereas these industries are also experiencing constant changes. It might be due to change management being usually assigned to project managers depending on the structure of the organization (Crawford and Nahmias, 2010). It is important to note that project managers do not always meet the demands for organizational change project requirements (Crawford and Nahmias, 2010). This can be influenced by the assumption that project managers are likely to lead change projects, even though there's an argument that they need extra efforts to ensure that project managers are aware of what change management is and the role it plays in the success of organizational change projects (Pollack and Algeo, 2014). Figure 3 presents the results of the industries that were mentioned in the job specifications of change manager's positions.
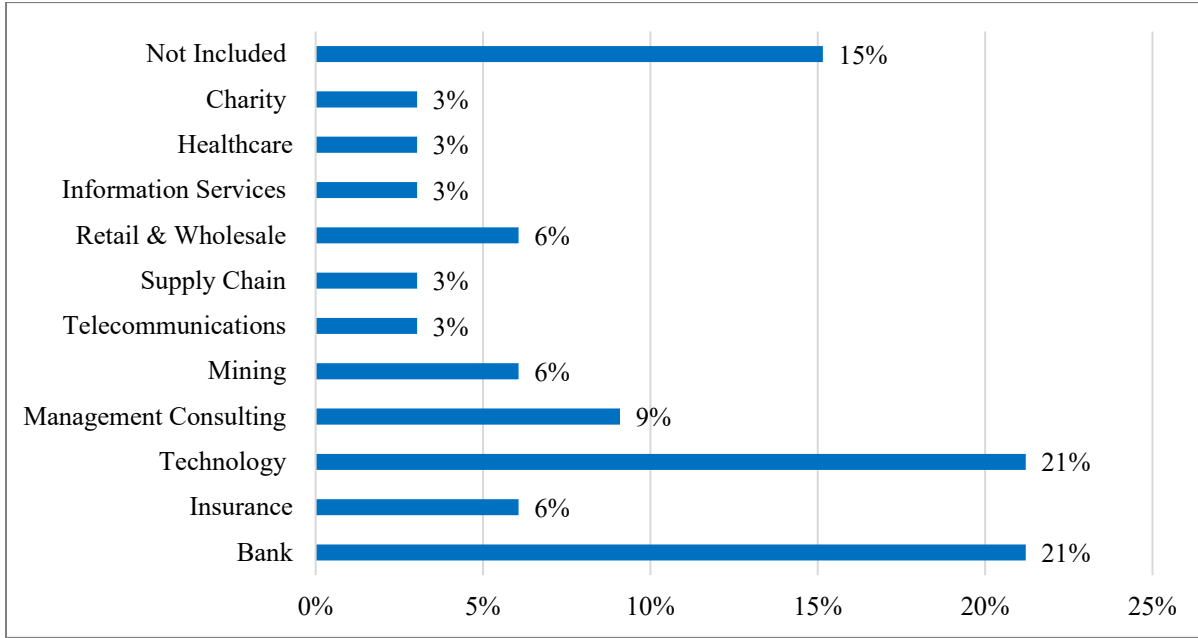
Figure 3. Job specifications according to industries

5.2. Education and Field of Study

Figure 4 below presents the education level required for the change managers. It can be seen that a degree is dominating with 67%. This is reasonable since the results of the study by Chatzoglou et al. (2017) showed that managers with higher education usually develop improved competencies in all areas.
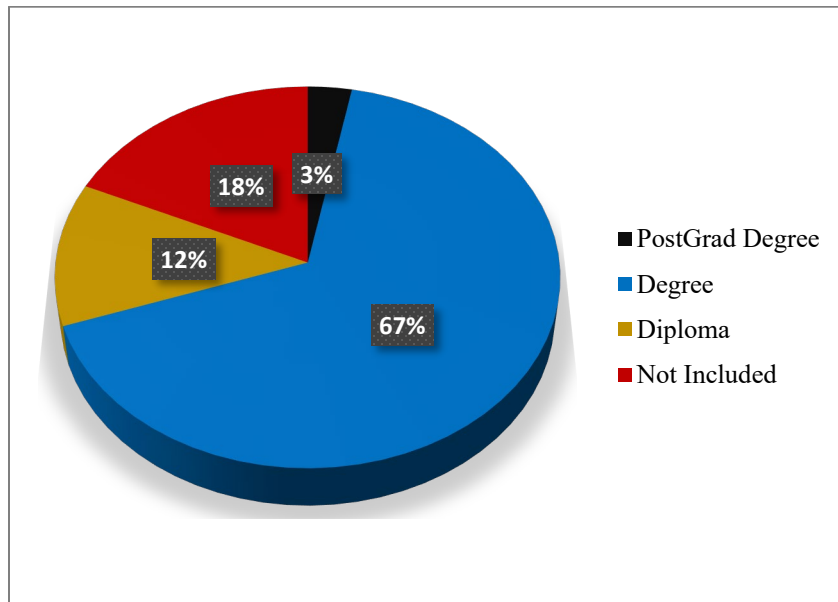

Figure 4. Education level required for the change managers

The study also looked at the field of study included for each education level. Figure 5 below presents the field of study.
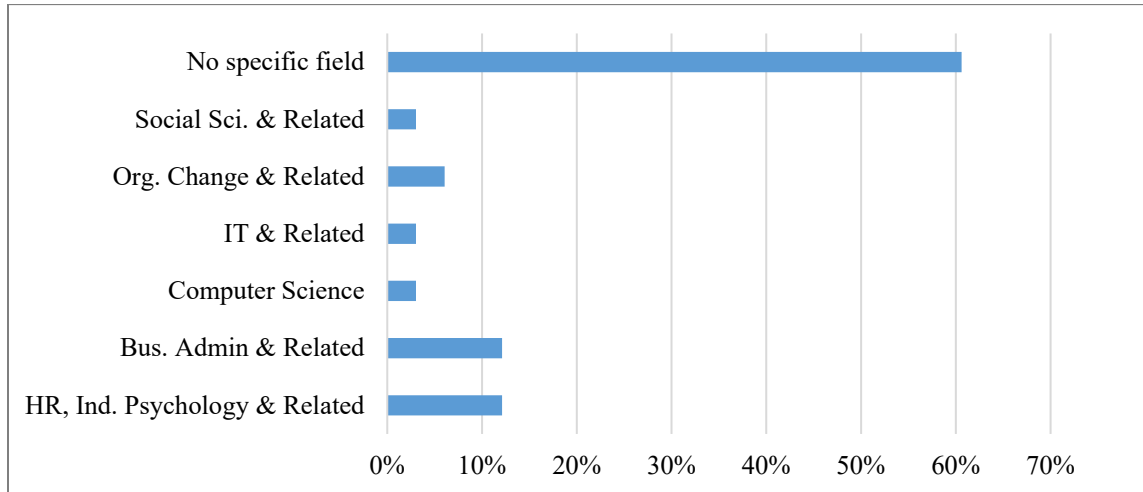
Figure 5. Field of study

Based on the results it can be seen that about 60% of the job specifications did not include the field of study. The results seem reasonable since change management relies on a multidisciplinary approach. It is also not surprising to see human resources, business administration and related fields also dominating because change management is viewed as people side of change.

5.3. Years of Experience

Figure 6 below presents years of experience for change managers.
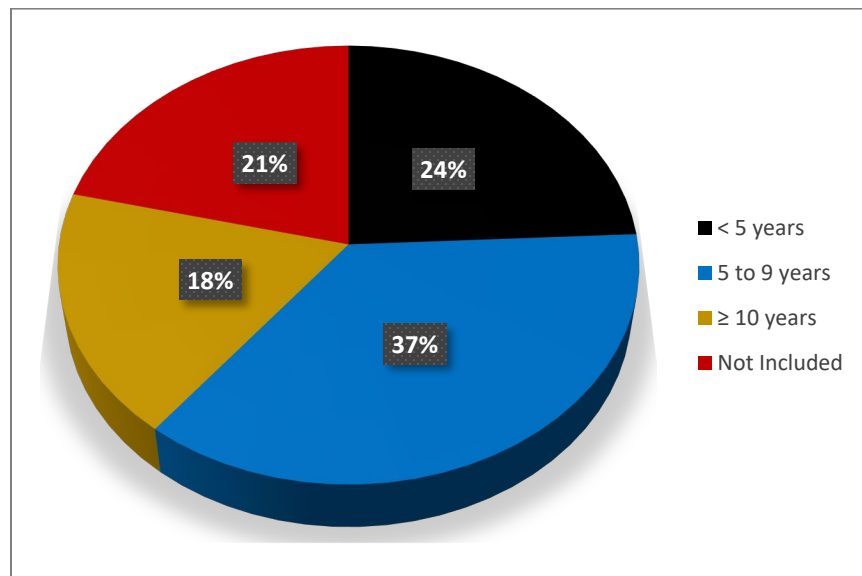

Figure 6. Years of experience

It can be seen from the figure that the highest percentage (37%) represents the experience between 5 and 9 years. This is reasonable since change management is predominantly handled by middle managers as confirmed in the study by (Hermkens 2021). The results show that the lowest percentage (18%) represents experience of 10 years and over. This might be due to seniority of positions that require that experience and also that in the South African context change management has not matured yet.

5.4. Change Managers' Skills
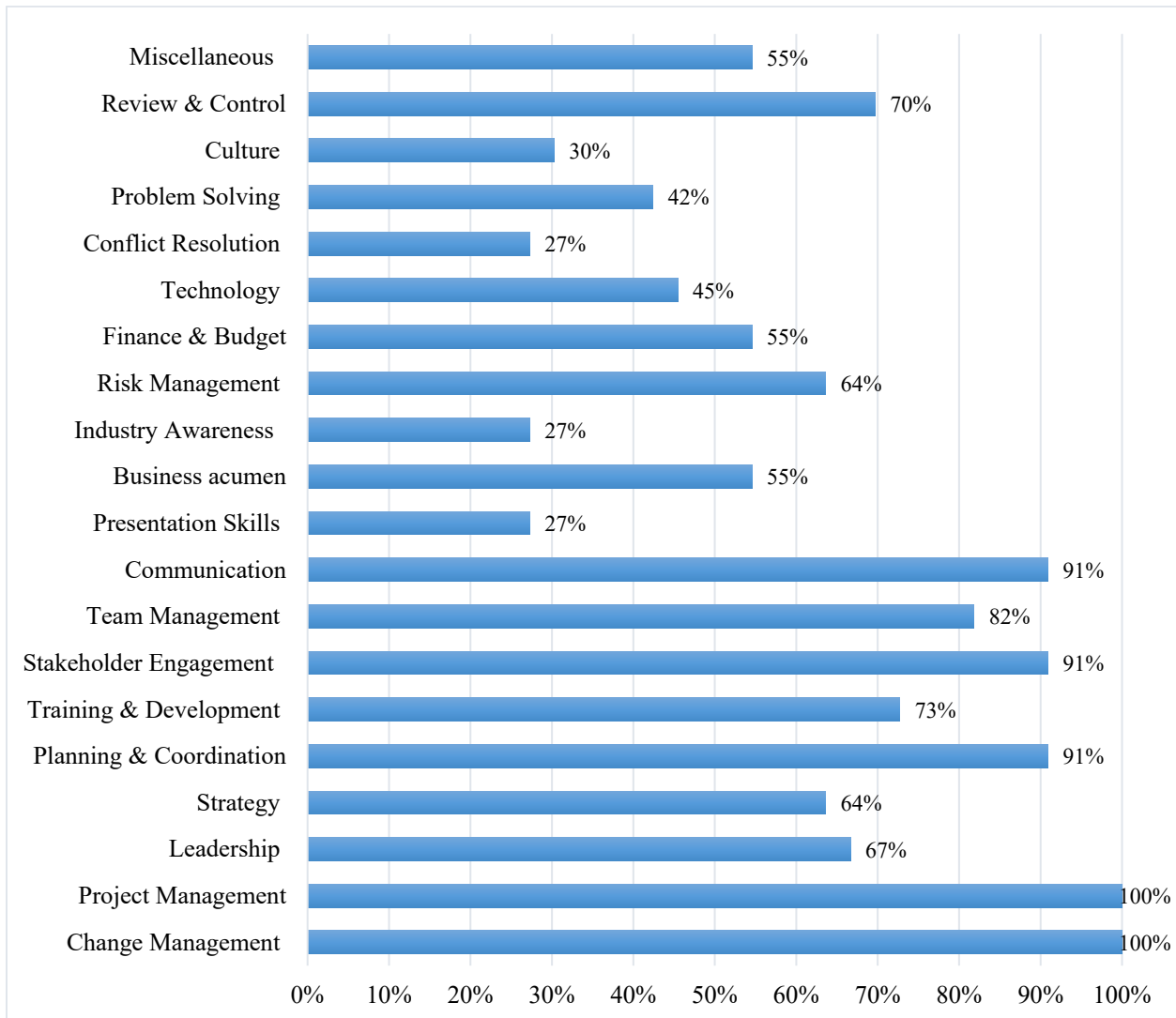
Figure 7 shows the change mangers skills.

Figure 7. Change manager's skills

The following were the key findings of the study:
All 33 (100%) job specifications recorded change management and project management as key skills for a change manager. This is consistent with the study by Pollack and Algeo (2016) who discovered through various studies that project management and change management are deemed an effective combination of management techniques for organizational change projects. Communication, planning and coordination, stakeholder management and showed a strong presence, all at 91% of the times in the job specifications. Then followed by team management (82%) and training and development (73%). Leadership (67%) and review and control have fairly high percentages, which shows that majority understand that leadership is key especially in preparing people for change and influencing to avoid resistance. These results are consistent with the previous studies such as (Lines et al., 2015; Pollack and Algeo, 2014; Junkoon and Marnewick 2018; Hussain et al., 2018) in terms of competences required for change managers as demonstrated earlier in the introduction. The culture (30%) and conflict resolution (27%) have the lowest percentages. These require attention since they are also key to successful change management. This needs to be interrogated on the future studies that follow a quantitative survey or qualitative interview research.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to identify and assess the competences or skills required by change mangers to successfully lead organization through change. The paper identified, presented and discussed a number of competences required by change managers. Change managers play a significant role in assisting organizations to navigate through change. The study also looked at the education levels required for change managers as well as their field of study. It then looked into the years of experience that change managers need to have. This was done because education and years of experience have a considerable impact on the leadership skills necessary for change management.

The analysis of job specifications might not give results that can be generalized beyond the South African context, but it allowed a rigorous process to identify and analyze the competences for change managers. This study made contributions to the research of change management by stimulating the debate and discussions. It also made contribution in the practice of change management, as well as providing concepts to be incorporated in teaching and learning.

Future studies may focus on the quantitative surveys to solicit the views of change managers within their practice. It might also focus on doing the job analysis based the practical job one is doing on daily basis to manage change. Finally, the future studies may also look into the engineering sector to confirm if they rely on technical project managers for change management or if they understand the role of change management in change projects.

Acknowledgement

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Biography

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