



Lisbon School  
of Economics  
& Management  
Universidade de Lisboa

**MASTER IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)**

**MASTER'S FINAL WORK**

**DISSERTATION**

**ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL  
LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

**MARIA INÊS DA SILVA BENTO**

**OCTOBER 2024**



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MARIA INÊS DA SILVA BENTO

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## ABSTRACT

Resistance to change is a barrier for organizations that need to evolve. Understanding how factors like internal communication and ethical leadership influence employees' resistance is crucial for organization that are going through change. During this work, the impact of internal communication and ethical leadership on resistance to change is explored, aiming to identify which variables help to reduce employees' resistance to change during moments of transition.

To develop the study, a questionnaire was sent to different people that work in the Portuguese organizational context. Significant differences were found within the sample for resistance to change. Participants who work in the public sector of activity are less resistant to change than the ones who work for the private sector. Significant differences were also found for organizational integration and personal feedback, where individuals who have worked on the company for 11 to 15 years are the most satisfied with these dimensions of communication.

This study examined how the different dimensions of ethical leadership and internal communication predict resistance to change through stepwise regression analysis. The results indicate that one of the dimensions of ethical leadership (despotic leadership) as well as one of the dimensions of internal communication (informal communication) are relevant predictors and explain 8,5% of the variance.

**Keywords:** Resistance to Change, Ethical Leadership, Despotic Leadership, Internal Communication, Informal Communication

## RESUMO

A resistência à mudança é um obstáculo para as organizações que precisam de evoluir. Compreender como fatores como a comunicação interna e a liderança ética influenciam a resistência dos colaboradores é crucial para as organizações que estão a passar por mudanças. Neste trabalho, explora-se o impacto da comunicação interna e da liderança ética na resistência à mudança, com o objetivo de identificar quais as variáveis que contribuem para reduzir a resistência à mudança dos colaboradores em momentos de transição.

Para desenvolver o estudo, foi enviado um questionário a diferentes pessoas que trabalham no contexto organizacional português. Foram encontradas diferenças significativas na amostra relativamente à resistência à mudança. Os participantes que trabalham no sector público de atividade são menos resistentes à mudança do que os que trabalham para o sector privado. Foram também encontradas diferenças significativas para a integração organizacional e o feedback pessoal, sendo que os indivíduos que trabalham na empresa há 11 a 15 anos são os mais satisfeitos com estas dimensões da comunicação.

Este estudo examinou a forma como as diferentes dimensões da liderança ética e da comunicação interna preveem a resistência à mudança através da análise de regressão stepwise. Os resultados indicam que uma das dimensões da liderança ética (liderança despótica) e uma das dimensões da comunicação interna (comunicação informal) têm uma correlação significativa e são fatores de previsão relevantes, explicando 8,5% da variação.

**Palavras-chave:** Resistência á mudança; Liderança Ética; Liderança Despótica; Comunicação Interna; Comunicação Informal



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Resumo</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1. Resistance to Change</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2.2. Ethical Leadership</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.2.1 Definition and impact for organizations .....	5
2.2.2 Relationship between resistance to change and ethical leadership.....	7
<b>2.3. Internal Communication</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.3.1 Definition and impact for organizations .....	9
2.3.2. Relationship between resistance to change and internal communication .....	11
<b>3. Empirical Study</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1. Method</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1.1 Participants .....	14
3.1.2 Instruments.....	15
<b>3.2. Results</b> .....	<b>16</b>
3.2.1 Mean and Standard Deviation in the sample .....	16
3.2.2 Analysing differences in sub-groups of the sample .....	17
3.2.3 Analysis of correlation between variables .....	19
<b>4. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>4.1 Analysis of the results and contributions of the study</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>4.1 Limitations of the study and recommendations to future research</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>31</b>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of business, we find nowadays, change is an important part of it. In order to maintain competitiveness, organizations must adapt to this changing world (Neves et al., 2018). However, from this necessity of change, organizations often meet resistance from their employees. This response from employees may harm organizations when the need to implement new initiatives arise (Szabla, 2007).

The concept of resistance to change has been studied by several authors applied to several different contexts, including in organizational behaviour. Some recent studies have shown that there are some variables that can attenuate resistance to change. In this study, it is going to be presented how communication and ethical leadership can either exacerbate or alleviate resistance. Internal communication is defined as an analysis of how individuals communicate in the organizational environment (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) and is considered by many as one of the most crucial activities in an organization. Ethical Leadership is an emerging topic and is also an important factor in how employee's response to change. An ethical leader is known as a person who maintains alignment between their actions and their affirmations (Moreno, 2010).

There already exists some literature that explores these variables both independently and jointly. However, there still exists a gap in the study of how internal communication and ethical leadership influence resistance to change. One of the aims of this research is to investigate whether the organizational processes, like communication, or the personal factors, like leadership, influence resistance to change the most. Internal communication is a topic that has several aspects underneath. In order to do a better analysis, it is important to identify which of these aspects impact resistance to change the most.

This research addresses the question using empirical research. The data used was collected using a survey that measures the three variables: resistance to change, ethical leadership and internal communication.

With the data collected, this study aims to analyse the data and understand whether ethical leadership and internal communication moderate employee resistance. The main

## ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

objectives are to understand whether there are dimensions in ethical leadership or in internal communication that affect resistance to change in organizations

This study will contribute to further the knowledge of the relationship between resistance to change and the two variables chosen to study: ethical leadership and internal communication. Despite the existence of some studies about these topics, this work will help to further this knowledge, studying these variables and their behavior together. The main objectives are:

- Analyse the levels of resistance to change, ethical leadership, and organizational communication in Portuguese organizational context.
- Analyse whether there are differences in the variables under study according to socio-demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, seniority)
- Analyse which variables are relevant predictors of resistance to change

In the remainder of this thesis, the following sections will be discussed: Firstly, there is the literature review, in this section of the study a literature review of all the variables, resistance to change, ethical leadership and internal communication will be provided, with the main focus being defining them and some of the key theories about each one. Secondly, the empirical study, in this part of the research, the method of the collection of data will be explained as well as all the results will be explored Finally, the conclusion where the results and recommendations will be presented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Resistance to Change*

In order to better understand the concept of “Resistance to Change” it is important to firstly understand the concept of “Change”. In this literature review, both concepts will be explored, starting with the concept of “Change”.

Change in an organization is the process of moving from the current state to a desired state in the future (Mack, Nelson, & Quick, 1998). According to Guidetti *et al* (2018), from the concept of change grows the concept of change management. The aim of change management is to create an optimal path from the starting point to the goal. In other words, change management involves taking steps to continuously update an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to cater to the ever-changing needs of internal and external customers (Sundus *et al.*, 2017). According to the same author, a major goal of change management is "maximizing all people's collective benefits and minimizing the risk of failure to achieve the change" (p. 17). Change management is a complex process that must be initiated at various levels and requires the constructive alignment of diverse stakeholder interests. In this context, understanding the potential causes of failure is just as crucial as recognizing the factors that lead to success. (Lauer, 2021). Resistance to change is one of the most significant obstacles to a successful change management.

Resistance is a phenomenon that impacts the change process by delaying or slowing its initiation, hindering or obstructing its implementation, and increasing the associated costs. Resistance to change can be defined as a multidimensional negative attitude toward change, encompassing affective and behavioral components, which must be overcome or eliminated (Sundus *et al*, 2017, p.17).

According to Oreg (2003), resistance to change is a multidimensional concept comprising four dimensions:

- Routines: A preference for low levels of stimulation and novelty, coupled with a difficulty to abandon old habits.
- Emotional Reactions: Emotional responses to imposed changes, including reduced psychological flexibility and fear of losing control.

- Short-Term Focus: Intolerance to the adjustment period brought about by change and reluctance to relinquish control in the short term, along with fear of immediate change.
- Cognitive Rigidity: The ease with which individuals change their opinions or ideas.

According to Cabrera, Vera, and Hernandez (2011), resistance to change is a critical psychological state among employees that can undermine change initiatives by disrupting the restructuring of internal processes and organizational activities, thereby preventing any mechanisms that might alter the existing status quo. Bareil (2013) defines resistance to change as the rejection of new ideas or processes, characterizing it as employee antagonism toward change. This resistance is linked to factors such as loss of control, routines, traditions, relationships, security, fear of the unknown, lack of support, trust, and inadequate management styles (Mdletye, Coetzee & Ukpere, 2014).

Resistance is often perceived as "collateral damage" in change initiatives. It can manifest in various forms, such as intentional work delays, resignations, strikes, sabotage of organizational property, and whistleblowing (Carr & Brower, 2000).

No matter how well-conceived or administratively sound a proposed change may be, its implementation ultimately depends on the individuals within the organization, who possess the power to either enact or undermine it. While organizational change can be initiated by managers, imposed through changes in policy and procedures, or driven by external pressures, it fundamentally represents management's effort to influence members of the organization to think, behave, and perform differently. (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

Employees often resist change due to a fear of the unknown, a misunderstanding of the need for change and its consequences, and a low tolerance for change. (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

To successfully implement change initiatives, organizations must acknowledge the critical role of their employees and consider their reactions to change, which are shaped by various factors such as emotions, perceptions, communication, and involvement in decision-making. Organizations that effectively manage complex changes and

adaptations will not only survive, but also thrive (Cahill, 2011). Srivastava and Agrawal (2020) argue that the human dimension is the most crucial element in the successful implementation of change, as it is reflected in employees' feedback regarding the change. Consequently, employees often resist change due to their inclination to preserve the status quo, while the change process itself aims to modify that status quo.

People do not inherently resist change; rather, they resist the potential loss of status, pay, or comfort that may accompany it (Dent & Goldberg 1999)

## *2.2. Ethical Leadership*

### *2.2.1 Definition and impact for organizations*

Before getting into understanding what ethical leadership is, it is important to define what leadership itself is and what is the part of the leader in both these concepts.

According to Northouse (2016), leadership is the process by which an individual influences a group of people toward achieving a common goal. Following this line of thought, a leader is an individual who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more followers with diverse talents, abilities, and skills, directing them toward the organization's mission and objectives. This influence inspires followers to willingly and enthusiastically invest their spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a coordinated effort to achieve the organization's goals.

In the organizational environment, ethics focuses on the moral codes that guide business decisions, particularly in how they affect individuals and the surrounding community, based on a socially accepted framework of individual and collective rights and obligations. Ethical companies are typically those whose conduct is socially valued and whose policies are aligned with prevailing moral standards. These companies ensure that their activities and strategies are grounded in ethical considerations and are subsequently carried out in a socially responsible manner (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2007).

As the demand for ethical standards increases in the modern organizational environment, ethical leadership has become a focal point of attention. A leader's behavior, whether ethical or unethical, plays a crucial role in shaping the organizational culture and influencing interpersonal relationships (Bedi et al., 2016). Yukl (2006) characterizes the ethical leader as an individual who advocates for honesty and ensures that their actions reflect their values and beliefs.

There are several definitions for what ethical leadership is. On Brown's perspective (et al., 2005, p. 120) ethical leadership is defined as the demonstration of behavior that aligns with accepted moral standards through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the encouragement of such behavior among followers through open communication, positive reinforcement, and ethical decision-making.

During the research on ethical leadership, Martinez-Saenz (2009) identified five dimensions within the subject: altruism, selfishness, autonomy, legalism, and community orientation.

- An altruistic motivation in ethical leadership occurs when a leader acts without regard for their own interests.
- A selfish perspective involves the leader assessing what is right based on their personal gain.
- Autonomy refers to the leader empowering their followers to adhere to their own ethical beliefs.
- Legalism happens when the leader adheres to specific rules or procedures.
- A community-oriented approach emphasizes the improvement of the society and community in which the organization operates.

An ethical leader engages in honest practices and treats employees with fairness. Such leaders inspire trust and gratitude, promoting attitudes that encourage ethical behavior and positive actions among team members. This, in turn, creates a more pleasant work environment, enhancing commitment and performance, and establishing the leader as a role model to be emulated (AlShehhi et al., 2021). According to Avey et al. (2012) a leader's character has a positive influence on organizational outcomes, particularly in terms of trust and job satisfaction.

Moreno (2010) discusses the trust crisis within leadership research, emphasizing that even a minor discrepancy between a leader's words and actions can create ethical dilemmas for followers. An ethical leader is one who maintains alignment between their actions and their statements. Ethical leaders influence their followers through consistent behavior, appropriate actions, a principled approach to leadership, and by following through on their commitments.

Team performance improves when ethical leaders actively help eliminate work-related barriers, offering support, motivation, and the necessary training to create a more constructive organizational environment. Consequently, teams led by ethical leaders demonstrate superior performance compared to those without the same level of resource and time investment from their leader (Niemeyer & Cavazotte, 2016; Qing et al., 2020).

The survey used for this research *Questionário de Liderança Ética* (Neves, Jordão, Pina e Cunha, Vieira, & Coimbra, 2016; QLE), also has a dimension on Despotic Leadership to contrast with the ethical dimension. According to De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) despotic leadership happens when a leader has a tendency to engage with an authority behavior to pursue his own interest, exploiting the subordinates. This type of behavior in the workplace can negatively affect the job performance of employees under this type of leadership (Naseer et al., 2016).

### *2.2.2 Relationship between resistance to change and ethical leadership*

Some authors have already studied the relationship between ethical leadership and resistance to change.

As Babalola et al. (2014) demonstrated, an increase in the frequency of change is only associated with higher turnover intentions when leaders are viewed as unethical. Having leaders who behave ethically and do not harm their subordinates enhances employee morale and motivates them to show loyalty to the organization that employs them. According to the authors, this type of ethical leadership can soften resistance to change.

According to some authors (Brown et al., 2005; Stouten et al., 2012; Ng and Feldman, 2015) the trust in leaders is closely related to not only ethical behavior but also to ethical leadership, this trust is also important to fight resistance to change, ensuring readiness to

change by the employees, and reducing uncertainty (Walker et al., 2007), therefore, a leader's ethical dimension can play a crucial role in helping boost this valuable individual outcome in the organizations.

The research made by Sharif & Scandura (2014) also showed that ethical leadership gains importance during change processes. Similarly, Metwally et al. (2019), noted that ethical leadership can play a significant role in predicting important workplace outcomes like readiness to change, which has been virtually unexplored so far.

Sustainable and positive change in organizations can only occur if leaders act ethically and implement approaches that align with ethical principles. These approaches should not only address their own personal (self-interested) needs but also result in utilitarian outcomes, benefiting the greatest number of stakeholders (Burnes and By, 2012).

Ethical leadership is viewed as important for motivating organizational members to embrace change (Babalola et al., 2014). Vakola (2014) states that stress makes employees feel negatively toward change, however ethical leaders can have a positive impact on employees' resistance to change, making them feel ready to change.

Neves et al. (2018) showed that a positive response to change is likely developed by employees under ethical leaders that encourage employees' social identity and create social exchange processes. Under an ethical leadership, employees will consistently and long-term receive supportive, fair, and humane treatment, leading employees to feel more secured (Ng and Feldman, 2015).

In contrast, the absence of ethical leadership, on the other hand, would demonstrate to employees that the organization's strategy and agents' day-to-day behaviour do not coincide (Neves P et al., 2018).

Based on the above-mentioned literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Ethical leadership is negatively associated with resistance to change.

Hypothesis 1b: Despotism leadership is positively associated with resistance to change.

### *2.3. Internal Communication*

#### *2.3.1 Definition and impact for organizations*

Communication, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is defined as “the act or an instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas, or feelings”. An organization is “a group of persons organized for some end or work; association”. Combining both definitions, the definition of organizational communication, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is “the way in which an organization gives the public and its employees information about its aims and what it is doing”.

Apart from the dictionary’s definition there are other ways to define communication. According to Beattie and Ellis (2014) communication is the human language that is used to transmit information.

Encarta (1998) says that communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others at a specific time and place. It encompasses writing and speaking, as well as nonverbal communication (such as facial expressions, body language, and gestures), visual communication (including the use of images or pictures, such as in painting, photography, video, or film), and electronic communication (such as telephone calls, electronic mail, cable television, or satellite broadcasts). Communication is essential in personal life and is equally important in business, education, and any other context where people interact.

Richmond et al (2005) define organizational communication as stimulation of meaning in the minds of others by individuals communicating verbally or non-verbally.

Other authors (e.g., Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002) define internal communication as a specialized sub-discipline of communication that analyses how individuals communicate within organizations and explores the characteristics of effective communication systems in organizational contexts.

Communication within the company has been considered by many authors as a crucial part to a company’s success. According to Bavelas and Barret (1951), a company's communication is its most fundamental activity, and it underlies all its functions. A

corporation can't coordinate its activities unless its various departments or units communicate with one another.

Following the same line of thought, Charles (2011) explains that communication and business are intimately and inseparably linked, asserting that no business can survive without effective communication, which ultimately determines the success or failure of a business. He further emphasizes that a sender-oriented approach reflects the belief that a well-structured communication product, utilizing precise and accurate terminology, will automatically fulfil its intended purpose.

According to Clemons (2003) internal communication is more important today than in previous years, partly due to the increasing complexity of business and market conditions. The abundance of information in the marketplace makes it crucial for employees to understand this information. Developing and implementing a strategic internal communication strategy can offer numerous benefits to organizations, such as maintaining employee motivation and engagement, and ensuring that clear, consistent messages are shared with employees in a timely manner.

To run a successful business, managers must clearly communicate organizational goals to employees and, through that communication, inspire employees to trust in their leadership and perform at their highest potential in order to lead successfully. To control effectively, managers must communicate with employees to monitor progress, re-emphasize organizational goals, and correct ongoing processes. Consequently, communication extends beyond merely talking, writing, reading, and listening (Radovic Markovic, M., & Omolaja, M., 2009).

There are many ways the lack of communication can affect the results of the company. According to (DiFonzo et al., 1994; Smelzer and Zener, 1992), poorly managed change communication leads to rumours and resistance to change. Mayer (2000) states that ineffective communication skills often exacerbate conflict situations

Downs and Hazen (1977) developed the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and communication. In their analysis of the application of the CSQ, Downs and Hazen (1977) found that communication is a multidimensional construct,

There are 8 dimensions in the “Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire”. In this research, it was only used 6 of those dimensions. In this questionnaire, there were only used the dimensions that were more adequate to the type of research done, having selected these dimensions for that reason. A description of these six factors used in this research, according to Clampitt and Downs (1993) is presented below.

- The Communication Climate reflects communication at both the organizational and personal levels. It includes factors such as the extent to which communication within the organization motivates and encourages employees to achieve organizational goals, as well as whether attitudes toward communication within the organization are considered healthy.
- Supervisory Communication encompasses both upward and downward communication with superiors, including the extent to which subordinates anticipate the supervisor's need for information.
- Organizational Integration refers to the degree to which individuals receive information about their immediate work environment, such as updates on personnel matters and departmental plans.
- Horizontal and Informal Communication (Co-worker Communication) addresses the accuracy and openness of horizontal and informal communication among colleagues.
- Corporate Information pertains to broader organizational information, including updates on the company's financial status and announcements regarding changes.
- Personal Feedback focuses on employees' need to understand how their performance is evaluated and judged.

It is clear to some authors, such as Hahn et al. (2014), that having communication competency is the most essential skill for the 21st-century workforce to achieve organizational success.

### *2.3.2. Relationship between resistance to change and internal communication*

There are several motives that enhance resistance to change and achieve readiness to change. However, several authors agree that organizational communication is one of

those. As Galpin (1996) mentioned, the strategy for organizational change starts when the need for change is established. After, the most critical decision is to decide how to communicate this need to the organization's employees. This need for change has to be communicated clearly, along with the consequences of not changing, not to mention how the organization will appear all the changes are done (Galpin, 1996). Herold et al. (2008) says communication has an important role in implementing change successfully, because it reduces uncertainty. There is a possibility that lack of information can lead to rumours and gossip, as well as anxiety associated with the change due to the lack of communication (Christensen, 2014).

However, it is challenging to communicate to employees and reduce their uncertainty about the future. Nelissen et al (2008) suggested that one of the main challenges of achieving change is to communicate to employees. According to Gilley et al. (2009) the capability of being an effective communicator is crucial to leaders that want to implement change and achieve better results. Sharing the motives of change and its implications to employees reduces the uncertainty about the moment of change (Elving, 2005).

Communication about change should be frequent, accurate and vigorous, giving information, seeking feedback, and creating an open environment where the importance of change is understood (Lewis & Sahay, 2018).

Instead of the usual one-way top-down way of sharing news, organizations should include employees and listen to their opinions during the decision-making regarding change (Lewis & Russ, 2012). According to Christensen (2014) one of the strategies that could defeat resistance is to involve employees in the different processes of change, giving them the opportunity to participate with ideas.

Practices such as the ones mentioned above, ease the process of employees' acceptance to change, decreasing their feeling of uncertainty (Lewis, 2006). Employees will feel less stressed and ready to collaborate and achieve change when they have information about the current situation. (Malek & Ya zdanifard, 2012)

Having an efficient communication is crucial since it links all the processes of the organization, Christensen (2014). According to Barret (2002), in order to have an effective employee communication there are five primary goals to communicate change with employees:

## ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- Make sure the message is clear and consistent in order to explain to employees the company vision, strategic goals and how will the change affect them;
- Motivate employees to uphold the company;
- Enhance performance and discretionary effort;
- Limit informal communication (rumours) that may affect productivity;
- Ensure employees are aligned with the company's strategic goals and overall performance improvement plans.

Based on the above-mentioned literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Satisfaction with communication climate is negatively associated with resistance to change

Hypothesis 2b: Satisfaction with supervisory communication is negatively associated with resistance to change

Hypothesis 2c: Satisfaction with organizational integration is negatively associated with resistance to change

Hypothesis 2d: Satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication (co-worker communication) is negatively associated with resistance to change

Hypothesis 2e: Satisfaction with corporate information is negatively associated with resistance to change

Hypothesis 2t: Satisfaction with personal feedback is negatively associated with resistance to change

### 3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

#### *3.1. Method*

The data supporting this study were collected during the months of August and September 2024. The questionnaire was sent to a convenience sample of work colleagues, masters colleagues and family. It was also shared online.

##### *3.1.1 Participants*

From the total sample of 124 people 81 are women (65,9%) e 42 are men (34,1%). With an age range starting at 18 years, we verified that 39% (n=48) belong to the age range between 18 and 40 years. The next most relevant range is the one who comprehends ages from 41 to 50 that represents 33,1% (n=41) of the respondents. The least representative range is the one who identifies 50 or more years old, that represent 27,4% (n=34).

When asked about their marital status, 35,8% (n=44) are single, and 8,9% (n=11) are divorced or separated. The majority of the inquiries, 55,3% (n=68) are married. 61,8% (n=76) of the inquires have children, while the remaining 38,2 % (n=47) do not.

Regarding the completed educational qualifications, 4,9% (n=6) only completed primary education and 16,3% (n=20) completed secondary school. The majority of the inquires has a bachelor's degree 50,4% (n=62). Inquires with a master's degree is also a signification group representing 27,6% (n=34). Only 0,8% (n=1) inquire has a doctorate.

Concerning the sector of activity, 28,5% (n=35) work in the public sector. The majority of the inquires, 60,2% (n=74) work in private for-profit sector, while the remaining 11,4% (n=14) work in private non-profit sector.

Regarding the contractual situation, the majority of the sample affirm that they have an open-ended employment contract, 72,6% (n=90), while 9,8% (n=12) are either interns or have a fixed-term employment contract. 15,3% (n=19) are independent workers and 1,6% (n=2) selected the "other" option.

Concerning the seniority in the company, 42,3% (n=52) of the inquires affirm that they have been working in the company for less than 5 years. Only 15,4% (n=19) have

worked in the company from 6 until 15 years and 32,5% (n=40) have worked in the company for 20 or more years.

Regarding their job title/professional category, 23,6% (n= 29) are top or middle managers and 7,3% (n= 9) are supervisors or team leader. The majority of the sample, 61,8% (n = 76) are highly qualified professional and qualified professional. Only 7,3% (n=9) work as nonqualified professional.

When asked if performs managerial duties, 39,5% (n=49) answered positively, while the remaining 59,7% (n=74) answered negatively.

### 3.1.2 Instruments

The instrument used consisted of three previously validated scales. The reliability of the scales within the sample was assessed using Cronbach's alpha indicator. For a scale to be considered reliable, it must have a value greater than 0.7, and all items must have a correlation with the scale above 0.2. (Maroco & Garcia-Marques, 2006)

The first scale is about Resistance to Change. The questionnaire used was *The Resistance to Change Scale* (RTC-21; Oreg, 2003). This questionnaire was designed to measure an individual's willingness to resist changes. It is composed by 11 items. The scale of 11 items has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.844

The second scale is related to Ethical Leadership, using the *Questionário de Liderança Ética* (Neves, Jordão, Pina e Cunha, Vieira, & Coimbra, 2016; QLE), it is used to assess ethical leadership in two dimensions: Ethical Leadership and Despotism Leadership. There are 21 items divided in these two dimensions. On the Ethical leadership dimension, the scale of 15 items has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925. Regarding the Despotism Leadership dimension, with the scale of 7 items, its Cronbach's alpha is 0.833

The third scale relates to Organizational Communication, using the *Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire* (CSQ) by Downs and Hazen (1977), translated to Portuguese by Titoce (2012). This questionnaire is divided in eight dimensions. In this dissertation were only used thirty items, reflecting six of those dimensions: Organizational Integration, Personal Feedback, Supervisory Communication, Horizontal and Informal

Communication (Co-worker Communication), Communication Climate, Corporate Information. On the Organizational Integration dimension, the Cronbach’s alpha of the scale of 5 items is 0.878. Regarding the Personal Feedback dimension, with a scale of 5 items, its Cronbach’s alpha is 0.875. The dimension of Supervisory Communication, with a scale of 5 items, has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.906. On the Horizontal and Informal Communication (Co-worker Communication), composed by a scale of 5 items, the Cronbach’s alpha is 0,750. Regarding the Communication Climate dimension, with a scale of 5 items, presents a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.875. Lastly, concerning the Corporate Information dimension, with a scale of 5 items has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.903

### 3.2. Results

#### 3.2.1 Mean and Standard Deviation in the sample

For this survey, it was used a scale of 5 points, where the theoretical mid-point is 3. Regarding resistance to change, it has a relatively low mean (2,669), which indicates a low resistance to change.

Concerning Ethical Leadership and Despotism leadership, both have high means, 3,817 and 3,948. The higher mean for the latter shows respondents perceive leadership to be more despotic than ethical.

Regarding communication and its dimensions, supervisory communication is highest rated with a mean of 3,763. Concerning the communication climate, this dimension presents a 3,602, mean which shows a fairly positive communication climate. Organizational integration has a mean of 3,594 this value suggests a positive view of this dimension through communication. The 3,505 mean in the horizontal and informal (co-worker communication) reflects a positive co-worker communication. Concerning the personal feedback mean of 3,418, it suggests that feedback communication has a neutral almost positive view to respondents. Lastly, regarding corporate information, this dimension has the lowest mean, 3,334, of the internal communication dimensions.

Table 1 – Mean and Standard Deviation in the Sample

	Mean	Standard Deviation

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

<b>Resistance to Change</b>	2,669	0,679
<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	3,817	0,618
<b>Despotic Leadership</b>	3,948	0,803
<b>Internal Communication – Organizational Integration</b>	3,594	0,761
<b>Internal Communication- Personal Feedback</b>	3,418	0,798
<b>Internal Communication- Supervisory Communication</b>	3,763	0,840
<b>Internal Communication- Horizontal and Informal Communication (Co-worker Communication)</b>	3,505	0,629
<b>Internal Communication- Communication Climate</b>	3,602	0,812
<b>Internal Communication- Corporate Information</b>	3,334	0,840

*3.2.2 Analysing differences in sub-groups of the sample*

To analyse the differences in subgroup of the sample, two different types of tests were performed. For the questions with only two groups (gender, children, manager position) a T-Test was performed, while to the remaining questions (age, marital status, qualifications, sector of activity, seniority, job title and contractual situation), with more than two groups, an ANOVA test was performed.

Significant differences were found for three of the variables under study ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Regarding the resistance to change variable, a significant difference was found for sector of activity ( $p = 0.015$ ). Compared with the private for-profit (2.751) and private non-profit sectors (2.955), the mean for the public sector is lower (2.429). These values

indicate that public sector workers are less resistant to change compared to the other. (Table 2)

Concerning the organizational integration dimension of communication, a significant difference was found for seniority in the company ( $p < 0,001$ ). The higher mean of 3,96 of this question is from employees with 11 to 15 years in the company. These employees show higher satisfaction than employees in mid-career. On another note, employees with 16 to 20 years are the ones with the lowest satisfaction with a mean of 3,133. (Table 2)

The personal feedback dimension also showed a significant difference in terms of seniority in the company ( $p = 0,001$ ) The more satisfied group of employees are the ones with 11 to 15 years in the company, with a mean of 3,780. Employees who have been on the same company for 16 to 20 years are the least satisfied with personal feedback and with a mean of 2,900. (Table 2)

Table 2 – Significant differences in sub-groups

		Mean	F	Sig.
<b>Resistance to Change</b>	Public Sector	2,429	4,340	0,015
	Private for-profit sector	2,751		
	Private non-profit sector	2,955		
<b>Internal Communication (Organizational Integration)</b>	Less than 1 year	3,86	4,573	<0,001
	1 to 5	3,313		
	6 to 10	3,4		
	11 to 15	3,96		
	16 to 20	3,133		
	More than 20	3,84		
<b>Internal Communication (Personal Feedback)</b>	Less than 1 year	3,75	4,277	0,001
	1 to 5	3,163		
	6 to 10	3,178		

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

<b>Seniority in the company</b>	11 to 15	3,78		
	16 to 20	2,9		
	More than 20	3,635		

*3.2.3 Analysis of correlation between variables*

To analyse the correlation between variables (Table 3), Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated, with a one-tailed significance test.

According to this analysis, a positive significant correlation was observed between the main variable “Resistance to Change” and one of the dimensions of Communication “Horizontal and Informal Communication (Co-worker Communication)”. This result indicates that when informal communication increases, resistance to change has the same tendency to increase, confirming that Satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication (co-worker communication) is negatively associated with resistance to change (H2d).

There is a negative significant correlation between “Resistance to Change” and one of the dimensions of leadership, “Despotic Leadership” This negative correlation means that as the level of dystopic leadership increases, the level of resistance to change decreases, verifying that despotic leadership is positively associated with resistance to change (H1b).

Table 3 - Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Resistance to change	1								
2. Ethical Leadership	0.043	1							
3. Despotic Leadership	-0.199*	0.548**	1						

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

4.Com. Organizational Integration	0.133	0.422**	0.154*	1					
5.Com. Feedback	0.065	0.506**	0.229**	0.811**	1				
6.Com. Supervisory	0.015	0.466**	0.298**	0.650**	0.760**	1			
7. Informal and Horizontal Communication (Co-worker Communication)	0.178*	0.422**	0.164*	0.696**	0.764**	0.683**	1		
8.Com. Climate	0.054	0.417**	0.190*	0.659**	0.755**	0.728**	0.817**	1	
9.Com. Corporate Information	0.031	0.363**	0.131	0.623**	0.711**	0.629**	0.727**	0.750**	1

\*p<.05 \*\*p<0.01

The stepwise regression was used to evaluate which variable had the highest predictive power of resistance to change. This model (Table 4) retained two variables – Despotic Leadership and Informal Communication and explains 8,5% of the variance ( $R^2$ ).

Table 4 – Stepwise regression for resistance to change

Predictor	$R^2$	Beta
Despotic Leadership	0.085	-0.235
Informal and Horizontal Communication (Co-worker Communication)		0.217

## 4. CONCLUSION

### *4.1 Analysis of the results and contributions of the study*

The aim of this study was to analyse the influence of resistance to change on ethical leadership and internal communication, with the need to integrate a set of demographic variables and thus respond to the objectives outlined in the introduction.

The first main goal of this research was to **analyse the levels of resistance to change, ethical leadership, and organizational communication in Portuguese organizational context**. To analyse the levels, the mean of the different dimensions was calculated. Resistance to change has a relatively low mean of 2,669, translating in a low resistance to change. Regarding the ethical leadership part of the survey, both showed high means (3,817 for ethical leadership dimension and 3,948 for the despotic leadership dimension) showing that on the Portuguese work environment respondents perceive leadership to be more despotic than ethical. Concerning the section of internal communication and its dimensions, the dimension of supervisory communication showed the higher mean of 3,763. The dimensions of communication climate, organizational integration, horizontal and informal communication have average means comprehended between 3,6 and 3,5. The dimensions with lower means were feedback communication and corporate information with means of 3,418 and 3,334 respectively.

Regarding the second main goal of analysis **of the differences according to the socio-demographic variables**, only three variables were significant. These variables were resistance to change by sector of activity, and. Both these socio-demographic variables influence significantly the perception of employees regarding resistance to change and internal communication. Akan et al. (2016) studied resistance to change in the banking sector, and reached the conclusion that private sector bank workers have a higher tendency to resist to change. In this study, the same conclusion was reached, despite not being focused on the banking sector, in the Portuguese context private sector workers also have a higher tendency to resist when facing change. Regarding the two dimensions of communication that are significant, organizational integration communication and personal feedback by seniority, the same conclusions were reached by Ogunjinmi, et al. (2013) that refer the existence of a positive correlation with several socio-demographic variables, including seniority in the company.

**The last main goal was to analyse which variables are relevant predictors of resistance to change.** Recurring to the Multiple Linear Regression, using the Stepwise method, one regression was made with “resistance to change” being a dependent variable. The results showed that Despotic Leadership and Informal Communication explain 8,5% of the variance. Firstly, concerning the relationship between resistance to change and the different dimensions of ethical leadership (Ethical Leadership and Despotic Leadership). Despotic leadership has a significant negative impact, which means that this dimension of ethical leadership is strongly associated with a lower resistance to change, confirming the validation of hypothesis 1b: despotic leadership is positively associated with resistance to change. There are not many authors that have found despotic leadership a high predictor of resistance to change. However, Shahid and Bilal (2023) have reached the conclusion that “Employees’ resistance to change can be reduced by decreasing the perception of despotic leadership” showing that despotic leadership is relevant when fighting resistance to change.

Secondly, regarding the analysis of the relationship between resistance to change and the different dimensions of internal communication (Organizational Integration, Personal Feedback, Supervisory Communication, Horizontal and Informal Communication (Co-worker Communication), Communication Climate, Corporate Information). The only dimension with a significant correlation was horizontal and informal communication and resistance to change, verifying hypothesis 2d: Satisfaction with horizontal and informal communication (co-worker communication) is negatively associated with resistance to change. Therefore, exists a parallelism with the results achieved by some authors as Eder e Eisenberger (2008) and, when peers have a higher predisposition to change, this will naturally be reproduced by the other members of the organization. According to Assunção (2014) informal communication should be given importance as it may influence the reduction of resistance to change when employees face organizational change.

#### *4.1 Limitations of the study and recommendations to future research*

Along the process of development of this research, some limitations were found. One of the main limitations of this study is the sample size. Only 124 respondents participated on this study, and all the respondents are Portuguese and work in the country, meaning this study is based on the perspective of the Portuguese work market. Therefore, for future research may be important defining a more specific demographic, such as the sector of activity, in order to provide more useful outcomes to a specific niche. It could also be helpful to extend the research to other countries to have a more representative sample and achieve conclusive results.

The collection of data happened on a small window of time, this factor may also represent a limitation since, perception of resistance and the other dimensions evaluated can evolve over time and change. Therefore, it would be interesting to accompany a group of people and compare their answers in different times of the year, evaluating if their perception changes.

The low value of the variance achieved in the regression model calculated in this research (8,5%) demonstrates that predictors like despotic leadership and informal communication only explain a small part of resistance to change, suggesting that there may be other relevant factors contributing to resistance to change, which could be helpful to take into consideration in future research.

The questionnaire used for the ethical leadership data collection still has few uses, so it is harder to compare the results with other published works. So, it is important that more researchers use this tool to evaluate ethical leadership.

Finally, the questionnaire was answered online, which can mean that the attention of the respondents could also impact the responses. So, for future research it could be important to add a qualitative measure, for example, conduct interviews which could lead to more reliable answers.

Regardless of the limitations found, this study contributes with valuable insights for the organization context in Portugal.

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APPENDICES

The questionnaire handed was the following:

1. Nesta secção terá de responder a questões relacionadas com a sua relação com a mudança no contexto laboral. Por favor, indique o seu grau de concordância com as afirmações abaixo. (Escala: Discordo Totalmente; Discordo; Indiferente; Concordo; Concordo Totalmente) / In this section, you will need to answer questions related to your relationship with change in the work context. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below. (Scale: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neutral; Agree; Strongly Agree)

1.	Prefiro estar entediado do que ser surpreendido. I'd rather be bored than surprised
2.	Se fosse informado de que haverá uma mudança significativa na forma como as coisas são feitas no trabalho, provavelmente ficaria stressado. If I were to be informed that there's going to be a significant change regarding the way things are done at work, I would probably feel stressed
3.	Quando alguém me pressiona para mudar algo, tendo a resistir, mesmo que ache que a mudança possa, em última análise, beneficiar-me. When someone pressures me to change something, I tend to resist it even if I think the change may ultimately benefit me
4.	Quando sou informado de uma mudança de planos, fico um pouco tenso. When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit
5.	Depois de fazer planos, não é provável que os mude. Once I've made plans, I'm not likely to change them
6.	Quando as coisas não correm conforme o planeado, isso deixa-me stressado When things don't go according to plans, it stresses me out
7.	Muitas vezes, sinto-me um pouco desconfortável, mesmo em relação a mudanças que possam potencialmente melhorar a minha vida. Often, I feel a bit uncomfortable even about changes that may potentially improve my life

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

8.	<p>Se o meu chefe mudasse os critérios para avaliar os funcionários, provavelmente sentir-me-ia desconfortável, mesmo que achasse que me sairia igualmente bem sem ter que fazer trabalho extra.</p> <p>If my boss changed the criteria for evaluating employees, it would probably make me feel uncomfortable even if I thought I'd do just as well without having to do any extra work</p>
9.	<p>Não mudo de opinião facilmente.</p> <p>I don't change my mind easily</p>
10.	<p>Se, a meio do ano de trabalho, fosse informado de que haverá uma mudança no calendário de prazos, antes de saber qual é a mudança, provavelmente presumiria que a mudança é para pior.</p> <p>If in the middle of the work year, I were to be informed that there's going to be a change in the schedule of deadlines, prior to knowing what the change actually is, I would probably presume that the change is for the worse</p>
11.	<p>Gosto de fazer as mesmas coisas de sempre, em vez de tentar coisas novas e diferentes</p> <p>I like to do the same old things rather than try new and different ones</p>

2. Nas afirmações abaixo deve seleccionar qual a sua opinião referente à sua chefia direta. (Escala: Discordo Totalmente; Discordo; Indiferente; Concordo; Concordo Totalmente)

1.	<p>Assegura-se que as suas ações são sempre éticas.</p> <p>Ensures that his actions are always ethical.</p>
2.	<p>O que diz é o que realmente quer dizer – é sincero(a).</p> <p>What he/she says is what he/she truly means – he/she is sincere.</p>
3.	<p>Merece confiança. Pode-se acreditar e confiar que vai cumprir a sua palavra.</p> <p>Is trustworthy. You can believe and rely to keep his word.</p>
4.	<p>Não critica os subordinados sem uma boa razão.</p> <p>Does not criticize subordinates without a good reason.</p>

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

5.	<p>Pode-se confiar que colocará os interesses dos seus colaboradores à frente dos seus próprios interesses.</p> <p>You can trust that he/she will put the interests of his/her employees ahead of his/her own</p>
6.	<p>Explica quem é responsável pelo quê.</p> <p>Explains who is responsible for what.</p>
7.	<p>Explica o que é esperado de cada membro do grupo.</p> <p>Explains what is expected of each group member.</p>
8.	<p>Explica o limite de autoridade de cada membro do grupo.</p> <p>Explains the limits of authority for each group member.</p>
9.	<p>Comunica as expectativas de desempenho que tem em relação aos membros do grupo.</p> <p>Communicates the performance expectations he/she has for the group members</p>
10.	<p>Clarifica as prioridades.</p> <p>Clarifies the priorities.</p>
11.	<p>Permite aos subordinados terem influência em decisões importantes.</p> <p>Allows subordinates to have influence in important decisions</p>
12.	<p>Reconsiderará decisões com base em recomendações de liderados.</p> <p>He/she will reconsider decisions based on recommendations from subordinates.</p>
13.	<p>Delega responsabilidades desafiantes aos liderados.</p> <p>Delegates challenging responsibilities to subordinates.</p>
14.	<p>Procura aconselhar-se junto dos colaboradores em questões relativas à estratégia organizacional</p> <p>Seeks advice from employees on matters related to organizational strategy</p>
15.	<p>Permite aos liderados participar ativamente na definição dos seus próprios objetivos de desempenho</p> <p>Allows subordinates to actively participate in defining their own performance goals.</p>
16.	<p>Assume o controlo e não tolera desacordo ou interrogações; dá ordens.</p>

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

	Takes control and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning; gives orders.
17.	Atua como um(a) tirano(a) ou um(a) déspota. Acts as a tyrant or a despot.
18.	Não permite que outros participem na tomada de decisões. Does not allow others to participate in decision-making.
19.	Tende a não querer ou não ser capaz de abrir mão do controlo de projetos ou tarefas. Tends to not want or be able to let go of control over projects or tasks.
20.	Espera obediência inquestionável daqueles que a si reportam. Expects unquestioning obedience from those who report to him.
21.	É vingativo(a); procura vingança quando prejudicado(a). Is vengeful; seeks revenge when wronged.
22.	Persegue os seus próprios interesses à custa de outros. Pursues his own interests at the expense of others.

3. Por favor, indique o seu grau de satisfação com as afirmações abaixo relativas ao método de comunicação na organização onde trabalha. (Escala: Muito Insatisfeito; Insatisfeito; Indiferente; Satisfeito; Muito Satisfeito) / Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the statements below regarding the communication method in the organization where you work. (Scale: Very Dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Very Satisfied)

1.	Informações sobre o meu progresso no trabalho. Information about my progress in my job
2.	Informações pessoais. Personnel news
3.	Informações sobre as políticas e metas departamentais.

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

	Information about departmental policies and goals.
4.	Informações sobre os requisitos do meu trabalho. Information about the requirements of my job.
5.	Informações sobre os benefícios e pagamentos. Information about benefits and pay.
6.	Informações sobre como estou a ser avaliado. Information about how I am being judged
7.	Informações sobre o meu trabalho. Information about how my job compares with others
8.	Informações sobre os meus esforços. Recognition of my efforts
9.	Informações sobre como os problemas no meu trabalho são encarados. Reports on how problems in my job are handled
10.	Os meus superiores conhecem e compreendem os problemas enfrentados pelos colaboradores. Extent to which superiors know and understand the problems faced by subordinates
11.	Os meus superiores ouvem e prestam-me atenção Extent to which my supervisor listens and pays attention to me
12.	Os meus superiores dão-me orientações para resolver os problemas relacionados com o meu trabalho. Extent to which my supervisor offers guidance for solving job related problems
13.	Os meus superiores confiam em mim. Extent to which my supervisor trusts me

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

14.	Os meus superiores estão abertos às minhas ideias Extent to which my supervisor is open to ideas
15.	A supervisão dos meus superiores é razoável Extent to which the amount of supervision given to me is about right
16.	Os boatos estão ativos na organização. Extent to which the grapevine is active in our organization
17.	A comunicação horizontal é rigorosa e circula livremente entre os membros da organização. Extent to which horizontal communication with other employees is accurate and free flowing
18.	As práticas de comunicação são adaptáveis a situações de emergência. Extent to which communication practices are adaptable to emergencies
19.	O meu grupo de trabalho é conciliável. Extent to which my work group is compatible
20.	A comunicação informal circula bem na organização. Extent to which informal communication is active and accurate
21.	A comunicação na organização motiva e estimula o entusiasmo para cumprir os meus objetivos. Extent to which the organization's communication motivates and stimulates an enthusiasm for meeting its goals
22.	As pessoas na minha organização são boas comunicadoras. Extent to which the people in my organization have great ability as communicators
23.	A comunicação na organização faz-me identificar e sentir-me parte vital dela.

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

	Extent to which the organization's communication makes me identify with it or feel a vital part of it
24.	A comunicação na organização é muito importante. Extent to which I receive in time the information needed to do my job
25.	Os conflitos são tratados de forma adequada através de canais de comunicação apropriados. Extent to which conflicts are handled appropriately through proper communication channels
26.	Informações sobre políticas e objetivos organizacionais. Information about company policies and goals
27.	Informações sobre ações do governo que afetam a minha organização. Information about government action affecting my company
28.	Informações sobre mudanças na minha organização. Information about changes in our organization
29.	Informações sobre a situação financeira da organização. Information about our organization's financial standing
30.	Informações sobre as realizações e/ou falhas na organização. Information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization

Por último, uma secção com perguntas demográficas/ Lastly, a section with demographic questions.:

Idade/Age:

- 18 a/to 25 anos/years
- 26 a /to 30 anos/years
- 31 a/to 40 anos/years
- 41 a/to 50 anos/years
- 51 a/to 60 anos/years
- Mais/More de 60 anos/years

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Género/Gender:

- Feminino/Feminine
- Masculino/ Masculine
- Outro/ Other
- Prefiro não responder/ Prefer not to answer

Estado civil/ Marital Status:

- Solteiro/ Single
- Casado/ união de facto / Married/ Common-law union
- Divorciado/ separado / Divorced/ Separated
- Viúvo / Widowed
- Outro / Other

Tem filhos? / Has children?

- Sim/ Yes
- Não / No

Habilitações literárias concluídas/ Highest level of education completed:

- Até ao 3º ciclo do ensino básico (9ºano)/ Up to the 3rd cycle of basic education (9th grade)
- Ensino secundário (12ºano) / Secondary education (12th grade)
- Licenciatura ou bacharelato / Bachelor's degree or undergraduate degree
- Mestrado ou pos graduação / Master's degree or postgraduate degree
- Doutoramento / Doctorate

Setor de atividade/ Sector of activity:

- Setor público/ Public sector
- Setor privado com fins lucrativos / Private sector for profit
- Setor privado sem fins lucrativos / Private sector for non-profit

Situação contratual/ Employment situation:

- Contrato de trabalho sem termo (efetivo) / Permanent employment contract (tenured)
- Contrato de trabalho a termo (não efetivo) / Fixed-term employment contract (non-tenured)
- Trabalhador independente / Independent worker
- Estagiário / Intern
- Outro / Other

Número de anos na organização/ Number of years in the organization:

- Menos/Less de/ than 1 ano
- 1 a/to 5
- 6 a/to 10
- 11 a/to 15
- 16 a/to 20
- Mais/More de/than 20

Que cargo ocupa na sua organização/ What position do you hold in your organization?

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- Gestor de topo/ Top manager
- Gestor intermedio/ Middle manager
- Supervisor/ responsável de equipa / Supervisor/team leader
- Profissional altamente qualificado / Highly skilled professional
- Profissional qualificado / Qualified professional
- Profissional não qualificado / Unqualified professional

Desempenha funções de chefia/ Does your role involve managerial duties?

- Sim / Yes
- Não/ No