

Combating Resistance to Change through Employee Upskilling in Supply Chain and Procurement Transformation

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Abstract

The accelerating diffusion of digital technologies, automation, and data analytics across global supply chains and procurement operations has generated substantial pressure on organisational workforces to adapt swiftly to new systems, processes, and roles. In Nigeria, this imperative for transformation is frequently impeded by employee resistance to change, a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in fears of job displacement, skill obsolescence, and institutional distrust. Therefore, this study investigates the role of targeted employee upskilling as a strategic mechanism for combating resistance to change and facilitating sustainable supply chain and procurement transformations in Nigerian public and private enterprises. Three research questions guide this study using the qualitative research design. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve purposively selected participants comprising supply chain managers, procurement specialists, human resource managers, and business transformation managers from both public and private sector organisations. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Three primary themes emerged: the multifaceted nature of change resistance, driven particularly by economic insecurity and institutional mistrust; the pivotal role of upskilling in building employee confidence, job security perceptions, and adaptive capacity; and the effectiveness of modular, role-specific, participatory, and experiential training designs in the Nigerian context. The study concludes that a comprehensive, employee-centred approach to change management is essential for sustainable supply chain and procurement transformation in Nigeria and comparable emerging economy contexts.

Keywords: Employee adaptability, employee upskilling, procurement transformation, resistance to change, supply chain

Introduction

The global supply chain and procurement landscape has undergone a deep structural transformation over the past decade, driven by the accelerating convergence of digital technologies, automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced data analytics. These innovations have fundamentally reconfigured traditional operational paradigms, enabling unprecedented levels of efficiency, end-to-end transparency, and responsiveness to the volatile dynamics of global markets. As organisations worldwide integrate these technological shifts into their core operations,

the imperative for a digitally literate and adaptable workforce has become strategically non-negotiable (Grama & Todericiu, 2025). Organisations that fail to nurture workforce capabilities that are commensurate with the demands of Industry 4.0 and 5.0 risk competitive erosion, operational fragility, and an inability to sustain the transformation initiatives upon which their long-term viability depends (Jhawar et al., 2025). For Nigeria, a nation with strategic significance within the West African regional economy, these global imperatives carry distinctive contextual weight. Nigeria's supply chain and procurement sectors grapple with structural impediments, including inadequate physical infrastructure, pronounced macroeconomic volatility, currency instability, and constrained access to advanced digital technologies, which collectively hinder seamless integration into global supply networks (Ashiwaju et al., 2023). These challenges are not merely technical; they are deeply intertwined with workforce dynamics, institutional capacity, and the socio-economic realities that shape employee behaviour and organisational culture. Specialised workforce development is, therefore, not simply a matter of productivity enhancement; it is a prerequisite for Nigeria's broader economic competitiveness and for realising the cross-functional potential of the supply chain as a driver of continental economic progress (Ekechi et al., 2024). Within this transformation, employee capability is increasingly the binding constraint because technology can be procured, but the workforce competencies required to operate, sustain, and continuously improve it cannot, and it is this human dimension of transformation that is the present study's focal point.

A critical, yet often underestimated impediment to successful supply chain and procurement transformation is employee resistance to change. Resistance is a well-documented organisational phenomenon (Oreg, 2018; Johnson, 2010), yet its manifestations in the Nigerian context exhibit distinctive characteristics shaped by the intersection of socio-economic insecurity, limited professional development infrastructure, and institutional distrust. Employees confronted with digital transformation initiatives frequently express fears of displacement by automation, anxiety about skill obsolescence, and scepticism regarding the genuine intent of employer-sponsored training programmes (Ray & Wang, 2023). In Nigeria's supply chain and procurement functions, where broader economic instability amplifies these baseline concerns, managing resistance effectively represents a fundamental condition for transformation success. Upskilling, defined as the deliberate provision of training and professional development opportunities that equip employees with competencies aligned to evolving technological and operational demands, has emerged as a strategically significant response to change resistance (Morandini et al., 2023). The conceptual logic connecting the two constructs is direct. That is, if resistance is substantially driven by a perceived gap between what employees can currently do and what transformed roles will require of them, then closing that competence gap through deliberate skill development should, in principle, reduce the resistance it provokes. Through the enhancement of employee confidence, competence, and perceived relevance within a transformed organisation, upskilling reframes digital change from an existential threat into a pathway for professional growth. Notwithstanding the substantial body of research on change management and upskilling in Western and Asian contexts, the African literature and the Nigerian literature in particular remain sparse, leaving critical gaps in understanding how these dynamics operate within the unique structural, economic, and cultural conditions of Sub-Saharan Africa (Edeh et al., 2023).

This study addresses these gaps by empirically investigating the dynamics of resistance to change and the role of upskilling in facilitating transformation within Nigeria's supply chain and procurement functions. The research is guided by three primary questions: (1) How does resistance to change manifest within Nigeria's supply chain and procurement functions? (2) What role does upskilling play in reducing resistance and promoting employee adaptability? (3) What strategies are most effective in designing upskilling programmes suited to Nigeria's workforce and supply chain environment?

Conceptual Review

Resistance to change refers to the reluctance, hesitation, or active opposition that employees exhibit when confronted with new processes, technologies, structures, or operational configurations within their organisation (Oreg, 2018). Conceptually, it is not a unitary or purely irrational reaction but a multidimensional response operating simultaneously across cognitive, affective, and behavioural registers, ranging from belief-based scepticism about the necessity of change, through anxiety and resentment, to passive non-compliance or, in extreme cases, active sabotage. Its principal antecedents include the fear of job loss arising from automation, uncertainty stemming from unfamiliarity with new technologies, the perceived erosion of status or competence, and scepticism regarding the sincerity of management's intentions (Ray & Wang, 2023). Within supply chain and procurement functions, where technological change is rapid and its operational consequences pervasive, resistance constitutes a strategic risk capable of delaying implementation, undermining returns on technology investment, and eroding workforce cohesion (Hallikas et al., 2021).

Employee upskilling denotes the deliberate provision of training and professional development that deepens and extends employees' existing competencies so that they remain relevant and effective as technological and operational demands evolve (Morandini et al., 2023). It is conceptually distinct from reskilling, which prepares employees for entirely different roles; upskilling instead builds upon an employee's current occupational foundation, allowing the individual to retain a continuous professional identity through the transition. As a change-management instrument, upskilling performs several functions at once: it narrows the perceived competence gap that frequently underlies resistance, strengthens employees' confidence in their capacity to operate new systems, signals genuine organisational investment in their futures, and opens pathways for career advancement that reframe change from a threat into an opportunity for growth (Grama & Todericiu, 2025). This continuity of identity partly explains why upskilling tends to be more readily accepted than wholesale retraining, particularly in contexts characterised by limited institutional trust.

Supply chain and procurement transformation refers to the deep, technology-enabled restructuring of the systems, processes, and roles through which organisations source, move, and manage goods and services, driven by the convergence of automation, artificial intelligence, and advanced data analytics (Hallikas et al., 2021). Conceptually, it extends beyond the adoption of isolated tools to encompass end-to-end digital integration, greater transparency, and data-driven decision-making that reconfigure traditional operational paradigms and redefine the competencies required of the

workforce (Saenz et al., 2026). In developing economies such as Nigeria, this transformation unfolds against structural constraints, including inadequate infrastructure, macroeconomic volatility, and limited access to advanced digital technologies, which shape both its pace and its feasibility (Ashiwaju et al., 2023). The transformation is therefore as much a human and organisational undertaking as a technical one, since the workforce capabilities needed to operate and sustain new systems cannot simply be procured.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Lewin's Three-Step Change Model. Lewin's foundational change model conceptualises organisational transformation as a sequential three-phase process: unfreezing (preparing the organisation and its members to accept change by dismantling existing mindsets and behavioural norms), changing (implementing new processes, systems, and behaviours), and refreezing (consolidating and institutionalising the new state as the organisational norm) (Nyamunda, 2022; Saenz et al., 2026). Within this framework, the unfreezing phase is particularly critical to understanding resistance: it is the stage at which employees must be prepared cognitively, emotionally, and practically to relinquish familiar ways of working. Upskilling functions as a primary unfreezing mechanism, equipping employees with the competencies and psychological readiness to engage constructively with the change process. Without effective unfreezing through targeted skill development, resistance is likely to persist into and beyond the changing phase, compromising the outcomes of transformation.

Kotter's 8-Step Change Process

Kotter's 8-Step Process provides a more granular and action-oriented framework for managing large-scale organisational transformation, encompassing: establishing urgency; forming a guiding coalition; developing a strategic vision; communicating the vision; empowering broad-based action; generating short-term wins; sustaining acceleration; and anchoring changes in organisational culture (Kotter, 1995). Several of Kotter's steps are directly important to upskilling as a change management strategy. The emphasis on empowering employees by removing skill barriers aligns directly with training's role in equipping the workforce for transformation. The importance of generating short-term wins maps onto the value of role-specific upskilling that delivers immediate, visible performance improvements, thereby sustaining momentum and buy-in. Kotter's insistence on anchoring change in organisational culture further underscores the necessity of institutionalising continuous learning as a normative professional practice.

The ADKAR Model

The ADKAR model, developed by Hiatt (2006), offers an individual-centred framework for understanding and facilitating acceptance of change. It posits that successful individual change requires the sequential development of five elements, and they are: Awareness (of the need for change); desire (to participate in and support the change); knowledge (of how to change); ability (to implement required skills and behaviours); and reinforcement (to sustain the change). The model's alignment with upskilling is particularly precise: targeted training directly addresses the knowledge and ability stages, providing employees with the competencies they need to engage effectively with new systems. However, the model also highlights that upskilling alone is

insufficient if the awareness and desire stages are not first adequately established, emphasising the importance of transparent communication and employee engagement as prerequisites for upskilling effectiveness.

Empirical Evidence and Identified Gaps

The empirical literature provides substantial evidence for the change-facilitating role of upskilling across a range of organisational and national contexts. Seow and Rajaharia (2023) found that organisations investing in robust upskilling initiatives experienced markedly fewer resistance-related disruptions during digital transformation, with skilled employees demonstrating a greater propensity to view technological change as an extension of professional growth. Hallikas et al. (2021) documented the transformative impact of digitising procurement functions on supply chain performance, while simultaneously noting that technology adoption outcomes are critically mediated by workforce digital literacy, highlighting the centrality of upskilling to procurement transformation. Closer to the present study's regional context, Katunga et al. (2024) examined human capital development practices among medium-sized South African organisations and found that structured, role-aligned skill-building programmes were consistently associated with stronger workforce buy-in to operational change, lending preliminary Sub-Saharan African support to the broader cross-national pattern. In the Nigerian context, Okafor et al. (2022) found that supply chain employees frequently resist technology adoption due to acute job security concerns intensified by the spectre of automation-driven role elimination, a resistance pattern that upskilling demonstrably reduces by reinforcing perceived employee value and indispensability. Lincoln (2022) recognised the barriers to supply chain sustainability innovation among Nigerian entrepreneurs, identifying limited workforce capabilities as a primary constraint. Yet despite the growing recognition of these dynamics, empirical studies specifically examining the interplay between resistance to change, upskilling, and supply chain and procurement transformation within Sub-Saharan Africa remain conspicuously scarce (Edeh et al., 2023). Specifically, what remains absent is qualitative, practitioner-derived evidence on how upskilling is experienced as a resistance-reduction mechanism by the supply chain and procurement professionals who design and undergo it, rather than evidence inferred from organisational outcome metrics alone. The present study addresses this gap directly, generating contextually grounded, employer-relevant empirical insights from the Nigerian supply chain and procurement sectors.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design to generate an in-depth, contextually sensitive understanding of the attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences of supply chain and procurement professionals navigating organisational transformation in Nigeria. The exploratory design is appropriate given the limited empirical literature specific to the Nigerian context, where an emergent, discovery-oriented approach is more epistemologically defensible than confirmatory or hypothesis-testing designs.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who could provide informed, experience-rich perspectives on change management and upskilling within Nigeria's supply chain and procurement functions. Selection criteria required participants to hold roles providing direct,

substantive experience of organisational transformation and workforce development challenges, to possess a minimum of five years of industry experience, and to have direct involvement in or awareness of upskilling programmes within their organisations. Twelve participants were recruited from public and private sector organisations, representing a role diversity encompassing supply chain management, procurement operations, human resource management, and business transformation leadership. A sample of twelve was deemed adequate on the grounds of thematic saturation, as no substantively new codes emerged from the final two interviews, and the deliberate role diversity within the sample was prioritised over sample size as the primary safeguard of analytical richness. This breadth ensures that the findings capture perspectives from both strategic and operational points, thereby enriching the analytical depth of the study. Table 1 presents the anonymised participant profile. All participants were assigned coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1: Anonymised Participant Profile

Code	Role	Sector	Years Exp.	Key Focus Area
P01	Supply Chain Manager	Private	8 years	Digital transformation & ERP adoption
P02	Procurement Specialist	Public	6 years	Vendor management & e-procurement
P03	HR Manager	Private	11 years	Talent development & change management
P04	Business Transformation Mgr	Private	14 years	Organisational change & digital upskilling
P05	Supply Chain Director	Public	17 years	Logistics & supply chain resilience
P06	Procurement Manager	Private	9 years	Strategic sourcing & supplier relations
P07	Logistics Manager	Private	7 years	Last-mile delivery & warehouse tech
P08	HR Manager	Public	10 years	Policy design & workforce planning
P09	Senior Procurement Officer	Public	13 years	Compliance & regulatory procurement
P10	Supply Chain Transformation Mgr	Private	12 years	Process re-engineering & automation
P11	Procurement Specialist	Private	5 years	Data analytics & spend analysis
P12	Senior Supply Chain Manager	Public	15 years	Risk management & strategic planning

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection instrument. This method was selected for its dual capacity to maintain thematic focus aligned with the research questions while preserving sufficient conversational flexibility to enable participants to elaborate upon their experiences, introduce unanticipated perspectives, and respond reflexively to probing follow-up questions (Kvale, 2009). The interview guide covered: Perceptions of and experiences with

organisational change in supply chain and procurement contexts; attitudes toward and experiences of upskilling initiatives; observed impacts of training programmes on resistance and adaptability; and perceived characteristics of effective upskilling programme design. Each interview was conducted individually, lasted approximately forty-five minutes, and was audio-recorded with informed consent. All recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researchers. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, was applied to the verbatim transcripts. The analytical process commenced with familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts; progressed through systematic open coding of semantically significant statements; moved into the identification and review of emergent themes through axial coding that examined relationships among codes; and culminated in the definition, naming, and report-ready articulation of final themes. Theoretical triangulation was employed to strengthen analytical rigour, with emerging themes systematically interrogated against the conceptual frameworks of Lewin's Model, Kotter's Process, and the ADKAR model. Member checking was conducted by sharing thematic summaries with a subset of participants to verify the accuracy and representativeness of analytical interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2019). Two researchers independently open-coded a subset of transcripts before reconciling codebooks, providing a measure of analyst triangulation that guarded against single-coder bias in theme construction. Given the researchers' professional familiarity with the Nigerian supply chain and human resource practice, reflexive memos were maintained throughout coding to surface and bracket prior assumptions about resistance and training that might otherwise have shaped the interpretation of participant accounts. Rigorous ethical protocols governed the study's conduct throughout. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interview, with full disclosure of the study's purpose, methods, intended outputs, and participants' unconditional right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Participant anonymity was protected through coded identifiers; no identifying information appears in any transcript or analytical record. Data were stored in encrypted digital repositories accessible exclusively to the researchers. All procedures conform to established standards for responsible and ethical qualitative inquiry (Flick, 2019).

Result of the Findings

Thematic analysis of the twelve interview transcripts yielded three primary themes, each directly corresponding to one of the study's research questions. The themes are: (1) the multidimensional manifestations of resistance to change; (2) upskilling as a pivotal mechanism for resistance reduction and adaptability enhancement; and (3) effective upskilling programme design strategies for the Nigerian context. Table 2 presents a structured overview of the themes, sub-themes, and key analytical insights. The following sections present each theme in depth, supported by representative verbatim quotations from participants.

Table 2: Summary of Themes, Sub-themes, and Key Analytical Insights

#	Theme	Sub-themes	Key Analytical Insights
1	Manifestations of Resistance to Change	<i>Job security fears, skill obsolescence anxiety, institutional mistrust, and economic vulnerability</i>	Resistance is multidimensional and context-specific; Nigeria's macroeconomic instability amplifies baseline resistance drivers identified in global literature.
2	Upskilling as a Mechanism for Reducing Resistance	<i>Confidence building; enhanced job security perceptions; growth mindset cultivation; risk perception reduction</i>	Upskilling acts as a stabilising force in economically volatile contexts; it reframes change as a professional opportunity rather than an existential threat
3	Effective Programme Design Strategies	<i>Modular/tiered design; role-specific content; participatory development; experiential/scenario-based learning</i>	Contextually sensitive, employee-centred design is essential; one-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective in resource-constrained, heterogeneous workforce environments.

Theme 1: Multidimensional Manifestations of Resistance to Change

Resistance to change in Nigeria's supply chain and procurement sectors emerged from the data as a complex, multilayered phenomenon whose dimensions extend well beyond the competence-deficit explanations that dominate the mainstream change management literature. Three analytically distinct sub-dimensions were identified. These are job security fears tied to technological displacement, institutional mistrust of upskilling intent, and the amplifying effect of macroeconomic insecurity, each of which is discussed in turn below.

Job Security Fears and the Threat of Technological Displacement

The most pervasive and consistently articulated driver of resistance was the fear of job displacement attributable to digital transformation and automation. Participants across both sectors described a widespread employee perception that technological change was designed primarily to eliminate, rather than augment, existing roles, a perception that generated weighty apprehension and defensive resistance: "Many employees feel that these changes are designed to replace them rather than to support their work." — P03, Again, "For employees who have been with us for a long time, new technology often feels like a threat to the roles they have mastered." — P04. Participants emphasised that longer-tenured employees, those most deeply invested in established workflows and professional identities, exhibited the most pronounced resistance, precisely because the prospect of role redefinition or elimination represented a more consequential threat to identity and livelihood than it did for younger, less entrenched colleagues.

Institutional Mistrust and Skepticism About Upskilling Intent

A second, analytically distinct dimension of resistance was rooted not in technological anxiety per se, but in a deeper institutional scepticism regarding the genuine intent of employer-sponsored upskilling initiatives. Multiple participants described employees who interpreted training programmes not as investments in their professional futures, but as preparatory phases for role consolidation or redundancy: "Some see the training as just another way for the company to cut costs by consolidating roles." — P06, and "People wonder if the new skills we're learning are

going to help us keep our jobs or if they're just a step towards us being phased out." — P01. This institutional mistrust reflects a historical pattern in which management communications about transformation have not consistently matched subsequent organisational actions as a trust deficit that must be explicitly addressed if upskilling is to achieve its intended resistance-reduction function. As one HR manager (P08) observed: "If employees don't feel like the training is truly for their growth, they're just going to see it as a threat"

Economic Insecurity as a Contextual Amplifier

The third sub-dimension, particular to the Nigerian context and largely absent from the Global North literature, was the amplifying effect of macroeconomic instability on baseline resistance. Participants consistently identified Nigeria's broader economic vulnerability as a contextual factor that intensifies employees' sensitivity to any organisational change perceived as threatening income or employment stability: "With the economy being so uncertain, people are worried about any shift that could mean job loss." — P09. Again, "Right now, people just want stability" - P07. These observations highlight a critical contextual insight: in environments characterised by economic fragility, the standard change management prescription of 'communicate benefits and create urgency' is insufficient. The subjective risk calculus of employees in economically precarious contexts weighs potential losses far more heavily than potential gains, a dynamic that demands more holistic and employee-centred approaches to change management.

Theme 2: Upskilling as a Pivotal Mechanism for Resistance Reduction

Notwithstanding the depth and complexity of change resistance noted under Theme 1, participants provided compelling and convergent evidence that well-designed, genuinely employee-centred upskilling initiatives function as powerful antidotes to resistance. Three analytically distinct mechanisms through which upskilling reduces resistance were identified. These are competence building and confidence enhancement, strengthened job security perceptions, and growth mindset cultivation, each mapping onto a corresponding resistance driver identified under Theme 1.

Competence Building and Confidence Enhancement

The most immediately impactful effect of upskilling reported by participants was the enhancement of individual competence and, consequently, professional confidence in engaging with new technologies and systems. Participants described how the acquisition of new skills transformed their subjective experience of digital change from one of anxiety-driven avoidance to one of engaged participation:

"Upskilling has made it easier for me to work with new systems without feeling out of my depth. I now feel that I have something to offer even as things change." — P06. Additionally, "Before the training, I was wary of all these changes, but now I feel like I can adapt to anything. It's given me a different perspective." — P10.

These accounts illustrate the psychological mechanism through which upskilling operates: by closing the perceived competence gap, training shifts employees' self-assessments from deficit to capability, enabling them to engage with change from a position of confidence rather than vulnerability.

Strengthened Job Security Perceptions

Participants consistently reported that effective upskilling contributed directly to enhanced perceptions of job security - directly counteracting the displacement fears identified as a primary driver of resistance in Theme 1. Employees who experienced substantive skill development reported feeling more valued by their organisations and more confident in their continued relevance within a transformed operational environment:

“The training showed me that the company values my role and wants me to grow. It’s not just about new tools but about investing in my future.” — P12. In the same vein, “Knowing that I have the skills to keep up with changes gives me peace of mind. I’m not worried about being left behind.” — P06.

This finding carries important practical implications: upskilling is most effective as a resistance-reduction mechanism when it is explicitly framed and communicated as an organisational investment in employee careers, not merely as a technical training exercise.

Growth Mindset Cultivation and Risk Perception Transformation

Beyond immediate competence gains, participants described a more fundamental shift in their orientation toward change itself, a cognitive reframing from threat-appraisal to opportunity-appraisal that effective upskilling had catalysed:

“Upskilling has helped me embrace new tools as part of my job, not something separate or foreign.” — P10. Also, “I used to think automation would make my job harder, but after the training, I see it as a tool I can work with rather than something to be afraid of.” — P07.

These accounts align closely with the growth mindset literature’s distinction between fixed and growth orientations toward ability (Dweck, 2006), and suggest that effective upskilling functions not merely as a knowledge transfer mechanism but as a catalyst for fundamental attitudinal transformation as a shift with enduring implications for organisational adaptability and change readiness.

Theme 3: Effective Upskilling Programme Design Strategies

The third theme addresses the design and implementation dimensions of upskilling programmes, identifying the features that participants considered most critical to effectiveness within Nigeria’s supply chain and procurement workforce environment. Four design features recurred across participant accounts: modular and tiered programme architecture, role-specific content, participatory development, and experiential, scenario-based learning.

Modular, Tiered Programme Architecture

Participants across roles and sectors emphasised the particular value of modular, tiered training architectures that accommodate the substantial variation in technological proficiency within the Nigerian supply chain and procurement workforce. Unlike uniform, one-size-fits-all training approaches that can overwhelm or disengage participants at the distributional extremes of the competence spectrum, modular designs provide accessible entry points and structured progression pathways:

“Not everyone is at the same level when it comes to using new technology, so having different stages in the training allows everyone to find a starting point they’re comfortable with.” — P08.

This design principle is particularly pertinent in the Nigerian context, where workforce digital literacy exhibits wide heterogeneity and where the psychological stakes of perceived failure or exposure in a group training setting can be especially inhibitory. Modular architectures mitigate this risk by enabling self-paced progression and preserving learner dignity throughout the development process.

Role-Specific Content and Immediate Applicability

Training content that connects directly to the specific daily responsibilities and operational challenges of individual participants was consistently identified as more effective in securing engagement, reducing resistance to the training process itself, and delivering durable competency gains: *“The training was most beneficial when it was directly applicable to my responsibilities, allowing me to see immediate results in my work.”* — P01. This finding reflects a fundamental principle of adult learning theory: learners engage most effectively when they can perceive immediate relevance and practical applicability in what they are being taught (Knowles, 1990). For organisations operating in resource-constrained environments such as Nigeria, role-specific training design also offers efficiency advantages by eliminating content redundancy and maximising the return on training investment.

Participatory Programme Development and Feedback Integration

The involvement of employees in the design, development, and iterative refinement of upskilling programmes was identified by multiple participants as a critical trust-building mechanism that simultaneously enhances training relevance and generates employee ownership of the change process: *“When employees are asked for input, it shows that the training is for us, not just something imposed from the top down.”* — P08. This participatory approach directly addresses the institutional mistrust dimension of resistance identified in Theme 1: when employees experience genuine influence over the training process, the credibility gap between management’s stated intent and employees’ experienced reality is substantially narrowed. The practical instruments through which participation can be institutionalised, employee advisory committees, structured feedback loops, and iterative pilot testing, were identified by participants as feasible and effective mechanisms even within resource-limited organisational contexts.

Experiential and Scenario-Based Learning

Hands-on learning approaches incorporating real-world scenarios, role-playing exercises, and problem-solving simulations were identified as substantially more effective in promoting skill retention and transfer than purely didactic or theoretical training formats: *“It’s one thing to learn about a tool in theory, but when we get to use it in a real scenario, it sticks with us.”* — P04. This preference for experiential learning aligns with established principles of adult education and reflects the particular value of contextually embedded training that enables participants to develop confidence in applying new skills before being required to deploy them in live operational settings. In the Nigerian context, where the opportunity costs of operational disruption are substantial,

training designs that accelerate the transition from learning to competent application carry particular strategic value.

Discussion

Theorising Resistance Manifestations

The multidimensional resistance dynamics documented under Theme 1 find precise theoretical articulation within both Lewin's Change Model and the ADKAR framework. Within Lewin's formulation, the depth of resistance observed in its entrenchment among longer-tenured employees particularly reflects the strength of the existing 'frozen' state: the more deeply embedded an employee's professional identity is in established workflows and competency sets, the more psychologically costly unfreezing becomes (Sinhababu, 2013). This insight has direct practical implications: organisations pursuing supply chain and procurement transformation in Nigeria must invest disproportionate attention in the unfreezing phase by providing extended preparation time, targeted communication, and early skill-building exposure before the change itself is implemented. The ADKAR model's emphasis on Awareness and Desire as foundational prerequisites for change acceptance offers a complementary explanatory lens for the institutional mistrust sub-dimension identified in the data (Hiatt, 2006; Kamarova et al., 2025). When employees are not adequately informed about the genuine purpose and anticipated benefits of transformation initiatives or when historical organisational behaviour has eroded trust in management communications, the Desire to participate in change cannot be cultivated, regardless of the quality of the upskilling provision. This suggests that in trust-deficient organisational contexts, the effectiveness of upskilling is bounded by the quality of the communicative and relational infrastructure within which it is embedded. The contextual amplification of resistance by Nigeria's macroeconomic instability constitutes a significant and theoretically underexplored finding. Standard change management frameworks were largely developed within contexts of relative economic stability, where the risk calculus of individual employees assigns moderate weight to potential job losses. In environments characterised by structural employment insecurity and limited social safety nets, this calculus is fundamentally different: the subjective magnitude of potential losses is amplified, and the threshold of evidence required to overcome resistance-driving fears is correspondingly elevated. Future theoretical development in change management must incorporate these contextual mediating variables to achieve analytical validity in emerging economy settings. This study terms this dynamic economic risk amplification an emerging-economy moderating variable that future applications of Lewin's and ADKAR's frameworks in similarly precarious labour-market contexts would do well to incorporate explicitly.

Upskilling Mechanisms and Theoretical Alignment

The three mechanisms through which upskilling reduces resistance (competence building, job security enhancement, and growth mindset cultivation) are mapped cleanly onto the theoretical frameworks employed in this study, while also extending them in contextually significant ways. Within Kotter's framework, upskilling functions primarily as the practical realisation of Step 6 (generating short-term wins): by delivering immediate, observable competency gains that improve day-to-day operational performance, targeted training creates tangible evidence of

transformation's positive impact, sustaining employee motivation and organisational momentum (Kotter, 1995). The empowerment function of upskilling (Step 5) is equally evident: removing the competence barrier that impedes engagement with new technologies directly enables the broad-based action that Kotter identifies as essential for transformation success. Within the ADKAR framework, the study's findings explain upskilling's centrality to the Knowledge and Ability stages, which are the phases that translate awareness and desire into actual behavioural change (Hiatt, 2006). The participant observation that upskilling fundamentally reframes employees' cognitive orientation toward change - from threat to opportunity - extends the ADKAR model by surfacing a Desire-stage function of training that the model's original formulation does not fully anticipate: effective upskilling does not merely address knowledge deficits; it retroactively strengthens the Desire to participate by demonstrating concretely that change is navigable and personally beneficial. The economic stabilisation function of upskilling identified in the Nigerian context is particularly theoretically significant. In environments where employment insecurity is structurally entrenched, upskilling functions not merely as a competency development mechanism but as a psychological stabiliser that provides employees with a form of portable human capital that hedges against the risks of displacement regardless of whether their current role is ultimately preserved. While standard change management frameworks do not typically include upskilling as an implicit employment security guarantee, this function is expected to hold significant explanatory value in various emerging economy contexts.

Implications of Programme Design Findings

The design principles identified under Theme 3 - modularity, role-specificity, participatory development, and experiential learning - collectively constitute a contextually adapted framework for upskilling programme design in Nigeria's supply chain and procurement functions. These principles are consistent with established best practices in adult learning theory and experiential education, but their particular configuration and relative weighting in the Nigerian context reflect contextual factors that generic frameworks do not capture, which are the heterogeneity of workforce digital literacy, the importance of trust-building as a prerequisite for engagement, and the operational cost of extended learning periods in resource-constrained organisations. The participatory design principle warrants particular emphasis for its dual function: as a trust-building mechanism that addresses the institutional scepticism dimension of resistance, and as a quality assurance mechanism that aligns training content with actual operational needs. Organisations that invest in participatory programme development are, in effect, simultaneously managing resistance and enhancing training effectiveness as a compound return that substantially exceeds the modest additional cost of employee engagement in the design process. This finding aligns with Kotter's emphasis on building a guiding coalition and generating broad-based employee buy-in as non-negotiable conditions for sustainable transformation (Kotter, 1995).

Conclusion

This study has generated empirically grounded and theoretically informed insights into the dynamics of resistance to change and the role of upskilling in facilitating supply chain and procurement transformation within Nigerian public and private organisations. Three principal conclusions are warranted by the evidence. First, resistance to change in Nigeria's supply chain and procurement function is a multidimensional, contextually embedded phenomenon whose distinctive characteristics, particularly the amplifying role of macroeconomic instability and institutional mistrust, require change management strategies that transcend the prescriptions of frameworks developed predominantly in Global North contexts. Second, targeted, well-designed upskilling programmes function as powerful resistance-reduction mechanisms by simultaneously building competence, enhancing job security perceptions, cultivating growth mindsets, and providing tangible evidence of organisational investment in employee futures. Third, upskilling programme effectiveness is substantially mediated by design quality: modular, role-specific, participatory, and experiential designs are substantially more effective in the Nigerian context than generic, top-down, didactic alternatives. Theoretically, the study contributes to the change management literature by demonstrating the contextual boundedness of standard resistance frameworks in emerging economy settings, surfacing a psychological stabilisation function of upskilling that extends the ADKAR model's Desire-stage formulation; and articulating the amplifying effect of macroeconomic vulnerability on baseline resistance dynamics, which is a mediating variable largely absent from existing theoretical frameworks.

Recommendations

- i. Organisations should directly confront the drivers of resistance by pairing transparent, sustained communication about the purpose and scope of transformation with an explicit commitment to protecting employees' roles and career prospects; when the intent behind upskilling is communicated openly, and employees engage with it in good faith, the institutional mistrust and job-security fears that most strongly fuel resistance are substantially reduced.
- ii. Upskilling should be delivered through modular, tiered, and role-specific programmes that are co-designed with the workforce, so that content reflects the operational realities employees actually face and offers clear, incremental progression pathways; shared ownership of programme design between the organisation and its employees secures both relevance and buy-in, and accommodates the wide variation in digital literacy across supply chain and procurement roles.
- iii. Transformation initiatives should embed experiential, hands-on learning and treat skill development as a continuous, jointly owned commitment rather than a one-off event, with organisations providing the necessary time, resources, and recognition and employees taking proactive responsibility for their own learning, reinforced where possible by supportive industry and policy frameworks to sustain workforce adaptability over the long term.

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