



# Engaged but Exhausted

The consequences of change



A Biz Group and Podium partnership white paper



*“We trained hard—but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we were reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while actually producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.”*

### **Petronius Arbiter (54 – 68 AD)**

**This white paper describes the work Biz Group and Podium are doing together in the area of change fatigue. We will explain why we undertook this project, define change fatigue, and discuss what we did to understand the extent to which it is real in UAE businesses.**

We also explain the psychological effects of change fatigue and the implications for individual behaviours and organisational performance. Finally, we illustrate what organisations can do to understand if and how change fatigue is an issue for their organisation.

### **Authors**

#### **Carl Francis CPsychol, AfBPS EAAP**

Podium, Operations Director

Carl is a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Registered Occupational Psychologist with the Health and Care Professions Council (UK) and a Registered Aviation Psychologist with the European Association of Aviation Psychologists. He is Operations Director at Podium, a psychometric assessment and systems developer and publisher. Carl has over twenty years' experience supporting organisations across the Gulf Region as part of his global work.

#### **Chris Quy**

Director of Strategic Learning, Biz Group

Chris has a proven track record of creating and developing high-performance teams throughout his 18-year career in training and talent development across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. As a former Head of Learning & Development for a major international consultancy group, Chris brings a wealth of experience as a skilled training professional, facilitator and leader. Chris has worked closely with global brands in diverse sectors such as automotive, aviation, FMCG, luxury, finance, marcomms, and the creative industries and is therefore uniquely equipped to assist Biz Group's clients in building and enhancing their human capital.

# Defining the Problem

The quote from Petronius Arbiter above reminds us of the clichés ‘there’s nothing new under the sun’ and ‘the only certainty in modern business is change’. Clichés aside, it does describe something many of us are probably very familiar with in the reality of our working lives.

Change is an inevitable part of organisational life. It can be driven by various factors, such as technological advancements, economic fluctuations, or shifts in customer preferences. While change can bring positive outcomes, such as increased efficiency and competitiveness, it can also create a sense of uncertainty, exhaustion, and scepticism among employees. This phenomenon is known as Change Fatigue, and it can have a significant impact on individual and organisational performance.

Being engaged at work is essential for productivity and personal fulfilment, but being exhausted can hinder one's ability to perform well and feel satisfied. When employees are engaged but exhausted, they may experience burnout, which can manifest in various ways, such as decreased motivation, poor job performance, and low morale. Additionally, they may struggle with work-life balance and experience negative health effects.

When employees experience change fatigue, they can become resistant to change, leading to increased turnover rates, decreased productivity, and decreased job satisfaction. Additionally, change fatigue can lead to increased stress, burnout, and wellbeing issues. This can create a negative work environment and can ultimately impact the organisation's bottom line.

## THE IMPACT OF CHANGE

### Decreased motivation and productivity

When employees are constantly bombarded with changes, they may lose their sense of purpose and direction, which can affect their motivation and productivity. They may also feel that their efforts are futile, as their work may be constantly modified or replaced.

### Increased stress and burnout

Change can create uncertainty, which can lead to increased stress and burnout. Employees may feel that they are not equipped to handle the changes, or that their workload has increased without a corresponding increase in resources or support.

### Negative impact on mental health

Change fatigue can have a negative impact on employees' mental health. It can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, which can further impact their ability to perform and function.



**Change Fatigue  
can lead to exhaustion,  
resistance, or lack of motivation**

# Developing an Intervention

To do something practical around Change Fatigue, we needed to operationalise it in a meaningful way. Again, based on our research review, we identified how Change Fatigue might manifest within work, or what aspects of the workplace may contribute to Change Fatigue.

This became our Attitudes to Change Model and is described in Table 1 below. Change attitudes represent the extent to which people might agree with the notion that ‘too much change is happening’.



**TABLE 1: CHANGE ATTITUDES MODEL**

Change Attitude	Definition	Low Scores Indicate	High Scores indicate
Change Scepticism	Reflects beliefs about the likelihood of change initiatives being successful. This is related to views about the competence of those responsible for implementing or managing change.	Optimism related to the likelihood of change success and confidence in the effectiveness of change leaders.	Scepticism related to the likelihood of change success and pessimism about the effectiveness of change leaders.
Psychological Exhaustion	Reflects a feeling of being depleted or over-extended beyond one's capacity to handle work demands. Exhaustion is a mechanism which drives affective reactions to change fatigue	Feeling able to cope and able to perform comfortably within the limits of personal resources.	Feelings of being over-extended or overwhelmed by change demands.
Uncertainty	Psychological uncertainty is defined as an individual's inability to predict how change will impact on the organisation and consequentially the person. Uncertainty can contribute to the perception of change fatigue.	Low levels of uncertainty about the impact of change; the impact of change is predictable and can be planned for effectively.	High levels of uncertainty about how change may impact the organisation or personal job security
Change Pace	Change Pace reflects the overall perception that the rate of change is too frequent or too much change is taking place making it hard to cope with.	The rate of change is not perceived as too frequent nor is it overwhelming.	The amount or rate of change is perceived as too frequent or overwhelming.

As noted, if Change Fatigue exists, it may have consequences for personal engagement. That engagement is a result of 'how I'm feeling about change right now' (my change attitudes) and, therefore, we called the consequence of change fatigue model our State Engagement Model' which is described in Table 2 overleaf.

**TABLE 2: STATE ENGAGEMENT MODEL**

State Engagement Attributes	Definition	Low Scores Indicate	High Scores indicate
Satisfaction	Satisfaction describes the extent to which the person feels fulfilled and energised by all aspects of the role and work environment.	Low levels of satisfaction or higher disengagement with the current role.	High levels of satisfaction leading to good engagement with the role and organisation.
Involvement	Involvement describes an individual's emotional attachment and sense of connection to an employing organisation.	Low levels of attachment or weakened sense of connection to the employing organisation.	High levels of attachment or strong sense of connection to the employing organisation.
Commitment	Commitment is characterized by a tendency to internalise work-related problems and a willingness to “go the extra distance” on behalf of the organisation.	Low commitment, tendency not to feel responsible for organisational problems and less willing to go beyond fulfilling basic duties.	High commitment, willing to take on problems for the benefit of the organisation and willing to 'go the extra mile'.
Empowerment	Empowerment reflects the sense of autonomy and control an individual feels within their work resulting in the ability to make an effective contribution.	A sense of lacking autonomy or control over their own work inhibiting the ability to contribute in a way they feel is valued or valuable.	A strong sense of autonomy or control over their own work enabling them to contribute in a way they feel is valued or valuable.

In summary, our model describes Change Attitudes which might contribute to Change Fatigue (change scepticism, psychological exhaustion, uncertainty and pace of change) and also evaluates the effect it has on current feelings (State Engagement Attributes) of personal engagement (satisfaction, involvement, commitment and empowerment).

The Change Attitudes and State Engagement models were then operationalised as a survey tool.

## THE SURVEY

In February 2023, Biz Group undertook a research project, which was developed by Podium (as described above) to detect if and how change fatigue was being experienced across UAE business as a whole. They reached out to employees across various UAE industries, (both public and private sector) within the HR and L&D divisions.

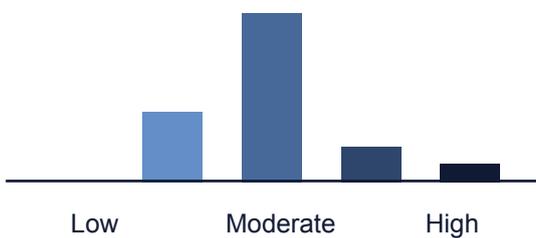
**It must be noted that this type of survey is better demonstrated within a single organisation. Whilst individual responses are valuable, the overall picture of change fatigue within a team / department or across the organisation as whole is more insightful.**

# Survey Methodology

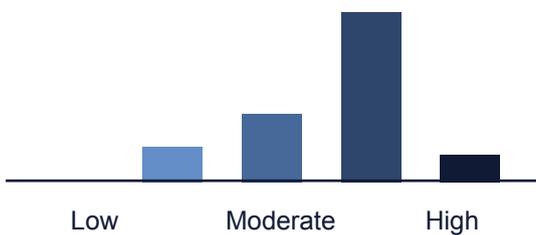
Having defined the model, Podium operationalised the constructs into a survey. Each construct was explored through the creation of 4 statements, each of which can be rated on a five-point Likert scale that allows the survey participant to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement. Accordingly, the overall survey consists of 32 statements. To capture the reality of personal attitudes and feelings, Podium also added a free text field for each construct allowing participants to describe their feelings, views and experiences. Gathering qualitative data in this way adds real value and insight in the interpretation of quantitative data.

## Change Attitudes Survey Findings:

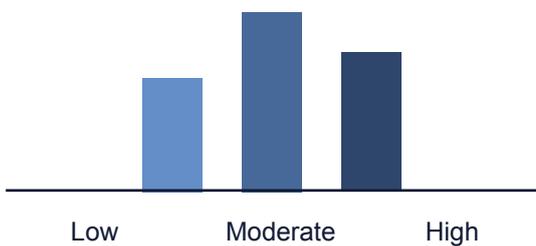
### Change Scepticism



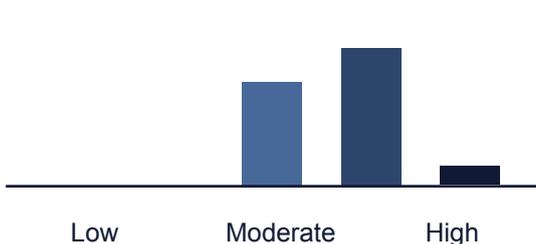
### Psychological Exhaustion



### Uncertainty

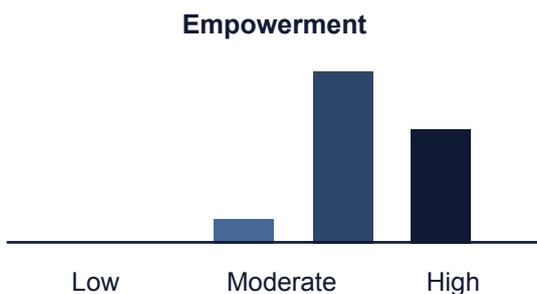
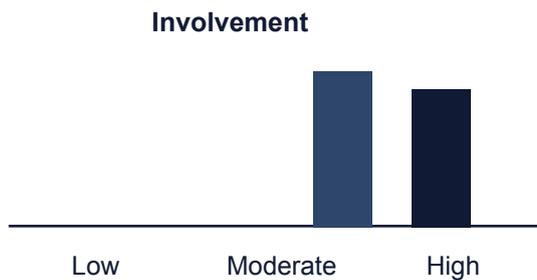


### Change of Pace



- 22% feel optimistic about change initiatives being successful.
- 22% express moderate to high scepticism about the success of change initiatives in their organisation.
- The remainder (56%) appear not to be overly optimistic, or perhaps moderately sceptical about change success.
- 2% indicate moderate low levels of psychological exhaustion.
- 98% indicate moderate to high levels of feeling overextended by change demands.
- Moderate to moderate high levels of uncertainty about organisational or personal futures expressed by 74% of participants.
- 26% express moderate low levels of uncertainty regarding change.
- **This is perhaps the most striking message re change fatigue:** consistent with hypothesised links between change pace as a mechanism for psychological exhaustion, 100% of participants express moderate to high levels of concern relating to the pace of change.

## State Engagement Survey Findings:



- Despite some concerns raised within attitudes to change, overall, engagement metrics are high. 78% of participants express high levels of satisfaction.
- There are indications from 22% reporting only moderate to moderate low satisfaction impacting organisational engagement.

- All (100%) report moderate high to high levels for their sense of involvement with their organisation.

- Similarly, commitment is again high overall with 96% expressing high commitment to their work and organisation.

- Again, people feel empowered, able to contribute in ways they feel are valued or valuable.

## Change Attitudes Discussion

Change scepticism presented a moderate picture. Whilst 22% expressed some optimism that change would be effective in their organisations and was managed by competent people, **22% also expressed some scepticism**. The remainder were neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic.

Similarly, uncertainty wasn't expressed in extreme terms, but one interpretation is that **74% had moderate to moderate high levels of uncertainty** about how change would affect them or the future of their organisation. Uncertainty can be a mechanism for anxiety, and anxiety over time can be depleting. This could explain the indications of some degree of psychological exhaustion within the surveyed group.

# Change Attitudes Discussion

The summary analysis suggest **43% indicate low to moderate levels of psychological exhaustion** whilst **57% indicate moderate to high levels of feeling over extended by change demands.**

However, an alternative interpretation could be that 91% express moderate exhaustion or higher. The strongest message was related to the pace of change. 100% of participants express moderate to high levels of concern relating to the pace of change. To gain insight into this, some of the free field (qualitative) comments related to change pace were:

- “Change - change – change.”
- The period of time to 'Freeze' and reflect is important so that you can benefit from any changes that have happened. Continuous change is never helpful.
- It's not the quantity but the magnitude of change that impacts people.

**The comment about quantity Vs magnitude is insightful. Perhaps it's the scale of change that's impactful. We're not just seeing change, we're seeing BIG changes.**

# State Engagement Discussion

Whilst we might conclude there is indeed Change Fatigue being reported in the change attitudes element of the survey, we get an encouraging picture when we review the state engagement metrics.

**78% continue to report moderate high to high satisfaction, meaning they continue to be fulfilled by their work.** 100% expressed higher levels of involvement, meaning they still feel an attachment to their work and their organisation and that was similarly reflected in their ongoing commitment.

**Additionally, 91% presented moderate high to high scores for empowerment,** meaning they still feel they have autonomy and control over their work and their contribution remains effective in the face of change.



# Insights

Perhaps we can reflect on Petronius Arbiter's words from nearly 2000 years ago: what a wonderful method it (change) can be for creating the illusion of progress. Is there a risk that change has become the default reaction to uncertainty? Continuous improvement is a worthy objective but does that have to mean continuous change?

Continuous improvement could similarly mean consolidation and mastery of what we do or have already. Another clue comes from one of the survey participant's comments which might speak to this idea,

reflecting their experience: "Changes are implemented without proper research when there is a problem, I don't believe that the root cause is properly investigated, rather surface level issues are addressed".

In summary, the thinking here seems to reflect

**"problem = change something."**

# Solutions

Change Fatigue can result from a variety of factors, such as unclear communication, insufficient training, unrealistic expectations, or a lack of involvement in the change process. When employees experience change fatigue, they may feel overwhelmed, stressed, or demotivated, and their ability to adapt and perform may be compromised.

## Create a culture where people and business can thrive

Utilising data driven solutions such as Microsoft Viva Insights, can help discover employee productivity and wellbeing experiences in the flow of work, and provide personalised recommendations to help employees do their best work. Business outcomes can be improved with actionable insights, by gaining visibility into workplace activities, communication behaviors and collaboration patterns to streamline decision-making and improve business performance.

Suggested practical solutions through mastering the Ways of Working are:

- Driving Performance with Viva Goals & OKRs
- Meeting Effectiveness In Today's World
- Manager Effectiveness Through Coaching
- Mastering Productivity For Employee Wellbeing



# Measure It Manage It

In psychology, the Hawthorne effect is well recognised. In essence, this suggests that the very practice of measuring something changes it. In this instance, not only would surveying your own organisation help understand if Change Fatigue exists for your workforce, but the very fact also that staff can see the organisation is concerned about change fatigue through conducting a survey could help mitigate any state engagement issues if they already existed.

The findings of this cross-sectional study suggest that Change Fatigue exists across a range of organisations and surveys such as this help give employees a voice by showing their views are important and the organisation cares. The loudest alarm bells should sound if a movement from exhausted but engaged towards exhausted and disengaged is observed.



Change is an inevitable part of organisational life, but it can create a sense of fatigue and resistance among employees, affecting performance, engagement, and well-being. As a Learning and Development company, Biz Group can support companies in managing change through providing training and resources, facilitating communication and involvement, fostering resilience and well-being, and encouraging feedback and continuous improvement. By doing so, we can help employees adapt to change and thrive.

## A Biz Group and Podium partnership white paper



Biz Group is one of the leading training and development companies in the Middle East with the purpose to enrich lives through learning. The company has over 50 employees, serving a diverse range of clients, to provide learning solutions for a fast-changing world. Biz Group has helped hundreds of leading companies, and provided over 2,500,000 hours of training to help people overcome business challenges and transform their organisations.

**[www.learningwithbiz.com](http://www.learningwithbiz.com)**  
[info@bizgroup.ae](mailto:info@bizgroup.ae)



Podium is a team of international academics, workplace psychologists, and technologists who have come together to raise the standards and ethics of our industry. They developed Podium to offer top-quality assessments that give organisations a deeper, more meaningful insight into their people while providing an assessment experience that showcases their corporate identity. Podium stands firm on a bedrock of scientific and technical excellence backed by world-class research.

**[www.podium365.com](http://www.podium365.com)**  
[info@podium365.com](mailto:info@podium365.com)



CELEBRATING  
30 YEARS  
2023

**Enriching Lives through learning**

+971 4 246 1600 | [info@bizgroup.ae](mailto:info@bizgroup.ae)

[LEARNINGWITHBIZ.COM](http://LEARNINGWITHBIZ.COM)