

A MODEL OF THE FORCES THAT GENERATE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

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The aim of this article is to present a proposed model of the forces generating resistance to change within an organization. After analyzing the literature and conducting a survey I concluded that the forces that generate resistance to change have a great impact on employees' resistance to change and they are both internal, as well as external.

Keywords: *resistance to change, model, management style, organizational culture, communication, economic environment.*

UN MODEL AL FORȚELOR GENERATOARE DE REZISTENȚĂ LA SCHIMBARE DIN CADRUL UNEI ORGANIZAȚII

Scopul urmărit în acest articol este de a prezenta un model al forțelor generatoare de rezistență la schimbare din cadrul unei organizații. În urma analizei literaturii de specialitate și efectuării unui studiu de caz am ajuns la concluzia că forțele care generează rezistență la schimbare au un impact semnificativ asupra rezistenței la schimbare din partea angajaților, acestea fiind atât interne, cât și externe.

Cuvinte-cheie: *rezistență la schimbare, model, stil de management, cultură organizațională, comunicare, mediu economic.*

I. Literature review

Resistance to change represents an important phenomenon to be considered in any change process since a proper management of resistance is the key to change success or failure [13, p.148]. In the latest decades, the success of achieving major change in organizations has been chronicled as poor, some researchers noting failure rates reaching as high as 70% [1, 3]. Many authors [10, 17] highlight that the reasons for the failure of many change initiatives can be found in resistance to change.

It is believed that the founders of an organization define its culture and the top management is the one who decides when, how and why to implement a new change. From this point of view results that the appearance of the resistance to change phenomenon at the organizational level is possible, but top management is excluded. Since the executive managers are the ones who identify the need for change and start the whole process, it is assumed that they are pro change and there is no way they could even think about manifesting resistance.

It has been accepted for a long period that employees are usually the ones who resist changes, while change agents, represented by middle or top management, try and do their best in convincing the first ones to participate and manifest their support. According to Kanter et al. (1992) and Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2003) "all of the organization's members manifest resistance to change, except executive management" [11, 2]. According to their research, when a new change is decided to be implemented, the executive managers are always confronted with line-managers and employees resistance. It is considered that resistance does not apply to executive managers, because usually they are the ones who decide about the new changes [2, p.6].

Even if there is enough proof to sustain the above mentioned statements, some authors have a different view. In his research, Smith (1982) found out that top managers and all those who are in power usually are reluctant to new changes, trying "to maintain the status quo, not dramatically changing it" [8, p.28]. In support of this idea come Spreitzer and Quinn (1996) who, citing Dent and Galloway Goldberg (1999), in a study of 3000 Ford managers, discovered that middle managers were the ones who blamed executive managers for resisting change efforts [8, p.28]. Studies have shown that middle managers can be both change agents, leading the change effort, as well as change beneficiaries, resisting change initiatives [14, p.7].

II. A model of the forces that generate resistance to change

For a long time employees were considered the only force generating resistance to change within an organization. But, with the expansion of research studies, experts in the field have identified other forces. Analyzing the literature I've found that there may be other forces generating resistance to change, some from within the company, while others outside it.

In figure 1 I have presented an original model of the forces that generate resistance to change and as it can be seen, the model is composed from three categories of forces.

The first category is represented by the members involved in the organizational change process. Unlike the elements identified in the literature, I've included additional to the employees, the stakeholders and the change agent. The change agents can generate resistance as well, either through their actions, either by the way they interpret the behavior of the affected staff [10, 14].

In the second category, entitled organizational environment, I've presented five forces, these being: organizational culture, organizational structure, management style, personnel policy and information system. Additional to the submitted evidence, I considered imperative to introduce in the model the personnel policy too, as it plays an important role in attracting employees on management's side, thus, obtaining their support for a smooth change implementation.

And not least, I found necessary to add another force, this time external to the organization, but which greatly influences the behavior of the staff. The economic environment is a very important force generating resistance to change within an organization, whereas depending on the national economic situation, employees will exhibit a lower or a higher degree of resistance. Most organizations adapt their activities according to the economic environment. If the economy is growing, organizations can expand their activities, more jobs being available, respectively, more opportunities for employees. On the contrary are the situations when the economy is in recession, registering negative values. In such cases, employees' resistance to change will be very reduced or even non-existent, they trying by all means to keep their job and show support toward management's decisions.

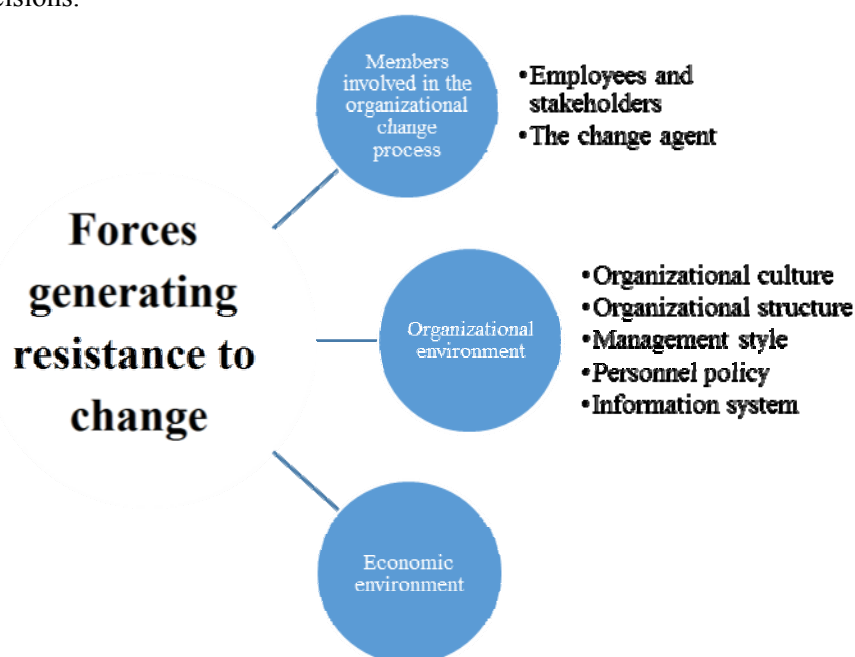


Fig.1. A model of the forces generating resistance to change.

III. Description of the Model's Components

A. Members involved in the organizational change process

1) *Employees and Stakeholders*

Any act of resistance to change is attributed to "the employees", those persons who meet the management's decisions with a refusal of involvement or acceptance. Although often it is considered that only employees from lower levels can manifest resistance, studies show that the middle and upper level managers, as well as other stakeholders can also express resistance. It is expected that higher level managers who have worked for a long time in the same company will oppose vehemently any change initiatives that could affect their positions or status. Of course, being forced to maintain the company's competitiveness on the market, they will implement new changes but they will rather be incremental and low-risk than radical and with a high level of uncertainty.

Although it is often stated that regardless of the nature of the change, be it good or bad, employees will oppose the change, I found that this is not always true. Research in organizational justice shows that employees react differently to any change attempt, depending on how they believe they are treated by management. If they ascertain that they are treated fairly, employees will develop attitudes and behaviors associated with successful change even in conditions of possible losses [7, p.244]. Contrary to this are the situations where employees feel they are misled, manipulated, or even treated unjustly. Their behavior will suddenly become negative, being characterized by decrease in productivity, an increase in thefts, a lack of cooperation and a diminished confidence in the change agent. Of course, each employee will react differently, depending on the impact he believes the change will have on him. From the employees' point of view such behavior is justified, representing a response to the injustices that have resulted.

Many of the answers to this injustice were qualified as resistance, suggesting that resistance can be the result of the perceived injustices and misunderstandings between the change agent and the organization's members. The violation of the existing rules and procedures as a result of the new change implementation can lead to the erosion of employees' trust and loss of credibility of the change agent. However, if the change agent presents a clear and formal justification on what happened, admits his guilt and asks employees' help, confidence can be restored and resistance reduced.

2) The Change Agent

By assuming that only employees can manifest resistance, the possibility that change agents can manifest it as well is being ignored.

As Smith (1982) and Spreitzer and Quinn (1996) announce, executive managers and all those who have some power in the organization usually are reluctant to new changes, representing an important factor that impedes change [14, p.7]. They prefer maintaining the current status quo to the detriment of more radical changes. "Those who usually want new changes are middle and bottom managers, while executive ones usually oppose" [14, p.8]. In such cases, we can no longer discuss a planned change, initiated by top management, but by their subordinates. As resistance can manifest at all levels, we consider that it would be a mistake to focus only on the resistance manifested in top to bottom changes. Since not all changes that are proposed to be implemented are beneficial, resistance from the part of middle managers and some top managers appears as a natural reaction.

"Change agents contribute to the occurrence of what they call 'resistant behaviors and communications' through their own actions and inactions, owing to their own ignorance, incompetence, or mismanagement" [10, p.362]. The possible actions of the change agent are communicating inadequate and inaccurate information along with misleading and betraying the employees' trust. Change agents contribute to the increase of the resistance to change phenomenon from the part of the affected members "by breaking agreements both before and during change and by failing to restore the subsequent loss of trust" [7, p.256]. Secondly, considering that they know better what to do and to not jeopardize their authority, often change agents ignore the ideas and proposals of the affected members which leads to a further increase of resistance from the employee.

B. Organizational environment

1) Organizational Culture

The organizational culture determines a predictable behavior. As all members of an organization share the same values, it is expected that when a new change is implemented that does not correspond with their values all of the members will oppose it. In some cases, the organizational culture can represent the cause of the resistance to change phenomenon. It makes sense that any change that is contrary to the generally accepted norms and practices of the organization is met with resistance. Thus, thanks to a rigid culture, the organization itself can generate resistance to change.

Although organizational culture is an external factor in relation to the persons involved in an organizational change process, it influences significantly their attitudes towards change. The organizational culture is the invisible force of each company that provides coherence for the daily activities and explains why relatively similar enterprises in terms of size, market share or field obtain different results in the same market conditions [5, p.10]. Depending on the values and practices that an organizational culture is centered around, the company will either succeed or fail with an effective change implementation. Similar companies obtain different results due to the culture they practice. Thus, companies that possess an organizational culture focused on innovation and performance achievement will have employees with a positive change attitude. Resistance in

such organizations will be reduced or even nonexistent. In contrast, however, are the organizations with a "conservative" culture for which the concept of innovation is unknown. Employees are accustomed to execute their tasks according to the daily routine and any change attempt is met with a lack of enthusiasm.

2) Organizational Structure

At the organization level, the structural variables can cause the appearance of the resistance to change phenomenon. Depending on the organizational structure that is used, the phenomenon's manifestation may be more or less intense.

In some cases, thanks to the adoption of a rigid organizational structure, the organization itself may generate unfavorable elements towards change. In order to function effectively, the organization needs stability and continuity, but the use of a rigid structure and establishments of authority hierarchies may require that employees use only certain communication channels. The more the organization is rigid and has several levels, the greater the distance the information has to travel. And of course, there is a higher probability that this structure will reject any idea of change.

In a turbulent environment, the organizations that adopt an organic structure are more effective and responsive to change. In terms of the present business environment, characterized by a high uncertainty, the organic organizations are more compatible with the economic realities. Knowledge and task control are located anywhere in the organization, and although it is considered that the organization of an organic type is more difficult to manage, its control range is much wider with the information flowing easier.

3) Management Style

Employees' resistance will be greatly influenced by the embraced management style.

Authors like Muczyk and Reimann (1987), Yukl (1989) and Bass (1981), state that the authoritarian management style is task-oriented, having a persuasive and manipulative character [6, p.212]. Depending on the employees' attitudes and mindsets, the adoption of this style can be beneficial or detrimental. It is not recommended to embrace the authoritarian style if employees feel stressed, have a high reliance on a manager and are not able to generate creative ideas, as well as in those situations where they want to be actively involved in the organizational change processes taking place within the organization. On the other hand, adopting this style can be beneficial in situations where new staff is hired and the employees are not familiar with the procedures or if they lack sufficient knowledge to execute their tasks. Furthermore, it is best employed when the time to make a change decision is limited, an imposed or urgent change is required to be implemented, or when employees do not have sufficient experience to make decisions [17, p.79].

Delegation and staff support are basic characteristics of the participative management style, an emphasis being placed on teamwork and employee's freedom to make decisions. There are cases, however, where the adoption of this style is not recommended, particularly when the organization's management does not have enough time to learn the views of all employees, when the manager feels threatened by the employee's involvement and/or when no mistakes or delays are admitted in the process [17, p.103].

4) Personnel Policy

Since human potential is one of the most precious values an organization has, the success of the latter highly depends on the degree of the staff's involvement in achieving organizational goals. Nowadays it is almost impossible for a company to enjoy an upward trend in business if it does not have a highly qualified personnel oriented towards change and innovation. According to the promoted personnel policy, organizations will have employees who support change or employees who are against change.

In the situation where a company's personnel policy does not contain all the necessary elements or some of them are not complied with by management, it may represent an important force generating resistance. It is recommended that when the human resource manager elaborates the organization's personnel policy, to consider the aspects related to the industry and environment in which it operates. In order to have pro change employees and be able to operate in uncertain and turbulent environments, the formulated personnel policy must focus in particular on training, motivation and an appropriate reward. Also, to benefit from less resistance, everyone in the company who holds decision power positions should ensure that their subordinates are taken care of.

5) Information system

The information system is a key aspect of the management function. Without a well-defined information system, managers cannot influence their subordinates to act in order to achieve the desired performance and they cannot properly inform them about what is taking place or will take place in the organization.

The quality and quantity of information that members of an organization receive from change agents will decisively influence their degree of resistance. Employees involved in an organizational change process will oppose a higher resistance when the organization's information system will not allow an efficient movement of information from the executive management towards themselves.

To reduce this reluctance to change and to obtain employees' support, an open and honest communication from the change agent is required. The agent must communicate clearly and by all available means of communication what will take place and what effects the new change will generate.

C. Economic environment

The economic environment is another force generating reluctance to change that through its evolution influences the behavior of the organization and its employees. Depending on the state of the economic environment, employees will exhibit a lower or higher degree of reluctance.

Most organizations adapt their activities according to the economic environment. If the economy is growing, organizations can expand their activities as there are more jobs available, with more opportunities for employees. As a result, opposition to change will be much higher as employees will have more employment options. A fast growing economy, a low unemployment and inflation rate, a reduced share of bad loans in total loans, as well as a high purchasing power of the population, are indicators that will determine a higher degree of resistance to change. On the contrary are the situations when the economy is in recession and registering negative values. In such cases, employees' opposition to change will be much reduced or even absent, as they will try to keep their jobs by any means and show support towards the management's decisions. Thus, employees' resistance to change will be much lower when the unemployment rate is high and the pace of economic development is low and recording even negative values. This will also be the case when the economy is in recession, the number of available jobs is very low, the inflation rate is high and recording a rising trend, the share of bad loans is high and has a tendency to increase in total loans, and the purchasing power of the population is increasingly reduced [15, p.1609].

IV. Conclusions

All employees can oppose a new change. Depending on the organizational culture and its beliefs, the organization's management will decide what is appropriate to be implemented. Since not all changes that are proposed to be implemented are beneficial for the organization, it's normal for executive managers to reject some proposals, even if their behavior might be perceived as resistant by their subordinates.

Also, depending on the chosen elements from the model, the type of the organizational culture, organizational structure, management style, personnel policy and information system, employees' resistance will vary. Taking into account the economic environment, employees' resistance to change will be greater during a favorable economic environment and with an upward trend, than in situations of unstable economy or recession.

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