
Acceptance of change: Exploring factors of employee resistance to organizational change

Ani Kalandia

Assistant Professor, Kutaisi University LLC, Kutaisi, Georgia

Abstract

Due to changes in globalization, changes due to advances in technology and other factors, the reality is our organizations are constantly having to adapt. If we continue to approach the transformation of organizations, the way we always have been (stressed) we need to sort out two things: First, why is change so exhausting? And second how do we fix it?

Change management becomes an inevitable within organizations' performance. Successful and unsuccessful change management initiatives have been discussed by various authors and the topic continues to expand. Numerous studies provide an understanding into the nature of change management and identifies its most common drawbacks. The most frequent themes include resistance to change, readiness for change, leadership effectiveness, employee commitment, and the roles and competencies ensuring smooth occurrence of strategic change.

The present article focuses on one of these themes: resistance to change. Understanding reasons for resistance may aid managers to reduce conflict and increase collaboration. To meet these challenges, leaders must be qualified enough to overcome resistance to change. This article points out important types of resistance for organizations to address.

Keywords: *Change Management; Organizational Change; Resistance to Change*

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Results of the recently research indicates that between 30% and 60% of all change initiatives within organizations fail (Gilley et al., 2009a, 2009b). Some researchers show even more pessimistic results, suggesting rates of change failure up to 80% to 90%, according to Gilley et al. Change is complex and most of the time is unpredictable. Even a well-planned organizational change strategy may have unintended consequences (Jian, 2007). It is widely assumed that resistance to change impedes the development of successful change strategies (Gilley et al., 2009a, 2009b).

In terms of change management research, the issue of resistance occupies a crucial place.

Organizations should take into consideration the human element and its implications for the success of all change management decisions. The success of change management usually is related to the organizational structure, availability of resources, vision and mission of the organization, and employees' willingness to work towards the change-related goals (Brisson-Banks, 2010). Managers who ignore the last component guarantee themselves an uphill battle, if not a sure failure.

REASONS FOR RESISTANCE

No matter at what managerial or nonmanagerial level an employee is, he/she may lack the experience to diagnose the urgency of change (Erwin, 2009). D'Amelio (2008) concluded that resistance to change grows from broken agreements and with issues related to trust violations. This line of research proposes that organizations that manage to restore broken relationships in a timely manner are less likely to face resistance (Ford et al., 2008). At the later stages of change implementation, resistance to change and concern about job security and growth become overarching (Erwin, 2009).

Many employees have fear that they won't be able to keep their jobs, whereas others are simply unwilling or unprepared to learn and develop new skills, according to Erwin.

The main reasons why people resist organizational change according to Stephen P. Robbins / Mary A. Coulter / David A. De Cenzo are following:

Uncertainty – Change replaces the known with uncertainty. No matter how much you may dislike attending college, at least you know what is expected from you. When you graduate, you will trade the known with unknown. Employees in organizations are faced with similar uncertainty.

Habit – we do things out of habit. We are creatures of habit. Life is complex enough – we don't want to have consider the full range of options for the hundreds of decisions we make every day. To cope with this complexity, we rely on habits or programmed decisions. But when confronted with change, our tendency to respond in our accustomed ways becomes a source of resistance.

Concern over personal loss is next reason. Change threatens the investment you have made in the status quo. More people invested in the current system, more they resist. They fear losing status, authority, stable income, friendships and other economic benefits that they value.

Change may not be in the organization's best interest. Employee may feel that change is incompatible with the goals and interest of the organization. For instance, employees at a company may protest a change that allows an automatic answering system to answer phone inquiries, claiming that the company is becoming "depersonalized." They are most likely resisting change due to conflicts with company goals. The new phone system does not increase the employees' uncertainty about their jobs or threaten their standing in the company. They are not protesting the change out of habit since they are explicitly identifying "depersonalization" as the source of their complaint. Employees think that the new phone system will damage the image of the company, so it is conflicting with company goals.

Communication breakdowns contribute to resistance in changing organizations (Ford et al., 2008). Resistance by itself proposes that those affected by ongoing changes are aware of their organization's needs and, most likely, discuss the benefits and drawbacks the change process can bring. According to Ford et al., resistance indicates that change recipients confer about change and its potential consequences. These authors noted that resistance has a considerable engagement value, and may even reproduce a higher level of commitment, rather than unthinking acceptance.

Resistance can also be interpreted as a form of conflict that could be used for enhancing quality of organizational decisions (Ford et al., 2008), if appropriate possibilities of communication are provided. These suggestions deny the validity of the previous assumptions about resistance. It appears that it is not resistance but the way organizations see resistance that either hinders or simplifies change. At the same time, the debate surrounding the issue of change should not be ignored. Managers should acknowledge and talk honestly about the needs for change, otherwise fear and uncertainty will remain a dominant element that can damage morale and stop successful implementation of the desired changes at all levels of the organization.

At this point, the key question becomes, "What psychological processes should be taken into account to determine if an employee will successfully cope with organizational change?". Kouzes and Posner (2002) indicate, successful change requires employees to be intrinsically motivated, able to see change as a new opportunity, and feel that they somehow could have control over the change process. A review of the psychological and organizational behavior literature points out that (a) intrinsic motivation can be equal to internal work motivation, (b) the ability to see change as a method of continuous learning opportunity can be equal to growth need strength, and (c) having control over the change process can be thought of as an internal locus of control. Those individual differences should be of importance to how employees cope with organizational change.

Attitude toward organizational change is an employee's overall evaluative judgment of a change initiative implemented by his or her organization (Lines, 2005). Employees' attitudes toward change are a key determinant to whether an organization's change efforts are either successful or fail. When employees exhibit a strong, positive attitude toward change, they are likely to act in appropriate, effortful ways that support and simplify the change initiative being implemented. However, when employees possess a strong, negative attitude toward change, they are more likely to resist, oppose and attempt to disrupt the change initiative (Lines, 2005). It is not enough for managers to simply overcome employee resistance to change. Rather, successful organizational change depends on managers generating employee support and enthusiasm for the proposed change initiative (Piderit, 2000). Behavioral change at the individual employee level is crucial to organizational change, whereas Antoni (2004: 198) reported, "one has to change the beliefs of the organizational members, which shape their behavior, in order to support sustainable organizational change."

PROMOTING CHANGE READINESS

Change readiness, as the opposite concept of resistance, continues to generate professional disagreements. To date, readiness has been considered the fundamental ancestor for implementing and managing productive change (Weiner, 2009). The concept of change readiness finds its reflection in Lewis's model of organizational change, which requires that organizations first to unfreeze the existing mentalities and develop the sense of urgency, before the change is actually set in motion for implementation.

The role of individual competencies, the potential contribution from each employee to have positive attitude about change, as well as the role of individual learning structure a considerable share of present-day organizational change knowledge and research (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Definitely, the quality of individual-level adaptation in organizational change cannot be easily discharged, and its significance is specified by the fact that, in organizational change, staff naturally seek to make sense of the situation and alter their expectations to the new experiences emerging as a result of the change (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008). However, organizations should not overemphasize the importance of individually-driven factors of change readiness.

For some employee's primary concern is relationships, while others are more loyal to structural components of an organization, which are often based on principles such as efficiency, tradition, or creating an acceptable fit with partnering organizations. Most often, both elements need to be addressed during organization change. To facilitate employee readiness and overcome resistance, some employees need to know that staff are treated fairly during the process, while others are more concerned with the logic of the decision-making around the need for structural change. For those employees more concerned with relationships, they need to be induced that certain staff changes are necessary and will be made as respectfully and fairly as possible. The employees concerned with structure may question whether change is necessary or consecutively whether it is simply the notion of some high-level executors who want to have a 'word to say' without full consideration of the implications. Those employees are more likely to take an attitude that change may offer few benefits. They could show more acceptance of change if they can be convinced that the short-term challenges will allow for long-term benefits. To ensure their buy-in to the change process, they must be convinced that the long-term benefits will outweigh them for the short-term disruptions and characteristic in the change process.

Leadership during organizational change

The role of leadership in driving or hampering organizational change remains one of the major subjects of professional debate in organizational change research. The significance of the concept is

justified by the fact that leadership effectiveness has direct impact on organizations' change capabilities (Gilley et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Numerous variables can have an effect on leaders' productivity and these variables can facilitate or impede change implementation within organizations (Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009).

Leaders' failure to establish clear norms of change readiness and develop a complete change vision can readily reduce organizations' capabilities to implement and manage change (Caldwell, Chatman, O'Reilly, Ormiston, & Lapiz, 2008).

First of all, let's acknowledge that change is hard. People naturally resist to change, especially when it's imposed on them. But there are some things that organizations do to make change even harder and more exhausting for people than it needs to be. First thing is that, leaders often wait too long to act. As a result, everything is happening in crisis mode. Or given the urgency, what they will do is they will just focus on the short-term results, but that doesn't give any hope in the future. Or they will just take superficial, one-off approach, hoping that they can return back to business as usual as soon as the crisis is over. This kind of approach is is kind of way some students approach preparing for standardized tests. In order to get test scores, go up, teachers will end up teaching to the test. That result may work, test results often do go up, but it fails the fundamental goal of education: to prepare students to succeed over the long term.

Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, and Liu (2008) suggested that transformational leadership is strongly indicative of effectiveness of organizational change. Although much remains to be established about the role of leadership in the change process, organizations with weak leadership have high risk of facing tough challenges in their change implementation.

To a large extent, at the present time organization leaders must themselves determine how ready they are for change and what factors could prevent them from meeting their goals.

Researchers have focused on the individual level of change readiness and rarely proceed to analyze readiness at the organizational level (Weiner, 2009). As of today, it is not obvious whether organizations, the structural units vary in their competences to implement and manage changes (Caldwell et al., 2008). The set of factors are not identified that could be regarded as the most important for change readiness. That readiness is essential for successful change, but how and whether at all readiness can be measured remains an issue of concern (Weiner, 2009).

Weiner noted that "in the absence of theoretical clarification and exploration of these issues, efforts to advance measurement, produce cumulative knowledge, and inform practice will likely remain stalled" (p. 2).

Although Herold et al. (2008) suggested that transformational leadership is strongly symbolic of effectiveness of organizational change, how exactly leadership and organizational change interact remains unclear.

Challenges and barriers to change management have been studied but the results are far from systematic.

Organizations do have some knowledge of the most important factors of organizational change but lack practical guidance to use them in real-life situations. Moreover, the picture of the factors delaying organizational change implementation lacks logic and completeness. Even though it is known that resistance, change readiness, and leadership have the potential to speed up, slow down, facilitate, or hinder the process of change, how these factors interact remains unclear.

Recommendation/Conclusion

In today's competitive business environment, organizations must be able to change to adapt, to survive and stay productive and cost-effective. By understanding which factors hamper or delay the development of change management initiatives, companies will have better chances to avoid the major drawbacks associated with change. Researchers continually identify resistance to change from employees as one major challenge. Therefore, employees need comprehensive information about the nature, processes, and consequences of organizational change. These attributes are important to prepare the staff for change and overcome resistance, but also to create the kind of readiness and buy-in that make employees active contributors to the success of organizational change.

We could list several strategic imperatives for managing resistance to change all of which have one thing in common: **putting people first**.

The first imperative of putting people first is to inspire through purpose. Most transformations have financial and operational goals. These are important and it can be energizing to leaders, but they tend not to be motivating to most people in organization. To motivate more broadly, the transformation needs to connect with deeper sense of purpose. Take Lego. Lego group has become an extraordinary global company, under their very capable leadership, they have actually undergone a series of transformation. While each of these had very specific focus, the North Star, linking and guiding all of them, has been Lego's powerful purpose: inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. It's not about increasing sales but about giving millions of children access to LEGO building bricks. It's not about developing new products but about enabling more children to experience the joy of learning through play. Not surprisingly, deep sense of purpose tends to be highly motivating to LEGO's people.

Second imperative is to go all in. Too many transformations are nothing more than head count cutting exercises, layoffs under the excuse of transformation. During the time of crisis, you may have to take

hard decision about downsizing. Rather than just cutting the costs, you need to think of initiatives, that will enable you to win in medium term, initiatives to drive growth, actions that will fundamentally change the way the company operates and investments to develop leadership and the talent.

Third imperative is to enable people with capabilities that they need to succeed during the transformation and beyond.

Chronos a global software company, recognized a need to transfer from building software products to building software as a service. To enable it's people to take that transformation, first of all they invested in new tools, that would enable their employees to monitor the usage of the features as well as customer satisfaction with the new service. They also invested in skill development, so that their employees would be able to resolve customer service problems on the spot. Very importantly, they have also reinforced the collaborative behaviors that would be required to deliver an end-to-end seamless customer experience. Because of these investments, rather than feeling overwhelmed by the transformation, Chronos employees actually felt energized and empowered in their new roles.

Fourth imperative – instilling the culture of continuous learning. When Satya Nadella became the CEO of Microsoft, he embarked on an ambitious transformation journey to prepare the company to compete in mobile first, cloud first world. This included the changes to strategy, organization and culture. Microsoft's culture at that time was one of silos and internal competition, not exactly conducive to learning. Nadella rallied his leadership around his vision, for a living and learning culture, shifting from the fixed mindset to a growth mindset. The role of employee became to listen, to learn and to bring out the best in people. Microsoft employees already noticed this shift in the culture, clear evidence of Microsoft putting people first.

Fifth imperative is specifically for leaders. During an organizational change, leader needs to have a vision, a clear road map with milestones, and then you need to hold people accountable for results. In order to capture the hearts and mind of people you also need to be inclusive.

References

Gilley, A., Gilley, J. W., & McMillan, H. S. (2009). Organizational change: Motivation, communication, and leadership effectiveness. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 21(4), 7-94.

Jian, G. (2007). Unpacking unintended consequences in planned organizational change: A process model. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21(5), 5-28.

Brisson-Banks, C. V. (2010). Managing change and transitions: A comparison of different models and their commonalities. *Library Management*, 31(4), 241-252

Erwin, D. (2009). Changing organizational performance: Examining the change process. *Hospital Topics: Research and Perspectives on Healthcare*, 87(3), 28-40.

Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., & D'Amelio, A. (2008). Resistance to change: The rest of the story. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(2), 362-377.

Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. (2002) *The Leadership Challenge*. 3rd Edition, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
Bercovitz, J., & Feldman, M. (2008). Academic entrepreneurs: Organizational change at the individual level. *Organization Science*, 19(1), 69-89.

Weiner, B. J. (2009). A theory of organizational readiness for change. *Implementation Science*, 4, 1-9.

Herold, D. M., Fedor, D. B., Caldwell, S., & Liu, Y. (2008). The effects of transformational and change leadership on employees' commitment to a change: A multilevel study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), 346-357.

Mary Coulter, by David A. De Cenzo, by Stephen P. Robbins *Fundamentals of Management* (10th edition)

ცვლილებების მიღება: ორგანიზაციული ცვლილებებისადმი თანამშრომელთა წინააღმდეგობის ფაქტორების შესწავლა ანი კალანდია

ასისტენტ პროფესორი, ქუთაისის უნივერსიტეტი, ქუთაისი, საქართველო

აბსტრაქტი

გლობალიზაციით გამოწვეული ცვლილებების, ტექნოლოგიური მიღწევების და სხვა ფაქტორების გამო, ვცხოვრობთ რეალობაში, სადაც ორგანიზაციებს მუდმივად უწევთ ადაპტაცია. თუ ჩვენ გავაგრძელებთ ორგანიზაციული ცვლილებებისადმი ნეგატიურ მიდგომას, ჩვენ უნდა დავაზუსტოთ და პასუხი გავცეთ შემდეგ ორ კითხვას: პირველი, რატომ არის ცვლილება ასეთი დამქანცველი? და მეორე: როგორ უნდა გამოვასწოროთ ეს?

ცვლილებების მენეჯმენტი გარდაუვალი ხდება დღევანდელ კონკურენტულ ბიზნეს გარემოში ორგანიზაციული პროცესების ეფექტურად მართვისთვის. ცვლილებების მართვის წარმატებული და წარუმატებელი ინიციატივები სხვადასხვა ავტორების მიერ განიხილება, თემა კვლავ აქტუალურია. კვლევები იძლევა საშუალებას გავიაზროთ ცვლილების მენეჯმენტის კონცეფცია და განვსაზღვროთ მასთან დაკავშირებული ყველაზე გავრცელებული ნაკლოვანებები. ორგანიზაციულ ცვლილებების თემის გარშემო ყველაზე გავრცელებული საკითხებია: ცვლილებებისადმი წინააღმდეგობის გაწევა, ცვლილებებისთვის მზადყოფნა, ლიდერობის ეფექტურობა, თანამშრომლების ერთგულება, მათი პასუხისმგებლობა და კომპეტენციები, რომლებიც უზრუნველყოფენ ორგანიზაციაში სტრატეგიული ცვლილებების შეუფერხებლად წარმართვას.

წინამდებარე სტატია ყურადღებას ამახვილებს ზემოთ ჩამოთვლილი საკითხებიდან ერთ-ერთ თემაზე: ცვლილებებისადმი წინააღმდეგობა. წინააღმდეგობის გამომწვევი მიზეზების იდენტიფიცირება შეიძლება დაეხმაროს მენეჯერებს შეამცირონ კონფლიქტი და გაზარდონ თანამშრომელთა ჩართულობა. ამ გამოწვევების დასაძლევად, ლიდერები უნდა იყვნენ საკმარისად კვალიფიცირებულები, რათა გადალახონ ცვლილებებით გამოწვეული დაბრკოლებები. სტატია ყურადღებას ამახვილებს იმ მნიშვნელოვან ფაქტორებზე, რომელიც იწვევს ცვლილებებისადმი წინააღმდეგობას, რაც ორგანიზაციამ აუცილებლად უნდა გაითვალისწინოს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: *ცვლილებების მართვა, ორგანიზაციული ცვლილება, ცვლილებებისადმი წინააღმდეგობა.*