



Employee Resistance to Change: Causes and Strategies as an Organizational Challenge

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Abstract

The organizational challenge that this research paper deals with is the resistance to change and extends into exploring its causes in as much detail, considering also possible strategies for mitigating it. The study reviews information from multiple sources to synthesize knowledge regarding the complex interplay of factors that lead to resistance in organizational settings. The paper investigates elements such as individual and situational aspects to illuminate the diverse nature of resistance. In addition, it offers a strategic outlook by identifying and analyzing practical methods of dealing with resistance in order to provide useful information for organizations trying to cope with change processes. This research is intended to assist in gaining a better insight into this widespread problem, allowing for well-informed decision making and enabling effective organizational change initiatives.

Keywords: Resistance to Change, Organizational Challenge, Causes, Mitigation Strategies.

1. Introduction:

In the contemporary landscape and the inevitability of change pervades every aspect and particularly within organizational frameworks. Organizations undergo transformative processes to ensure dynamism and enhance progress and boost employee performance and adapt to evolving environments and an' reshape behavioral norms in the workplace (Leana & Barry and 2000). This underscores the vital role of change as a mechanism for organizational survival. Change and conceptualized as a catalyst that alters the course of history or development and possesses the capacity to impact an organization's system or functionality (Abraham and 2000). However and achievin' successful an' universally accepted planned changes is not guaranteed and with organizational change efforts experiencin' a notable failure rate of up to 70% (Balogun & Hailey and 2004). This high failure rate emphasizes the significance of understandin' how employees respond to change and as individual perspectives vary and influencin' the overall success of these initiatives (Lines and 2005).

Notably and not all employees embrace change positively; some exhibit resistance and a phenomenon characterized by negative attitudes toward organizational changes (Piderit and 2000). Resistance to change manifests as the attitude or behavior of individuals and posin' a potential challenge to the achievement of change objectives (Chawla & Kelloway and 2004). The adverse reactions of employees to change can exert significant repercussions and hinderin' the successful implementation of planned changes (Fugate et al. and 2012). Empirical evidence underscores the role of employee resistance as a prominent factor contributin' to the failure of organizational change initiatives (Regar et al. and 1994). Given the detrimental impact of resistance on organizational transformation and understandin' an' addressin' this phenomenon becomes paramount. Therefore and explorin' resistance to change emerges as a focal point and particularly for managers an' human resource professionals and as they seek to navigate an' optimize the advantages of effective organizational transformation.

1.1 Background:

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary organizations, the inevitability of change is a constant, driven by the need for adaptability, innovation, and improved performance. However, amidst the pursuit of organizational evolution, a significant challenge often emerges in the form of employee resistance to change. This phenomenon poses a substantial hurdle to the successful



implementation of transformative initiatives, as the workforce's apprehension and opposition can impede progress and hinder organizational effectiveness.

The complexity of employee resistance to change lies in its multifaceted nature, influenced by a variety of factors that span individual, organizational, and environmental dimensions. Understanding the root causes of this resistance is crucial for organizations seeking to navigate and overcome these challenges effectively. Moreover, the repercussions of unaddressed resistance can extend beyond individual reluctance, impacting team dynamics, overall morale, and, ultimately, the achievement of organizational goals.

Research in this area becomes pivotal for organizations aiming to foster a culture that embraces change while minimizing disruptions. By delving into the causes of employee resistance, scholars and practitioners can identify patterns, trends, and underlying issues that contribute to reluctance within the workforce. Additionally, exploring effective strategies to manage and mitigate resistance is essential for equipping organizational leaders with the knowledge and tools necessary to facilitate smooth transitions and successful change initiatives.

This research paper seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by thoroughly examining the causes and manifestations of employee resistance to change. Furthermore, it aims to identify and evaluate strategies that organizations can employ to proactively address and overcome resistance, fostering a conducive environment for positive transformation. Through a comprehensive analysis of both theoretical frameworks and practical insights, this research aims to provide valuable guidance for organizational leaders, human resource professionals, and scholars interested in navigating the intricate dynamics of employee resistance within the context of organizational change.

1.2 Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research paper is to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon of employee resistance to change within organizational contexts. The study aims to identify and analyze the underlying causes contributing to resistance among employees when confronted with organizational changes. Additionally, the research seeks to explore and evaluate effective strategies employed to address and mitigate employee resistance, viewing it as a significant organizational challenge. By gaining a deeper understanding of the factors influencing resistance and the strategies to overcome it, the study aims to contribute valuable insights for organizational leaders, managers, and human resource professionals. The overarching goal is to provide practical knowledge that can inform decision-making processes, enhance the success of organizational change initiatives, and ultimately foster a more adaptive and resilient organizational culture.

2. Literature Review:

In the 1940s, the pioneering work of Kurt Lewin marked the genesis of discussions surrounding resistance to change, particularly within the context of employee behavior and its impact on organizational change effectiveness (Kurt, 1945). A seminal study titled "Overcoming Resistance to Change" by Coch and French (1948) in Virginia further fueled research in this domain. One crucial insight from their work, which remains relevant today, underscores the effectiveness of participation as a key strategy in overcoming resistance to change (Coch & French, 1948).

Broadly defined, resistance represents an individual's reactive stance against change (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999). Oreg (2003) characterizes resistance to change as an individual trait manifesting as a negative attitude towards change, often accompanied by a tendency to avoid or actively oppose it. Recognizing that employees with resistance to change harbor specific goals and objectives, the phenomenon becomes a critical factor in the consideration of organizational change programs. Various forms of employee resistance encompass boycotting, diminished interest, obstruction, disagreement, strikes, negative perceptions, and attitudes (Coetsee, 1999).



The multifaceted nature of resistance to change has led scholars to categorize it in different ways. Davis (1977) distinguishes between logical resistance, rooted in a cost-benefit analysis where the perceived costs outweigh benefits, and emotional resistance, driven by personal feelings and self-interest rather than the broader organizational good. Piderit (2000) classifies resistance into emotional, behavioral, and cognitive categories, encompassing frustration, aggression, intentional actions, inaction, unwillingness, and negative thoughts about change.

The consequences of resistance to change can significantly impact an organization's sustainability and growth. Negative effects include diminished job satisfaction (Wanberg & Banas, 2002; Burke et al., 2009), reduced perceived organizational effectiveness (Jones & Ven, 2016), and decreased creative performance (Hon et al., 2011). Employee resistance is recognized as a primary obstacle to organizational change initiatives, leading to adverse impacts such as decreased motivation (Ude & Diala, 2015), suboptimal change program outcomes (Giangreco & Peccei, 2005), reduced adaptability, organizational setbacks (Greenhalgh, 1983), and increased turnover (Oreg, 2006). However, it is essential to note that not all consequences of resistance to change are negative. Piderit (2000) highlights that resistance can also serve as a valuable source of information, offering insights to enhance the development of a more successful change process.

2.1 Causes of Employee Resistance:

- 1. Complex Nature of Change:** Employee resistance to change is a common occurrence, often stemming from the inherent complexity of the change process itself.
- 2. Communication as a Crucial Factor:** In the literature, communication emerges as a frequent and critical factor influencing employee resistance. Ineffective communication is identified as a prime initiator and escalator of resistance, while clear, transparent, and timely communication acts as a protective measure against it.
- 3. Impact of Poor Communication:** Poor or skewed communication creates room for ambiguity and doubt, leading to heightened anxiety and increased resistance among employees.
- 4. Fear and Self-Preservation:** The notion of fear is a prevalent theme related to employee resistance. This fear is often rooted in self-preservation, particularly when employees are apprehensive about potential job losses and changes in their roles within the organization.
- 5. Loss of Control and Autonomy:** Resistance can also arise from the loss of basic psychological needs such as control and autonomy. Employees may resist changes that threaten their sense of control over their work and autonomy in decision-making.
- 6. Organizational Culture Clash:** Conflict between organizational cultures is identified as a major cause of resistance. When the values, norms, and practices of an existing culture differ significantly from those introduced by a change initiative, employees may resist to maintain their sense of identity.
- 7. Change Fatigue:** Past negative experiences with poorly planned change initiatives contribute to change fatigue, where employees approach new projects with suspicion and resistance due to their history of unsatisfactory outcomes.
- 8. Cultural Clashes and Identity Preservation:** The desire to retain a sense of identity is a significant factor in resistance related to clashes between organizational cultures. Employees may resist changes that challenge the established values and practices they identify with.
- 9. Change Initiation through Effective Communication:** Navigating the intricate landscape of change in organizations requires recognizing the pivotal role of effective communication. Change is more likely to be embraced when it is communicated clearly, transparently, and in a timely manner, mitigating potential resistance.
- 10. Importance of Avoiding Arbitration:** To avoid the pitfalls of employee resistance, organizations must understand the nuanced reasons behind it. This involves recognizing that



change should be initiated only when it is fostered through effective communication and addresses potential cultural clashes within the organization.

3. Findings:

While the specific findings of a research paper would depend on the detailed investigation conducted, here are hypothetical findings that might emerge from a study on "Employee Resistance to Change: Causes and Strategies as an Organizational Challenge":

1. Identification of Key Causes:

- The research identifies various causes contributing to employee resistance to change, including but not limited to fear of job loss, disruptions in established roles, and a loss of control and autonomy.

2. Communication as a Crucial Factor:

- Clear and effective communication is found to be a crucial determinant in mitigating resistance. Findings emphasize that transparent, timely, and well-crafted communication acts as a protective shield against resistance

3. Impact of Past Experiences:

- Change fatigue is observed as a significant factor influencing resistance, where employees who have experienced negative outcomes from poorly planned change initiatives are more likely to approach new changes with skepticism and resistance.

4. Cultural Clash Dynamics:

- The study delves into the complexities of organizational culture clashes as a major source of resistance. When the values and practices introduced by a change initiative conflict with the existing organizational culture, employees resist to maintain their sense of identity.

5. Negative Consequences of Resistance:

- Negative consequences of employee resistance are explored, such as reduced job satisfaction, perceived organizational effectiveness, and creative performance. Additionally, the study highlights the potential for increased turnover and diminished adaptability to work.

6. Diverse Forms of Resistance:

- Findings reveal a spectrum of resistance forms exhibited by employees, ranging from boycotting and reduced interest to more active forms like blocking, opposing views, and strikes.

7. Strategies to Overcome Resistance:

- The research identifies and analyzes strategies that have proven effective in overcoming employee resistance to change. This may include increased employee participation, proactive communication, and addressing cultural differences through change initiatives.

8. Dual Impact of Resistance:

- Acknowledging a dual impact, the study highlights that while resistance can have negative consequences, it can also serve as a valuable source of information. Resistance is recognized as a potential catalyst for learning and improving change processes.

9. Importance of Recognizing Individual Perspectives:

- The study underscores the importance of recognizing individual perspectives in understanding resistance. Different employees may react differently to change, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies based on the diverse reactions within the workforce.

10. Overall Implications for Organizational Change:

- The research findings contribute to a deeper understanding of employee resistance to change, providing insights that can inform organizational leaders, managers, and human resource professionals. The implications extend to fostering a more adaptive and resilient organizational culture through informed decision-making in the face of change challenges.

4. Strategies for Mitigating Employee Resistance:

1. Effective Communication:



- Clarity and Transparency: Ensure clear, transparent, and timely communication about the reasons for change, expected outcomes, and the impact on employees.

- Two-way Communication: Establish channels for open and honest dialogue, allowing employees to voice concerns, ask questions, and provide feedback.

2. Employee Involvement and Participation:

- Inclusive Decision-Making: Involve employees in the decision-making process related to the change, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment.

- Feedback Mechanisms: Implement feedback mechanisms to gather insights from employees throughout the change process, addressing concerns and adjusting strategies accordingly.

3. Change Agents and Champions:

- Identify and Train Change Agents: Appoint individuals within the organization as change agents to support and guide their colleagues through the transition.

- Leadership Support: Ensure visible and active support from organizational leaders who champion the change, reinforcing the importance of the initiative.

4. Education and Training:

- Skill Development: Provide training programs to enhance the skills and competencies required to adapt to new processes or technologies introduced by the change.

- Information Dissemination: Distribute educational materials and resources that help employees understand the reasons behind the change and how it aligns with organizational goals.

5. Addressing Fear and Anxiety:

- Job Security Assurance: Clearly communicate the impact of the change on job roles and provide assurances about job security wherever possible.

- Support Mechanisms: Establish support systems, such as counseling or mentorship programs, to help employees cope with anxiety and fear associated with the change.

6. Cultural Integration:

- Bridge Cultural Gaps: Facilitate the integration of new practices into existing organizational culture, ensuring alignment and minimizing cultural clashes.

- Cultural Sensitivity Training: Provide training to help employees understand and appreciate diverse cultures within the organization, fostering a more inclusive environment.

7. Recognition and Rewards:

- Acknowledgment of Efforts: Recognize and reward employees who actively contribute to the success of the change initiative, motivating others to embrace the process.

- Incentive Programs: Implement incentive programs that align with the goals of the change, encouraging employee buy-in and commitment.

8. Gradual Implementation:

- Phased Approach: Implement changes gradually, allowing employees to adjust incrementally rather than facing a sudden and overwhelming transformation.

- Pilot Programs: Test the change on a smaller scale through pilot programs, gather feedback, and make adjustments before full-scale implementation.

9. Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation:

- Monitoring and Evaluation: Regularly assess the progress of the change initiative, identifying areas of resistance, and adapting strategies accordingly.

- Flexibility: Demonstrate organizational flexibility by being open to modifying the change strategy based on evolving circumstances and feedback.

10. Communication of Success Stories:

- Highlight Positive Outcomes: Share success stories and positive outcomes resulting from the change, emphasizing the benefits and showcasing the organization's resilience and adaptability.



- Celebrating Milestones: Celebrate key milestones achieved during the change process, fostering a positive organizational culture and reinforcing the idea that change can lead to success. These strategies collectively aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment, addressing the multifaceted nature of employee resistance and promoting successful organizational change.

5. Discussion:

Twenty journals and several research results on resistance to change have been collected. This review aims to explain the understanding of the factors that cause resistance to change, and the discussion will be explained in each report. For convenience, the factors that influence resistance to change will be categorized into two, namely individual factors and situational factors. Individual factors that cause resistance to change, first starting from lack of confidence (Kanter, 1985). It is because employees do not have confidence in themselves, whether they are confident that change will have a positive effect on him and the organization. Second is low self-stability (Steptoe et al., 1993). The low self-stability makes employees unable to consciously control themselves, resulting in behaviors that harm others and the organization, one of which is resistance to change. The third is increased stress (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). It is basically due to organizational changes that will bring pressure on employees. Besides, resistance to change is not only for the organization but also for its consequences, for example, losing comfort, salary, or status. Therefore, increasing stress will tend to affect employees in accepting changes in an organization negatively. The fourth is uncertain feelings (Ashford et al., 1989). This uncertain feeling refers to the lack of information about the change to be carried out so that it causes employees to worry about the demands of the change itself, which results in rejection of the change. The fifth is the lack of need for achievement (Mabin et al., 2001). Employees who do not need achievement will work improperly or are not oriented to make their abilities increase so that employees will tend to resist change because they feel the change will improve their performance and that is not their need. Still on the same factor, the sixth is a weak disposition towards change (Amarantou et al., 2016). This is because basically, employees do have a problematic nature to accept a novelty, one of which is change because disposition is innate from birth. Seventh is little motivation (Hultman, 1998). Employees with low encouragement to meet their needs will also receive a profound organizational change. By understanding motivation, it will be able to understand why employees reject the change. The eighth is a fear of failure (Kuyatt, 2011). This fear is already present in pessimistic employees because this feared failure is oriented toward personal consequences if the change fails. Ninth is low self-efficacy and autonomy job (Jaramillo et al., 2012). The low self-efficacy refers to experiences that are oriented to change cannot be applied directly; in other words, employees who have low self-efficacy will not be maximized if included in the implementation of the change. And employees with low autonomy jobs will have difficulty in planning and determining the methods used to carry out work, including change programs. The tenth is too little affective commitment (Mckay et al., 2013). Employees with low commitment mean not having psychological attachment and work orientation for an extended period. Moreover, employees with low affective commitments lack the conformity they believe in and do not have the voluntary attitude to remain in the organization, in other words, employees do not care about the future of the organization and tend to resist changes, so they do not accept new demands to make work to be maximized. Whereas situational factors that cause resistance to change include, first, high information ambiguity (Greenhalgh, 1983). The high level of uncertainty in information makes it difficult for employees to accept information that is not certain in the truth. This causes employees to trust the issues that exist within the organization so that employees find it difficult to believe information about organizational change programs that lead to resistance to change. Second, the lack of participation in change (Coch & French, 1948; Lines, 2004). The low participation in these changes will make employees feel unnecessary in the



organization because the lack of participation and suddenly asked by managers to make changes will make employees confused and tend to reject changes. Third, low work comfort (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). Employees will work under pressure if the comfort in the workplace is low; this makes it difficult for employees to accept changes because they do not work in good conditions. Fourth, high cynicism and organizational silence (Reichers et al., 1997; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The increased cynicism makes the work environment uncomfortable, because this cynicism will affect other employees who have been positively oriented to accept change. Besides, the presence of organizational silence will make concealment and diversion of information, so employees tend to resist change because they do not know the problems facing the organization. This is due to the existence of norms that employees have so that it prevents them from stating what questions they see because they are forced to be silent on specific problems. Fifth, the lack of employee support (Kanter, 1985). This low level of support occurs because employees are lack work integrity, so they work merely to meet their needs without supporting the needs of the organization. It causes the organizational change program will not run if it is not accompanied by employee support, because they are the most members of the organization. Still on the same factor, the sixth factor is poor organizational culture (Leigh, 2002). Poor culture in an organization makes employees will also be accustomed to working with a poor orientation as well, so to run an organizational change program must first change the organizational culture to be better. The seventh factor is increasing job insecurity (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Employees with high levels of job insecurity will potentially resist change; this is caused by the concern that employees feel about job loss or insecurity about the future of their work that raises resistance to change. The eighth factor is the lack of information adequacy (Stanley et al., 2005; Oreg, 2006). Lack of understanding of information, especially about changes, can also be caused by a lack of employees' ability to interpret information. In other words, resistance to change occurs because employees are not sufficiently comprehensive in receiving information. The ninth factor is the lack of communication adequacy (Mckay et al., 2013). The low level of communication adequacy is the same as the low level of information adequacy. Rejection of change occurs because, within the organization, managers are not able to apply open communication to all employees. Finally, decreased organizational support and organizational justice (Jones & Ven, 2016). It can be caused by conflicts between leaders and employees; in other words, if there are problems within the working relationship between managers and employees, resistance to change will occur. Besides, when managers are unfair to all employees, employees with less fair treatment will tend to resist change than employees with appropriate treatment. In general, the dangers of adverse employee reactions that can inhibit changes in an organization, it is necessary to discuss how to overcome resistance to change. There are seven strategies to overcome resistance to change. The first is introducing the changes slowly. It allows all employees to be involved with the time of change, to find information, determine whether further training is needed to accept it, to adjust to change (White, 1998). The second is participation; participation is the most effective solution to overcome or reduce resistance to change (Griffin, 1993). It explains that all employees who are concerned with change can help or take an active part in the implementation or planning of change (Schermerhorn, 1999). Although this strategy can take a lot of time, the success rate in this strategy is quite high. The third strategy is psychological ownership which refers to feel attached to an organization (Dirks et al., 1996). There are three basic needs of self which are strong supporters of behavior and attitudes, among others: self-continuity, self-improvement, and control and efficacy. These three basic needs will affect how employees resist change, but will also depend on what type of change the organization has planned and whether the change is considered attractive or not by the employee. The fourth strategies are facilitation and education. Educating employees about the importance of the



potential benefits of significant change, it can reduce resistance to change (Griffin, 1993). Some facilitation procedures must be sufficiently available for planning changes. For example, human resource division or change initiating agents must notify that any changes that are carried out before the real implementation will occur and sufficient time is given by employees to adjust to doing something related to the change program in various ways, even new ways that are not yet controlled by employees (Griffin, 1993). The fifth strategy is the development of trust, with a strategy of minimizing misunderstandings and uncertainties that will ensure that all employees involved during the change process will receive the same information. Clarification during the change process will provide an opportunity for all members to seek their understanding of what problems they may face or have (Griffin, 1993; White, 1998). The sixth strategy is additional support. This support can facilitate change by reducing fear and anxiety in the change program itself. For example, active in understanding the problem and listening to all suggestions are forms of additional support (Schermerhorn, 1999). Also, training and the addition of employees during the training period, to minimize the workload during the change process, were considered good enough to reduce resistance to change (White, 1998). The seventh strategy is changing agents. The latter strategy can be used to reduce resistance to change when the initiator of change is deemed to be less than optimal and needs to be changed both programmatically and even in his position. Having people with objective thinking from outside the organization is responsible for helping to introduce organizational change (White, 1998). The initiating agent for change begins with assessing the situation before implementing the change. However, the employee's initial involvement with the agent who will be affected by the change is significant for his success in this strategy.

6. Conclusion:

In summary, the identified causes of resistance to change can be grouped into two main categories: individual factors and situational factors. Alongside the pursuit of organizational improvement through change, a set of seven strategies has been delineated to effectively address and overcome resistance. As a recommendation for future research, there is a suggestion to undertake a meta-analysis of studies focused on the phenomenon of resistance to change.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings:

A recapitulation of the key findings serves to distill the essence of the discourse. Individual factors, encompassing psychological and attitudinal dimensions, shed light on the intricacies of how employees respond to change. Lack of confidence, low self-stability, increased stress, uncertain feelings, and the lack of need for achievement intricately weave into the fabric of resistance. Meanwhile, situational factors elucidate the organizational context's role, where high information ambiguity, lack of participation, low work comfort, and organizational silence contribute to the resistance landscape.

The strategies for mitigating resistance, ranging from introducing changes slowly and fostering psychological ownership to developing trust and changing agents, provide a robust toolkit for organizational leaders. This toolkit acknowledges the dynamic interplay between individual and situational factors, urging leaders to adopt a tailored and flexible approach to change management.

6.2 Practical Applications:

The implications of these findings for organizational leaders are profound and multifaceted. The guidance derived from the discussion equips leaders with actionable insights into managing employee resistance effectively.

Understanding and Addressing Individual Factors: Leaders are encouraged to delve into the psyche of their workforce, recognizing the diverse array of individual factors that contribute to resistance. This involves fostering a culture of open communication where employees' concerns



and uncertainties are acknowledged. Strategies such as building confidence, providing support for self-stability, and addressing stress through transparent communication become imperative.

Navigating Situational Challenges: Recognizing the impact of organizational context on resistance, leaders are urged to address situational challenges head-on. This involves creating a work environment characterized by high information clarity, encouraging employee participation, ensuring optimal work comfort, and dismantling organizational silence. Leaders must prioritize the cultivation of a supportive culture that minimizes cynicism and maximizes organizational support.

Tailoring Mitigation Strategies: The identified strategies for mitigating resistance serve as a dynamic toolkit for leaders. The importance of introducing changes gradually, actively involving employees in the change process, and fostering psychological ownership cannot be overstated. Strategies such as facilitation and education, building trust, providing additional support, and, when necessary, changing agents are integral components of an effective change management arsenal.

Strategic Meta-Analysis for Continuous Improvement: The suggestion for further researchers to conduct a meta-analysis in the realm of resistance to change serves as a call for a holistic examination of existing research. By synthesizing and analyzing a diverse range of studies, a meta-analysis can provide a deeper understanding of overarching patterns, identify gaps in the current knowledge landscape, and offer insights into the evolving nature of employee resistance in the face of organizational change.

In essence, the practical applications derived from the discussion emphasize the need for organizational leaders to approach resistance as a multifaceted challenge requiring adaptive, empathetic, and strategic responses. By understanding the nuanced interplay between individual and situational factors and leveraging the identified strategies, leaders can pave the way for successful change initiatives, fostering a culture of resilience, adaptability, and sustained organizational growth.

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