Identifying the Reducing Resistance to
Change Phase in an Organizational Change Model

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Abstract: In this article we examine where in an organizational change process it is better to place the reducing resistance to change phase, so that employees would accept the new changes easier and not manifest too much resistance. After analyzing twelve organizational change models we have concluded that the place of the reducing resistance to change phase in an organizational change process is not the same, it being modified according to the type of change. The results of this study are helpful for researchers, but especially for organizational change leaders. As change leaders are usually the ones confronted with resistance from their subordinates, they must know exactly how to deal with it and when is the best moment to reduce it, depending on the type of change that is desired to be implemented. The key contribution to this paper is that the best way to gain employee's support and change attachment is to try and reduce resistance to change before the actual implementation. Only when an immediate or imposed change is required to be implemented, the methods and ways for overcoming resistance should be applied during and after the implementation stage, to ensure a successful implementation of the change.

Keywords: resistance to change; organizational change model; change leaders; communication; involvement.

JEL Classification: O30; O39

1. Introduction

Changes are necessary for those organizations that want to survive and improve their performance. More recently, global environmental, technological and financial shocks have forced organizations to adapt and transform their activities (Bennebroek Gravenhorst & In't Veld, 2004; Becovitz & Feldman, 2008). And of course, these transformations have been met with resistance from the employees. For many change leaders, resistance to change represents a big problem, something that needs to be overcome, an assumption which continues to be popular today (Furst & Cable, 2008; Harvard Bussines School, 2005). Resistance to organizational change is an inevitable phenomenon, because people are asked to reexamine and modify their behavior, which breeds resistance.

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To ensure a succeful change implementation, managers and change leaders must effectively overcome their subordinates resistance to change (Agboola & Salawu, 2011; Burnes, 2004; Kotter, 1996; Predişcan, 2004). Overcoming resistance to change is not an easy job, especially when over the years, employees have formed certain habits.

Even if the goal of each organizational change process is represented by the transition from the current state, considered to be unsatisfactory, to a future desired state, the process itself differs from one author to another. The starting point in developing all the organizational change models is represented by Kurt Lewin's work, especially his three step change model (Kanter et al., 1992; Griffin, 2008).

In this paper we aimed to identify the place where the reducing resistance to change phase should be located in an organizational change process, so that employees could accept the change easier, without manifesting too much resistance. If people know why things are changing, they are more willing to join the process (Ford &Ford, 2010).

We have analyzed twelve organizational change models and concluded that the phase of reducing resistance to change is either present, either absent or it can be inferred from the other stages that are present in the model. Also, the place of the reducing resistance to change phase in an organizational change process differs, according to the type of change which is desired to be implemented.

Further research could identify the reason why only two of the twelve organizational change models contain the actual phase of reducing resistance to change and why the other authors did not consider important to include it in their models.

2. The Reducing Resistance to Change Phase according to the Type of Change

The place of the reducing resistance to change phase in an organizational change process is not the same, it being modified according to the type of change. Even if the goal of each organizational change process is represented by the transition from the current state, considered to be unsatisfactory, to a future desired state, the process itself differs from one change to another. According to the change that is desired to be implemented, employees resistance will vary too (Predişcan, 2004).

There are several types of organizational change and to identify and highlight the place of the reducing resistance to change phase, we will refer to some of them.

It is known that employees are more willing to provide support for implementing a new change when it is planned, incremental, participatory and bottom up. The organizations personnel participates more actively in the change process when they

have the feeling that are part of the process and contribute to decision making. Accordingly, employees will accept more enthusiastically the change decision if it has been suggested by them.

For the above mentioned types of change, the phase of reducing resistance to change is recommended to be placed before the actual implementation stage. The change decision needs to be communicated by the executive managers in advance, so that employees would have enough time to adapt to the new conditions and acquire the necessary skills. This positioning of the reducing resistance to change stage in an organizational change process is recommended, as to implement succesfully a new change, the support and involvement of each member of the organization is essential. Employees need to be informed in advance about what will take place and "feel" that are part of the planning process since the beginning.

Although most of the changes that are implemented in an organization are planned, there are cases where the need for change is sudden (Predişcan, 2004). Depending on the economic environment, the management of an organization may decide to implement urgent and immediate changes, which may influence the future success of the organization.

The immediate changes, which necessity appears "over night", usually are unplanned, imposed, top-down and in some cases radical. Employee reaction to this kind of change will certainly be very negative, the success of the implementation being attributed to managements capacity to communicate with and motivate employees properly. In such crisis situations, when an urgent and unplanned change is required to be implemented, the change agent has no alternative but to resort to immediate implementation of change. The question is: where is located the stage of reducing resistance to change?

Since the organization does not have enough time to inform and obtain employees support regarding the new changes before the implementation phase, I recommend doing this *during the implementation phase* and *immediately after.* Once the implementation phase is started, the resisting forces will appear and simultaneously with the advancement of the process, their manifestation will be increasingly emphasized. Clearly, most of the staff will be confused, with the morale down and even resentful, which is why the change leaders should act rapidly. For a successful implementation of the new change I recommend managers to communicate constantly with their subordinates and to involve them as soon as the process begins. The role of the change agent is also very important, the individual or the team, having to immediately introduce the phase of reducing resistance to change, otherwise, the success of the new change might be in danger. First, employees must be made aware of the reasons which lead to the sudden implementation of the change and secondly, the advantages employees will benefit from must be stressed.

Although Predişcan (2004) recommends the positioning of the reducing resistance to change phase immediately after the implementation phase, the utility of the first phase may not be the same if during the implementation the change agent has not communicated or informed employees about what was happening. If an imposed or immediate change has been successfully implemented, it is considered that the pro change forces managed to effectively constrain the resistant ones, with little chances for expression of resistance at the ending of the implementation.

3. Identifying the Phase of Reducing Resistance to Change in an Organizational Change Model

To locate the reducing resistance to change phase, we analyzed a few of the most representative change models found in the literature. Analyzing twelve organizational change models, we have concluded that the stage of reducing resistance to change is either present, absent altogether, or can be inferred through the proposed ways to reduce resistance to change.

In the next table a synthesis of organizational change models and the importance given to the reducing resistance to change phase is presented.

Table 1. Identifying the reducing resistance to change phase

Reducing resistance to change phase is present	Reducing resistance to change phase is absent	Reducing resistance to change phase can be inferred
Predişcan change model	Kurt Lewin change model	Edgar Huse change model
John Sena change model	Moorhead – Griffin change model	Rosabeth Moss Kanter change model
	Beckhard and Harris change model	John Kotter change model
	Florescu – Popescu change model	Tichy and Devanna change model
		Nadler and Tushman change model
		Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team model

From Table 1 we can easily observe that only two models of organizational change from those analyzed, respectively Predişcan change model and John Sena change model, have the phase of reducing resistance to change present. This phase is clearly defined and to ensure the success of the new changes, the authors placed it before the implementation stage. Before making a change, employees must be informed, educated and actively implicated in the process. They need to feel that

are part of the process and contribute with personal ideas. Usually, all that is new is associated either with a potential gain or a potential loss. Therefore, proper motivation and presentation of the advantages from which will benefit employees are primary. The main methods to reduce resistance to change recommended by John Sena are: patience, education and communication (Litch, 2005).

In Predişcan's change model, the second phase of the design stage is called reducing resistance to change. The author emphasizes this phase because, if people do not want to change and act according to the new standards, the new change is not likely to last. The main ways recommended for reducing resistance to change effectively are employee's information and motivation.

The main method recommended to reduce resistance to change is communication. An open communication between change leaders or change agents and the other members of the organization will always avoid any misunderstandings and will stimulate a much active participation from employees part. Rewarding employees efforts equals with motivation, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic.

An important aspect of Predişcan model is that, although the model applies to planned strategic changes, it can be adapted, as necessary, to implement urgent or imposed changes. In such cases, the author recommends the rapid identification of the type of change needed, the change implementation and then returning to that phase of reducing resistance to change. Returning to this phase is imperative, because if employees do not understand what, how and why it happened, they can sabotage the whole process, change being in vain.

In Lewin's, Moorhead – Griffin, Beckhard – Harris and Florescu – Popescu change models, the phase of reducing resistance to change has not been identified. The authors decided to omit this phase either because employees understand the need for change and willingly participate at the change process, or because they do not manifest too much resistance.

In the other six models respectively, Edgar Huse's model, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's model, John Kotter's model, Tichy – Devanna model, Nadler – Tushman model and Price Waterhouse Change Integration Team model, the phase of reducing resistance to change can be inferred through the methods and procedures presented in the models stages.

The planning stage of Edgar Huse's model involves, besides presenting the actions to be performed, the identification of resistance to change from emplyees part. Although the model does not include a stage intitled „reducing resistance to change", the author emphasizes its importance early in the planning stage. Employee's resistance to change is identified, a series of measures for overcoming resistance are recommended and only after, the new change is implemented.

In Kanter`s model, the following three stages relate to reducing resistance to change:

- *Line up political sponsorship*, stage in which, for a change effort to succeed, all members of an organization must be involved in the organizational change process. Leadership alone cannot bring about large scale change, which is why a change effort must have broad based support throughout an organization.
- *Develop enabling structures.* In this stage enabling structures are designed to facilitate and spotlight change from the practical, training programs for employees, to the symbolic, rearranging the organization's physical space. Employees are empowered, but before that, they are send to trainings to gain the necessary knowledge. The effort reward is also very important, being it financial or non-financial.
- *Communicate, involve people and be honest.* As potent tools for overcoming resistance to change, the author recommends an open communication between change leaders and organizations personnel, an active involvement and disclosure. People accept a change more quickly when they are given all the information, know the advantages and disadvantages, and feel part of the process.

Indirectly, Kanter et al. (1992) recommend first reducing resistance to change and only after obtaining the support and involvement of employees, to resort to actual implementation.

Kotter (1996) also makes reference to the importance of reducing resistance to change, the ways recommended being identified in the following four stages:

- *Form a powerful coalition*, stage which implies identifying and attracting the key leaders of the change process and encouraging the team members to work together. These stages refer to a consensus building.
- *Communicate the vision,* the author describing the model as requiring multiple conversations. The vision should be frequently and powerfully communicated, embedded in everything the change leader does. Employees need to know exactly what is happening and how their actual situation will change.
- *The empowering* stage implies getting employees responsible, giving them both the authority to perform a task and the necessary knowledge and tools. It is considered that employees are less resistant if they have all the necessary information and are rewarded accordingly.
- *Generating short-term wins* refers to the fact that any gain, being it small or big, should be rewarded and communicated to the other members. Thus, people become more motivated to engage in the process, because their involvement will be associated with a potential gain.

A constant two-way communication and employee's empowerment represent two key ways to attract and involve staff in implementing a new change (Gerhard, 2004). Usually people are excited to participate in something new when they know exactly what will happen, how it will affect them and what benefits they will get. As long as employees feel that they have sufficient knowledge and control over the situation, resistance to change from their part might not be manifested.

As in the models mentioned above, the reducing resistance to change phase, which can be inferred from the four stages described, is located before the implementation stage. Kotter recommends to attract and involve personnel in the process before the actual institutionalization of the change.

The main methods and ways to reduce effectively resistance to change presented in the other models are: a constant and open communication between all members of the organization, employee's education and training, and an active implication. These methods are recommended to be applied before the actual implementation of the change.

4. Conclusions

The location of the reducing resistance to change stage in a process of organizational change varies from one organization to another, depending on the type of change which follows to be implemented. When a planned and strategic change is decided to be implemented, the reducing resistance to change stage will always be placed before the implementation stage. However, in extreme situations, when introducing a new change is urgent and immediate, first the change will be implemented and after, the change leaders have to return to the reducing resistance to change phase.

Not all of the organizational change models analysed present as being necessary to go through a reducing resistance to change phase. However, authors of the most models recommend that the reducing resistance to change phase should be located before the implementation stage.

Reducing resistance to change is a difficult phase because over the years, employees form certain skills and habits. But, overcoming employee's resistance is possible, if change leaders know how to act efficiently and remove all the barriers. Once employees will be notified of the advantages of the new change, many of them will become more open and willing to participate in the process. To ensure success of the new implementation, it is important that employees understand the need for change and engage actively in the process. The role of the executive management in this stage is also essential.

The present period, characterized by a dwindling economic crisis, has contributed greatly to the change of employee's behavior. Organizations benefit from more and more adaptable and "open" to new challenges employees, change becoming a norm. Those who can cope with it remain in the organization, while others leave.

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6. References

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