A Reducing Resistance to Change Model

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Abstract: The aim of this scientific paper is to present an original reducing resistance to change model. After analyzing the existent literature, I have concluded that the resistance to change subject has gained popularity over the years, but there are not too many models that could help managers implement more smoothly an organizational change process and at the same time, reduce effectively employees' resistance. The proposed model is very helpful for managers and change agents who are confronted with a high degree of resistance when trying to implement a new change, as well as for researches. The key contribution of this paper is that resistance is not necessarily bad and if used appropriately, it can actually represent an asset. Managers must use employees' resistance.

Keywords: resistance to change; change model; change agent; communication; behavior.

JEL Classification: O30; O39

I. Introduction

Analyzing several organizational change models, I've found that the reducing resistance to change stage is either present, either can be inferred or totally lacking (Braduțanu, 2012, p. 21). To successfully implement a new change, I consider that any manager or change agent, must pay a close attention to this stage. Of course, initially, a change can be implemented without employees' support, but it does not mean that the new change will last.

Being accustomed to a certain routine, people can always go back to the old habits, especially in those conditions when they do not perceive the necessity and importance of the new changes. The role of the change agents is essential if the new change is desired to persist. They must communicate constantly with employees', answering all their questions and when necessary, to involve the key members in the process.

Most methods of reducing resistance to change originate from Kotter and Schlesinger's (1979) proposed six methods, resistance to change being generally considered a negative phenomenon.

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Many authors (Lawrence, 1954; Maurer, 1996; Strebel, 1996; Waddell and Sohal, 1998; and others) point out that the reasons for the failure of many change initiatives can be located in resistance to change. Indeed, in some cases, resistance to change represents a negative phenomenon with adverse effects on organizational performance, a phenomenon that must be overcome. This view was presented in the first published works on resistance to change, but over the years, after more debates on the subject, a positive side of the phenomenon was highlighted. In "Reframing resistance to organizational change" by Thomas Robyn and Cynthia Hardy, I have identified two distinct approaches of resistance to change: a negative and a positive one.

The term resistance is complex and very often misinterpreted (Ford et al., 2008). Change leaders should change their perspectives on this subject and try to "see" resistance from a positive angle too. Just changing the prospect of analyzing it, managers could record a greater success in implementing new changes and attract more efficiently employees on their side.

II. A Reducing Resistance to Change Model

Further, I propose a reducing resistance to change model (Figure 1), stressing that an effective manager must use employees' resistance, in order to improve and refine the change process.

The proposed model is recommended to be applied when the manager or the change agent reaches the reducing resistance to change stage within an organizational change model. Depending on the place of the reducing resistance to change stage, which is determined by the type of change that follows to be implemented, the application of the model may occur before, during or after the actual change implementation.

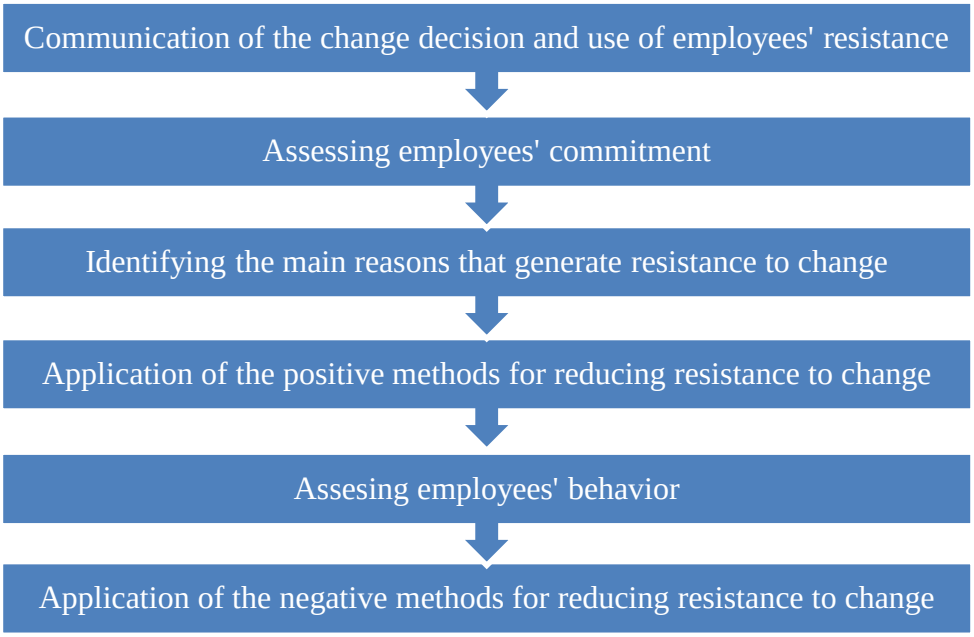

Figure 1. A reducing resistance to change model

1. Communication of the change decision and use of employees' resistance

Communication of the change decision and use of employees' resistance is the first phase of the model and requires an open communication between the change initiators and the affected members, so that the first would be able to announce openly the change decisions, and the last, to manifest their ideas regarding the change in question.

Although many authors recommend communicating the change decision at a propitious time, the reality indicates that this is not always possible. In order to perceive more easily the new initiatives, I suggest the communication of the change decision in such a way, that employees' would be able to openly express their views on the new process and have the opportunity to contribute with their own ideas. I emphasize on the two-way communication because often, employees can contribute with great ideas which can be useful at improving the change process.

Manifestation of resistance to change from some employees is inevitable at this stage, reason for which, the change agent must use it to his advantage. Since the resistance phenomenon assumes certain strengths, using them, he can gain employees' support, diminishing their resistance. The most common way through which change agents respond to employees reactions is "resisting their resistance, one force meeting the other" (Maurer, 1996). I believe that most often this approach

is wrong, especially since the change agent can benefit from the use of their resistance (Ford et al., 2008, Ford & Ford, 2010). And Fiorelli and Margolis (1993) state that a certain level of resistance may be beneficial for an organization.

In the present context, "the use of employees' resistance" means: hearing, considering and implementing some ideas of those employees who are against change, because very often, "the resistant people can provide valuable insights about how the proposed change may be amended in order to increase its chances of success" (Michelman, 2007, p. 3). Employees who agree with the new change rarely will propose creative ideas to improve the process, these ideas being much more easily and quickly obtained from those who resist.

In case of a planned change, the change agent may reserve some time for talks with key employees, finding out their views. The concern of the senior managers is to maintain or increase organization's performance, all the taken decisions being directed towards a positive end. However, there are multiple cases where employees from the middle and lower levels, exercising their daily activities and facing certain problems, may perceive the new change from a different perspective. They may detect certain aspects that need remodeling, the result of which, could have positive effects both on their work and organization's performance.

We recommend for managers and change agents not to ignore the views of the employees against change, but on the contrary, to use the valuable ones, because sometimes the resistant employees can come up with creative ideas that will contribute to a more rapid and effective implementation of the change. Further, after communicating the change decision, finding out employees views and considering the best of them, follows the second stage of the model.

2. Assessing employees' commitment

Assessing employees' commitment represents the second phase of the proposed model and involves analyzing employees' degree of commitment towards the organization where they work.

Before deciding which reducing resistance to change method must be applied, an effective change agent must assess the commitment of the members involved in the process and depending on the identified attitudes, to propose a number of solutions. The change management consultant, Daryl Conner, says that "resistance and commitment are two sides of the same coin". "Even if employees' resistance may not initially manifest, their lack of commitment could result in the appearance of a strong resistance to change throughout the process" (Davidson, 2002, p. 23).

To achieve a full assessment is it recommended to analyze separately each type of organizational commitment, namely: affective, continuous and normative commitment, as each type has its own results and implications on employee's behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Another important aspect that should not be overlooked is the need to assess the level of commitment in those circumstances when organization's management wishes to retain the most talented professionals. If they are not sufficiently attached towards the organization or satisfied, the management should take the necessary measures, otherwise, the loss of the best specialists may have negative effects on organization's performance. The organizations that face difficulties in retaining and replacing key employees, will also encounter difficulties in optimizing company's performance (Sarwar and Khalid, 2011, p. 671). As stated by the previously mentioned authors, "in addition to the immediate recruitment costs, there will be other hidden costs related to time management and low productivity, as the new employees will require some time before becoming effective at the new tasks".

3. Identifying the main reasons that generate resistance to change

Simultaneously or immediately after assessing employees' commitment, the change agent must identify the main reasons generating resistance to change, specific to each employee. The stage of identifying the main reasons of resistance to change is very important, because depending on the identified reason, a certain method for reducing resistance to change is proposed. Of course, the reasons for opposition will be different from one individual to another, depending on their own perception of the change process.

4. Application of the positive methods for reducing resistance to change

After assessing employees' commitment and determining the main reasons that generate resistance, the change agent has already formed an opinion regarding the existent degree of resistance within the organization and can apply a series of positive methods to reduce it. I focus on applying the positive methods first because, the change agent has to do his best to attract the affected members on his side. Only after they'll understand the need for new implementations, they will be willing to contribute to the process. In order to effectively reduce employees' resistance, I propose applying the following positive methods, with the condition that, they will be applied in accordance with the identified reasons. The positive methods for reducing resistance to change are: *a continuous communication, involvement, training, empowerment, financial and non-financial motivation, counseling and support, negotiation.*

The change agent must assume the task of choosing carefully the method or methods that respond better to the situation of the affected members and of course, to organization's culture and management style. Regarding the management style, I consider that the application of the positive methods are more characteristic for the participative style, while the negative methods are mainly practiced by managers who adopt an authoritarian style.

5. Assessing employees' behavior

Later after applying the positive reducing resistance to change methods, the change agent must evaluate employees' new behavior. He must determine if the application of the methods had the desired effect and whether the support of the affected members was gained or not. If the application of the positive methods was a success and resistance to change was diminished, the change agent can continue with the implementation of the new change. Otherwise, I emphasize on the necessity of the completion of the sixth stage of the proposed model, namely, application of the negative methods for reducing resistance to change.

6. Application of the negative methods for reducing resistance to change

In order to effectively reduce employees' resistance, I first proposed to apply a set of positive methods, but if they do not have the desired effect, the manager will have no alternative but to apply the negative methods. Since implementing the new change represents a priority for the company, its management will not hesitate to apply the coercive methods where employees do not want to subordinate to the new procedures. They either adapt to new conditions, either are penalized. It is believed that the management always has organization's interests in the limelight (Predişcan, 2004) and if employees do not change their behavior in a timely manner or, if their values do not correspond with those of the organization, the management will have no alternative but to take the necessary actions. After conducting a study in the banking sector, I found that employees emphasis more on their own interests than those of the organization (Braduţanu, 2012). It makes sense that an employee will cherish more his every day routine and job security, than to be exposed to some new changes that might cause potential disruptions. Here intervenes the role of the top managers, who as top priority will put organization's success and interests, and any incompatibility with them, will be considered a negative factor that must be eliminated. For this reason, when the application of the positive methods fails or when the position of the change initiator towards the opposing members is very strong, the application of the negative methods represents the ideal solution.

III. Conclusions

In order to improve a change process and gain employees' support, the manager or change agent must use employees' resistance. Resistance is not necessarily bad and if used appropriately, it can actually represent an asset. The proposed reducing resistance to change model consists of six phases and emphasizes on the importance of using employees' resistance. Also, in order to have pro change personnel, the change agents must first focus on applying the positive methods for reducing resistance to change, in this way gaining employees trust and support. If they are attached towards the organization and are explained clearly what is going to happen

and how the new changes will affect them, being presented both the advantages and disadvantages, employees will get on board and do their best to contribute to a successful implementation. Of course, not always the application of the positive methods will have the desired results. Depending on employees' level of commitment and trust in the change agent, they might refuse to get involved in the process and try to sabotage the new implementation. Since top management focuses first on organization's interests, the application of the negative methods might represent the only option.

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