

Dynamics of Organisational Change: Resistance, Readiness, and the Road Ahead

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Abstract: In today's rapidly changing and competitive business landscape, organizations are constantly forced to innovate to maintain success within their industries (Bagrationi, 2022). Resistance to change is often seen as a conscious and active choice of employees against proposed changes based on various prerequisites and motives (Oreg & Vakola and Armenakis, 2011). The purpose of this research is to explore approaches to resistance to change and readiness for change in terms of their differences. The following research questions were raised during the study: 1) What areas of research exist in the scientific discourse regarding attitudes towards change? and 2) What distinguishes understanding resistance from understanding non-readiness for change in these studies? To answer these questions, a bibliometric analysis was conducted of all English-language articles published in the journals of the first quartile (Q1) in the period from 1948 to 2022 in the category «Management, Business and Accounting», with an emphasis on attitudes to organizational change. The co-citation analysis was incorporated to narrow the sample from 21,162 articles to the most significant 258 articles. With the help of thematic analysis four main areas of research related to resistance to change and readiness for change were identified: 1) the «individual psychological» stream, 2) the «group» stream, 3) the «institutional and strategic» stream and 4) the «agency» stream. Our findings indicate that the bases for resistance to change and readiness for change are fundamentally distinct. This research underscores the variance in strategies for addressing resistance to change versus a lack of readiness for change. Tackling resistance to change is a reactive process that necessitates dynamic engagement by leadership, involving transformational actions, support for staff, and conflict resolution. This stands in contrast to the proactive fostering of change readiness, which primarily involves educating and informing employees.

Keywords: Attitude towards changes, Readiness for changes, Resistance to changes, Organizational psychology, Leadership

1. Introduction

Innovations emerge from various sources such as technological advances or changes in market demand (Vermeulen & Barkema, 2002; McGrath & Rotchford, 1983): new ideas, products and processes, or organizational structures, the implementation of which can significantly improve organizational performance (Ven van de & Poole, 2005). Regardless of their origin, innovations inevitably require organizations to implement accompanying changes (Tsoukas & Haridimos and Chia, 2002).

The existing literature identifies several constructs reflecting different aspects of attitudes toward change. Thus, «employee cynicism» towards change is considered to be a specific type of social attitude when employees doubt the sincerity or truthfulness of management's intentions (Andersson, 1996). «Commitment to change» reflects the degree to which an employee is willing to support and participate in the change process (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). «Openness to change» indicates an individual's willingness to accept and support innovation (Miller & Johnson and Grau, 1994). «Acceptance of change» is related to actively recognizing the need for change (Jones & Jimmieson and Griffiths, 2005), while coping with change focuses on an individual's ability to adapt to new conditions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

«Resistance to change» considered a conscious and active choice of employees against proposed changes based on various backgrounds and motivations (Oreg & Vakola and Armenakis, 2011). This may be due to threats to status, personal power, disagreement with the goals of the change or problems in the relationship with management (Eisenbach et al., 1999). On the other hand, «readiness for change» is usually related to positive perceptions and openness to upcoming changes, recognizing their necessity and usefulness (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). This paper focuses on these two constructs: although attitudes towards change are a complex and versatile phenomenon, resistance and readiness are the most fundamental and most popular among in the existing academic discourse.

The article by Stroh, 2021 identifies a pivotal shift in change management practices, stating a moving focus from primarily addressing employee resistance to actively cultivating their psychological readiness for change (Stroh, 2021). In this regard, the question arises: how relevant is it to study exactly resistance to change? Can the entire spectrum of employees' attitudes towards change be described in terms of one or another degree of readiness?

Through the systematic review analysis, the authors of the article discuss the possibility that employees may simultaneously exhibit both readiness for change and resistance to change and conclude that it is important to

The red cluster summarizes strategic aspects of change, focusing researchers' attention on the role of top management (e.g. Kotter, 1995; Tsoukas & Haridimos, 2002). This cluster includes C. Lewin's seminal work, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: concept, method and reality in the social sciences; social equilibrium and social change", where the "planned change" approach was first introduced, laying the foundation for subsequent studies of organizational change as a strategic process (Lewin, 1947). The green cluster emphasizes the dynamism of the change process and the adaptability of the organization during the period of change implementation (e.g. Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Studies of this cluster can be classified as institutional: they examine the role of culture, power relations, and change policies (e.g. Orlikowski, 1996; Oliver, 1991), as well as the dynamic capabilities of the organization (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). The purpose of several works categorized in this cluster was to develop tools to assess the readiness for change and the level of resistance of an individual employee (Oreg, 2003) and to explain how resistance can be managed (e.g. Armenakis & Harris, 2002). The light-blue cluster centered around behavioral aspects, primarily the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which establishes a direct link between attitudes, norms, perceived behavioral control, behavioral intention, and behavior itself. The purple cluster highlights control and power dynamics. Articles provide meaningful contributions to the understanding of control and power in the context of organizational change: a dialectical approach focuses on the relationship between control and employee resistance (Mumby, 2005), other works consider identity regulation as a form of organizational control and explore its implications for employee behavior in organizational change (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), and analyze cultural management in organizations and its relationship to control and power (Willmott, 1993). The yellow cluster, functioning as a «mirror», duplicates key works from the other clusters, identifying basic principles and approaches to the study of attitudes toward organizational change.

Thus, through co-citation analysis, we have uncovered key research areas in the field of attitudes to change. However, more detailed study is needed to uncover the interactions among theories and concepts. Thematic analysis, exposing important themes and relationships that might have been missed or under-reported in co-citation analysis, can pinpoint where theories intersect and guide more detailed research into readiness for change or resistance (Table 1). This allowed us to proceed to the description of the main results of the thematic analysis.

Table 1: The results of the thematic analysis

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
personality	discussion	structure	contract
psychological	act	divisional	main
contribute	readiness	requirement	agreement
failure	team	direction	life
employee	interpersonal	culture	relevant aspect
internal world	affect	emergent	department
desire	force	reason	goal
age	allow	gradual	necessity
career	common vector	openness	adaptivity
support	take action	unofficial	community
skill	organize	failure	balance
benefit	provoke	incremental	basis

4. Discussion

Group 1. (48%) «Individual-psychological» direction

The works included in this group focus on causes related to individual psychological characteristics such as personality traits and attitudes (e.g. Herold et al., 2007; Oreg, 2006). The publications included in the first group indicate that, overwhelmingly, employees seek comfort - an understandable and familiar situation, and the thought of impending change inspires anxiety and causes fear and alienation, subsequently becoming a complete barrier to attempts to overcome resistance to change by management (Rosenberg, Mosca, 2011). Researchers identify personality assumptions (self-esteem, self-efficacy, and others) and attitudes that directly influence resistance to change (Oreg, 2006). Other individual factors that influence attitudes toward change include demographic characteristics such as age, gender, skills and education, threat of personal power,

attitudes (trust) toward management, attitudes toward the difficulty of learning new technologies, and divergence of individual and organizational interests (Mumby, 2005; Venkatesh et al., 2003)

Thus, the first group is particularly significant and occupies almost half of the total volume of the thematic model. In a large number of works of this group the central role in the framework of employees' reaction to changes is given to individual-psychological characteristics, attention is focused on internal barriers and motives that can both contribute to resistance to changes and create conditions for readiness for them. According to this approach, resistance is predominantly caused by personal characteristics that directly influence the perception of change and reaction to it, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, and the causes of resistance are associated with anxiety due to the need to leave the comfort zone, with the avoidance of uncertainty (Oreg, 2006). Thus, in the works of the first group resistance to change is associated with personal preconditions and predisposition to a certain reaction to change, readiness for change is more associated with the perception of change by each individual employee and the degree of his/her awareness of these changes (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979).

Group 2. (22.5%) «Group» orientation

The second group rightly emphasizes the importance of group dynamics, team and interpersonal relationships in shaping and changing attitudes toward change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). Interactions within the group directly affect participants' awareness of the upcoming change, which can contribute to the formation of readiness, and group dynamics is one of the main factors affecting the success of organizational change (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). One reason for resistance may be the establishment of close ties within groups, which may lead to acting in the group's interests for fear of losing interaction with colleagues (Rafferty & Jimmieson and Armenakis 2013). In top-down directive change implementation, there is an increasing role for the authority of individuals and resistance to change may be based on the opinion of an authoritative participant (Eisenbach et al., 1999).

The second group focuses on the relationship between group dynamics and interpersonal relationships in the context of organizational change. Resistance to change in this group is primarily manifested through group dynamics: close ties within groups can lead to actions against organizational change for fear of losing those ties (Rafferty & Jimmieson and Armenakis 2013). Resistance can also arise from authoritative actors in a group when these actors resist change (Eisenbach et al., 1999). Norms and values play a key role in shaping readiness for change at the group level (Armenakis, Harris, 2002; Bordia et al., 2004). The degree of compliance of changes with the values and norms of the organization can serve either as an incentive or a barrier to their implementation, affecting the attitude towards change at the individual level (Rafferty & Jimmieson and Armenakis 2013). According to the works of the second group, to increase the level of readiness for change, it is necessary not only to provide clear information to employees about the upcoming changes, but also to take measures that promote the strengthening of interpersonal trust of employees in general and their trust in management in particular (Kotter, 1995).

Group 3. (16.8%) «Institutional and strategic» direction

The third group focuses on the attitude towards changes at the organizational level: the importance of aligning organizational changes with the company's development strategy is emphasized (Burns, 2004). When employees only learn about planned organizational changes retrospectively, the negative side of informal communication (rumors that create anxiety and fear of change) is manifested (Rosenberg & Mosca, 2011). Moreover, negative past experiences of change implementation can have a negative impact on the implementation of current changes: failed or incomplete changes cause employees to become cynical about management actions in the present and future changes in general (Tsoukas et al., 2002). In contrast, a policy of «small steps», continuous incremental change that allows the organization to continually adapt, can increase readiness for change through pairing long-term system plan-strategies with «quick wins» (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). On the other hand, the third group shifts the focus of attention to the external environment as well: it is in the third group that much work on institutional theory and resistance as a form of response to institutional pressures is concentrated (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). The context and reason for change can also influence the adoption or non-adoption of a particular innovation (Rosenberg & Mosca, 2011).

The third group's focus on the organizational level is also expressed in the way it illustrates the importance of organizational structure as a factor in a company's ability to change: structural characteristics (centralization or decentralization, hierarchy, size) directly affect the performance of the change implementation process and the level of resistance (Orlikowski, 1996). Other important ideas of the third group are the importance of the presence of a responsible person (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) controlling the process of change implementation

(whose presence contributes to increasing the level of readiness for change and promptly identifying problems with the current policy of change implementation), as well as the significant role of organizational culture, namely the conformity of change to the values and norms of the organization (Huber et al., 1993). In the works of the third group, resistance to change is generally viewed as an intentional action on the part of employees - it is to some extent an active expression of disagreement with proposed changes, often based on past experiences or rumors (e.g. Orlikowski, 1996; Rosenberg & Mosca, 2011; Tsoukas et al., 2002).

Group 4. (12.7%) «Agent-based» orientation

The last group examines the role of individual agents - active stakeholders - in shaping employees' attitudes towards change and relates the roles of individual actors to their capabilities in reducing resistance or in shaping readiness for change. Key here are the concepts of 'narrative' and 'meaning making' in the company: how exactly agents narrate change, how exactly meanings are translated (Isabella, 1990). It has been noted that the success of change is mediated by the achievement of consensus (agreement) rather than a directive approach (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Individual conditions of success of change agents are considered, such as high social status of the actor (as a necessary condition for its effectiveness in the role of a change agent, providing employees with necessary resources and the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills, providing support from immediate and top management, which will contribute to the perception of changes as fair (Eisenbach et al., 1999; Rosenberg & Mosca, 2011).

Thus, the works included in the fourth group emphasize how the role of individual agents in the process of change implementation is critical for generating positive employee attitudes towards the change: the narratives through which agents communicate information about change can both generate willingness and provoke employee resistance (Weick & Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005; Isabella, 1990). When change agents with high social status competently communicate with employees and support them on their mastery journey, their readiness for change increases (Higgs & Rowland 2005). In the absence of such work, especially if change is perceived as imposed or unfair, readiness levels may decline. At the same time, resistance is often a conscious choice; lack of readiness is more often related to a lack of understanding of how to adapt to a new situation. Effective change agents know how to distinguish between these two phenomena and adapt their strategies accordingly. Resistance to change in this context may be due to the actions of specific actors, e.g., employees with high social status who deliberately obstruct change for fear of losing their status or authority/privilege. The success of change may depend on the ability of agents, through transformational behavior, to form a suitable narrative by which change is perceived in a less negative way by company employees (Huy, 2002). Readiness for change, within the agency approach, can be enhanced by the actions of individual actors providing employees with the necessary support to acquire new skills. Research focusing on change readiness involves the development of approaches to foster positive attitudes towards change among employees and the organization (Teece et al., 1997; Ajzen, 1991).

5. Conclusion

Organizational change has traditionally been the focus of attention of researchers and practitioners in management and organizational psychology, with a special place in the discourse given to issues related to how to prepare employees for the upcoming changes and overcome their resistance (Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Kotter, 1995; Lewin, 1947; Coch, French, 1948). Since the late 20th century, «resistance» and «readiness for change» have become key concepts in academic and practical management discourse, epitomizing different attitudes towards the change process. The purpose of this study was to attempt to delineate the boundaries of these constructs.

Thus, resistance is most often associated with several social-psychological factors such as fear of the unknown, bias based on experience or the influence of the social environment and is expressed as active opposition to proposed changes (DiFonzo & Bordia and Rosnow, 1994). Readiness, on the other hand, acts as an indicator of understanding of the meaning of change, support and participation by management and their agents in the change process that organizations seek to implement (Teece et al., 1997). From these perspectives, unpreparedness is rather related to the lack or absence of knowledge and conditions for successful adaptation to new circumstances (Kotter, 1995; Burnes & Jackson, 2011). Therefore, resistance to change and readiness for change have different backgrounds and motivations, which require different approaches to studying and overcoming them (Oreg, 2006; Eisenbach et al., 1999; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Kotter, 1995).

Since the mid-twentieth century, staff resistance, which is often seen as a conscious choice of employees, has been assigned the role of a major obstacle to the successful implementation of organizational change (Lewin,

1947), and methods aimed at overcoming it are often based on a reactive approach, suggesting a predominantly reactive response to pre-existing circumstances. The goal of such interventions is to address concerns that may serve as sources of resistance - including those related to previous experiences, existing stereotypes, social pressures, and so on (Markus, 1983). To overcome resistance to change, management should, on the one hand, take into account both perceived threats to employees' status and social capital (including employee «blat», see: Bagrationi & Volkov, 2022), which cause disagreement with the goals of change, actively manage the change process by implementing a change-oriented style, such as transformational behavior (Eisenbach et al., 1999).

In contrast to methods within a reactive approach to overcoming resistance, building readiness for change requires methods implemented in a proactive approach. Such methods may also include persuasive tactics, for example: providing additional information about the benefits of change or showing successful adaptation examples of other organizations (Ajzen, 1991; Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). However, change readiness techniques are not aimed at transforming the already established attitudes of individual resisters, but at creating conditions for the involvement of a wide range of employees in the change process by providing them with the necessary support, by teaching them new skills and competencies (Weick & Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005; Isabella, 1990). They may also include creating a positive narrative about the upcoming changes, utilizing feedback mechanisms to capture employee opinions, and actively engaging leaders at various levels to promote change (Huy, 2002). Thus, the key difference between the two approaches is that while methods for overcoming resistance involve responding to problems that already exist, methods for creating readiness involve creating favorable conditions for the successful implementation of change.

Management often perceives their subordinates as a single social group with common goals, whereas the presence of different subgroups requires a much more nuanced approach to change management (Collins, 1998). Programs need to be shaped to both overcome resistance and build readiness. It is necessary to form programs aimed at both overcoming resistance and building readiness. The specificity of strategies designed to mitigate or neutralize resistance implies, for example, the inclusion in such programs of active leadership of change agents who are able to form an attractive vision of the company's future for employees after the implementation of changes (Bagrationi & Thurner, 2020): they need to actively communicate with employees, clarify their concerns and fears, and provide them with information about the reasons, goals and benefits of the proposed changes. To achieve this goal, change agents not only need to demonstrate their commitment to change and try to become a role model (Higgs & Rowland, 2005), but also use an individualized approach to employees who show a high level of resistance to consider their concerns, motives and needs in the communication work (Eisenbach et al., 1999).

Strategies to build readiness for change include emphasizing transparent and clear communication, employee training and development, and management support at all stages of the change process (Teece et al., 1997). Such strategies may involve a variety of training courses, master classes and workshops aimed at increasing employee awareness of change and its benefits to the organization (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Bamford & Forrester, 2003). The combination of these strategies is aimed at forming a synergetic effect that facilitates the process of change implementation and minimizes potential risks associated with resistance and unpreparedness of employees.

Based on this analysis, the directions for future research can be suggested. Since the vast majority of research has focused on a static understanding of the constructs under study, future research may shift the focus of researchers and practitioners to how resistance and readiness for change evolve over time in different contexts. Moreover, both best and unsuccessful change management practices should continue to be analyzed to identify key success factors.

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