

Identifying the Persons in Charge of an Organizational Change Process

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this research is to identify if there is a correlation between the change agent and resistance in order to change and to identify the persons who are in charge of conducting a change process within the Romanian organizations. To answer these two questions we have researched the current literature and carried out a research in the field, and discovered that even if in many cases the change agent can represent a force generating resistance to change within an organization, it does not apply to the analyzed sample. Also, we have identified the main categories of people who are in charge of implementing a new change and the results differ, depending on the size of the organization. This information is valuable for managers, researchers and practitioners.

Key-words: *change; resistance to change; change agent; direct manager; consultant.*

JEL Classification: *O30, O39.*

REZUMAT

Scopul prezentului articol este de a identifica, dacă există o corelație între agentul schimbării și rezistența la schimbare, și de a identifica persoanele care se ocupă de implementarea unui nou proces de schimbare organizațională în cadrul organizațiilor din România. Pentru a putea răspunde la aceste două întrebări, am cercetat literatura de specialitate și am efectuat o cercetare practică, constatând că, chiar dacă în multe cazuri agentul schimbării poate reprezenta o forță generatoare de rezistență la schimbare în cadrul unei organizații, acest fapt nu se aplică în cazul eșantionului analizat. De asemenea, am identificat principalele categorii de persoane care se ocupă de punerea în aplicare a unui nou proces de schimbare și rezultatele diferă, în funcție de mărimea organizației. Această informație este valoroasă pentru manageri, cercetători și practicieni.

Cuvinte-cheie: *schimbare, rezistența la schimbare, agent al schimbării, manager direct, consultant.*

Clasificare JEL: *O30, O39.*

1. Literature Review

By assuming that only employees can manifest resistance, the possibility that change agents can manifest it as well is being ignored.

The effectiveness of a change agent depends on his or her ability to influence others, to discover and mobilize human energy (both in him/herself and in other employees), to maintain a sense of humor

and perspective and to have self-confidence and interpersonal skills (Burke, 1992, p. 525). Although most of these skills can be learned, individuals who during a change process make the transition from manager to change agent often encounter major difficulties, since they are not prepared for the complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty specific to this project. To make the transition from manager to change agent, a prospective manager must possess the following skills (Gilley, 2001, p. 5):

- understand and apply the objectives of the change process;
- adopt a change agent's roles and responsibilities;
- design and develop the change activities;
- demonstrate competencies and skills specific to a change agent;
- implement and evaluate change initiatives.

An efficient change agent must possess all the necessary abilities and capabilities to initiate and successfully manage an organizational change process. The change agent should have enough knowledge in managing change along with social psychology and display communication skills, creativity and last, but not least, credibility (Predișcan, 2004, p. 230). Gaining employees' trust is not an easy task which is why the change agent must communicate with them constantly or as much as possible, trying to convince them of the necessity of the new changes, as well as presenting the potential benefits of the change.

The change agent who attempts to implement a new change can come either within or outside the organization. Both possibilities have their advantages and disadvantages. In case of small scale changes, management usually employs someone who is a manager from within the organization and who has earned the respect and trust of others. However, when a major change is implemented, it is advised to form mixed

teams of specialists with managers within the organization and also external consultants. Thus, the experience and objectivity of external change agents is combined with the confidence and knowledge held by the internal change agents. The external consultants are more objective about the organization's situation, while the insiders have the employees' trust, being permanently in contact with them. A successful collaboration, however, is guaranteed only when the two teams get along well. And so, the change agent(s) can be either a manager or group of managers within the organization, specialists from outside the organization, or a joint team of experts with specialists from inside and outside the company.

Since usually a middle or top manager is deemed a change agent, depending of course on the magnitude of the change, I will emphasize why it is better that the chosen change agent should be a person from a higher level in the organizational hierarchy.

I highlighted these two levels because when a new change is proposed, the organization's management usually selects a person from these categories. The course of selection differs, depending on the type and stretch of the change. The bigger stretch of change, better it is to choose a person, in this case a manager, from a higher level of management. Why? People usually have greater confidence in top managers, especially in those who have seniority, trusting them more even in turbulent times.

As presented in the paper "Change Agent – A Force Generating Resistance To Change Within An Organization?", the change agent himself can generate resistance to change (Predișcan, Braduțanu, 2012, p. 5). There are cases when a change agent adopts an inappropriate management style, making obvious mistakes during the change process. They may not perceive employees' resistance, do not understand the reasons why employees oppose new changes, or do

not know and apply efficiently the reducing resistance to change methods. "Change agents contribute to the occurrence of what they call 'resistant behaviors and communications' through their own actions and inactions, owing to their own ignorance, incompetence, or mismanagement (Ford et al., 2008, p. 362)." The possible actions of the change agent the inadequate communication and the inaccurate information along with misleading and betraying the employees' trust. As Cobb et al. (1995, p. 265) state, change agents contribute to the increase of the resistance to change phenomenon from the part of the affected members "by breaking agreements both before and during change and by failing to restore the subsequent loss of trust." Secondly, considering that they know better what to do and to not jeopardize their authority, often change agents ignore the ideas and proposals of the affected members which leads to a further increase of resistance from the employee.

If change agents expect the resistance to change phenomenon to be manifested, then they most likely will encounter it (Kanter et al., 1992). Starting from the pre-

conception that employees will manifest resistance, change agents will look for signs to confirm their initial assumptions. Since each change agent perceives resistance to change in his/her own way, in order to confirm his hypothesis, the change agent can classify as resistant those actions and non-actions that in reality are just normal behaviors. It is normal when a change initiative is announced for people to be curious and ask questions. They want to know more about the change process and it would be a mistake to consider such type of behavior as resistant. Change agents should try to answer all the questions and involve the employees as much as possible in the process in order to gain their support.

Sometimes, in the case of an unexpected problem, the change agent may attribute the negative effects of the change process to the resistance to change phenomenon but always, when a change will be successfully implemented, the success will belong to his or her efforts. From this point of view, resistance to change is often presented as being the source of all problems encountered in an organizational change process. In this way, change agents can transfer their

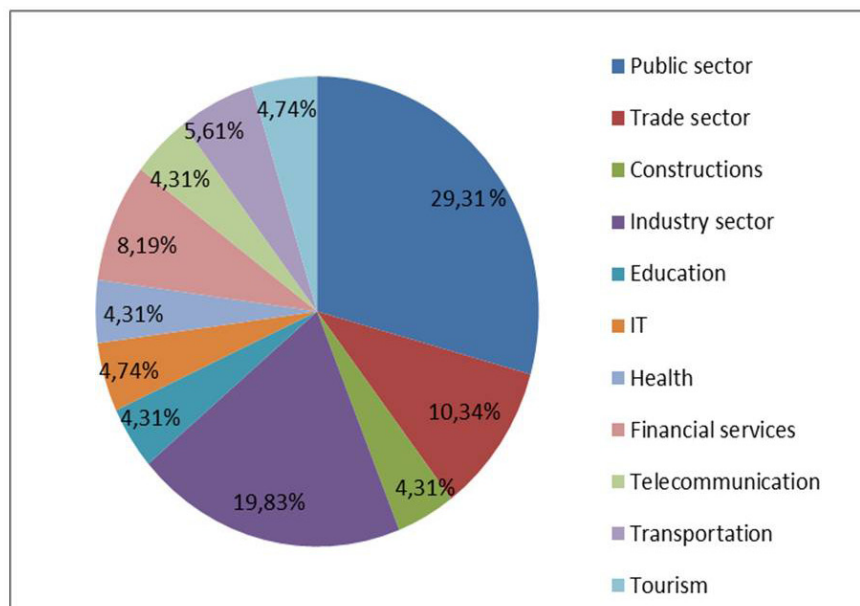


Figure 1. Fields of activity.

own failures, as a result of some inappropriate decisions, onto the employees who manifest contention, blaming them for the failure of the change process.

2. Method

The aim of this study was to inform practitioners, managers, researchers and other interested persons about the main reasons why employees oppose a new change, as well as the way managers cope with employees' resistance to change. Data was collected through a questionnaire, the participating organizations being both from a private and public sector. The survey included 232 employees, from which 112 were top managers and 120 were operational officers. The acceptance rate of responses was 80.55%. As stated by Edwards et al. (1997, p. 86), „there is no accepted criterion for responses to surveys, but in general, the rate of 50% or more is considered to be satisfactory.”

The respondents who participated in the study were from various parts of the country, however, most responses were received from employees in Bucharest, the western and eastern parts of the country.

3. Results

1. Descriptive analysis. As the participants to the study worked in organizations with different fields of activity, we began our research with a classification of the res-

ponses according to the field of activity. 11 fields of activity were identified, the largest share being held by organizations in the public sector - 29.31%, followed by organizations in the industry sector - 19.83% and trade sector – 10.34% (Figure 1).

In order to achieve a deeper research of the resistance in order to change phenomenon, two types of organizations were considered: private and public.

It can be easily seen in Figure 2 that more than half of the respondents work in a private organization - 52.59%, but even

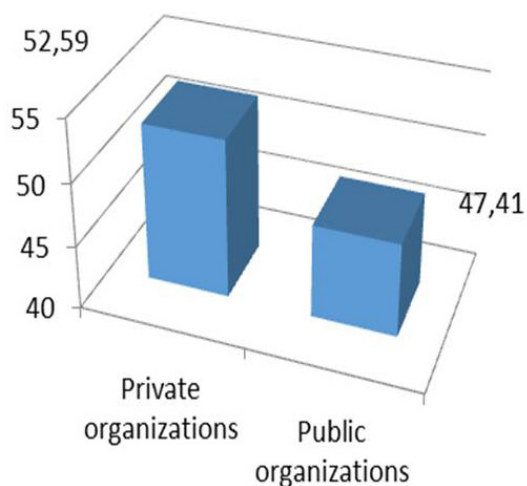


Figure 2. Private organizations versus public ones.

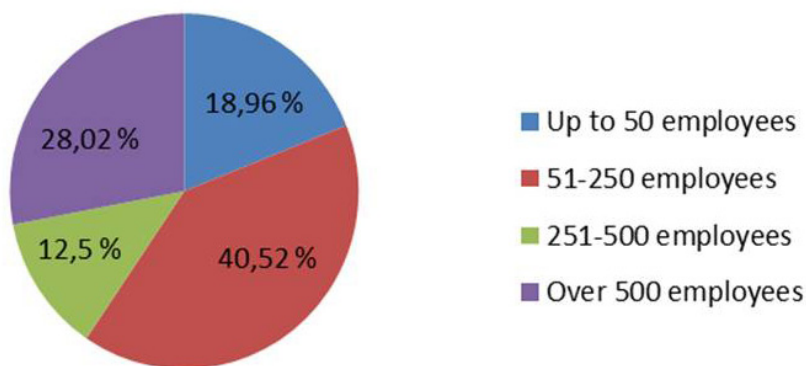


Figure 3. Sample's structure in relation to organization's size.

so, the number of the respondents from the public sector is quite satisfactory, yielding a value of 47.41% .

Analyzing the structure of the sample in relation to the size of the organization, we found that respondents come from organizations of different sizes. As it can be seen in figure 3, the most active respondents are from organizations with a number of 51-250 employees, representing 40.52% of the sample and they are followed by employees of large companies with more than 500 employees, which represent 28.02%. On third and forth place are situated employees from small organizations

and those that have a number of 251-500 employees.

The average age of the operational officers was 34 years old, while for top managers it was 44 years old. The most active respondents had an age between 26-35 years old, being followed by respondents with an age between 36-45 years old and 46-55 years old. Only 13 of the respondents had an age below 25 years old and no employee was aged 65 (Figure 4).

As respects employees' sex, 121 respondents were women and 111 were men. In the case of top managers more respondents were males, 54.5%, while in the case

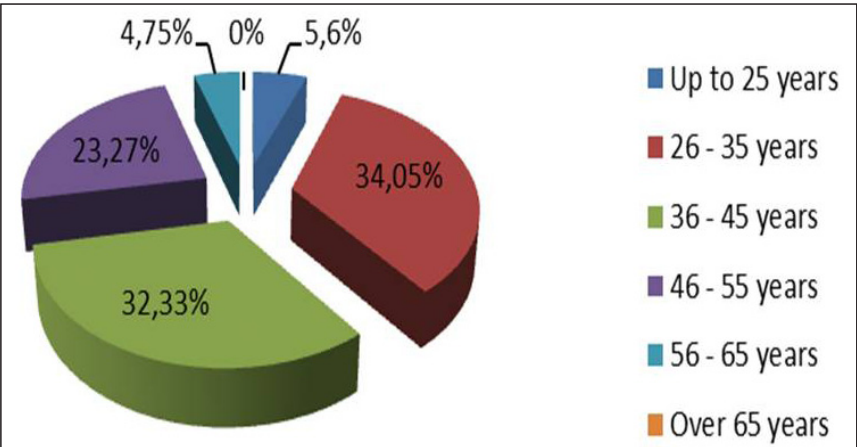


Figure 4. Sample's structure in relation to employees' age.

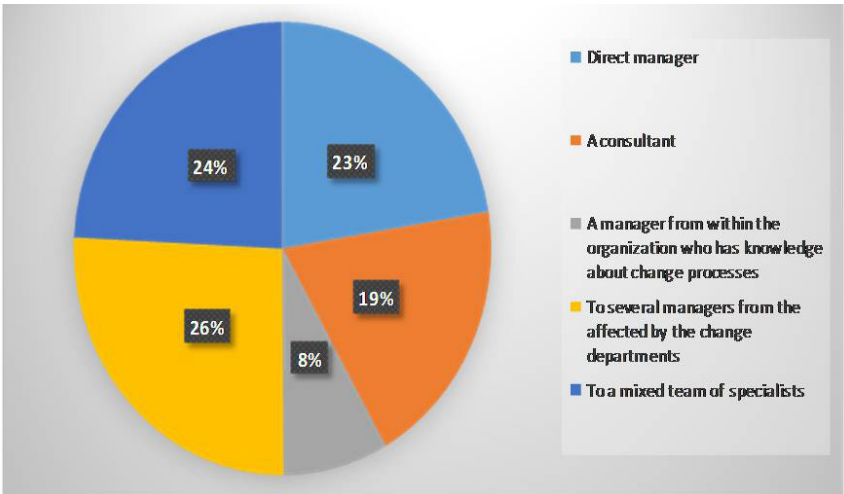


Figure 5. The person/persons who are responsible for coordinating a change process in terms of top managers.

of operational officers, females were predominant, 58.3%.

II. Identifying the persons in charge of an organizational change process.

Analyzing the results of the correlation between the change agent scale and resistance to change scale, no significant correlation between these two was identified. According to the statistical results, the change agent does not generate resistance to change through his actions in the analyzed companies.

Since the responsibility of coordinating a change in an organization usually belongs to one or more persons from inside

one manager who has knowledge about organizational change - 8%.

In terms of operational officers, the responsibility for coordinating changes most often belongs to the direct manager - 26%, being followed by several managers from the affected departments - 24%. The management of the organizations often enlist the help of mixed teams and specialized consultants, both categories obtaining a value of 20%. And similar to the above figure, rarely the responsibility for implementing a new change belongs to only one manager who has knowledge about organizational change - 10%.

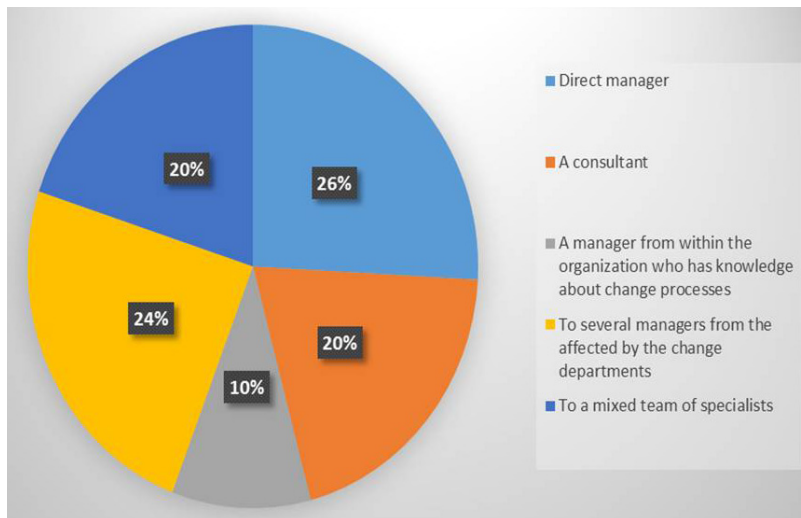


Figure 6. The person/persons who are responsible for coordinating a change process in terms of operational officers.

or outside the organization, or to a joint team, further I have decided to present two figures in which are shown the categories of staff who have the responsibility for coordinating a change process, both in terms of top managers and operational officers.

Looking at figure 5, we see that in terms of top managers, the responsibility for coordinating changes most often belongs to a few managers from the affected departments - 26%. The organizations often use mixed teams - 24%, but rarely there are cases when the responsibility for implementing a new change belongs to only

In large organizations, top managers either enlist to the help mixed teams either prefer to engage in the process multiple managers from the affected departments, while in small organizations, the responsibility of coordinating a change usually belongs to the direct manager.

4. Conclusions

Even if in some cases the change agent can represent a force

generating resistance to change, it is not the case for the analyzed sample. No significant correlation between the change agent scale and resistance to change scale was identified.

Analyzing the persons who have the responsibility for coordinating a change process, it was found that in terms of top managers, the responsibility for coordinating changes most often belongs to a few managers from the affected departments - 26%. The organizations often use mixed teams - 24%, but rarely there are cases when the responsibility for implementing

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