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Review Article

Implementing Organisational Change

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Abstract: The present monograph aims to describe comprehensibly the difficulties organisations have to face when trying to introduce changes. One of them is internal resistance to change. The sources of resistance are complex and varied. Among them, one may find uncertainty, need to feel secure, fear of losing power, unwillingness to change habits, and economic factors. Through a selective literature review, this paper seeks to offer some recommendations that may prove useful when designing and implementing change initiatives within an organisation. Some steps to follow are identifying what can be changed, establishing affordable goals, identifying change agents, creating trust, and developing commitment and a positive attitude towards change.
Keywords: Change, leader, resistant, organisation, process.

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age of changes; they happen so rapidly that it is possible to state that nowadays the only stable thing is change itself. Changes affect us at every moment. Whether we want it or not, changes alter and transform our world, our values and our beliefs. Consequently, changes –especially those that occur within social systems- will affect people and organisations, transforming not only our objectives and needs but also our priorities, roles and tasks.

Technology, principally in the field of communication, has made distances short. Today nothing happens unobserved. In the economic area, many transnational companies have spread all over the world holding budgets which may surpass those of some undeveloped countries. Products become obsolete very fast and hence mass consumption is encouraged.

These simple examples whose only aim is to illustrate just a minimal portion of what is happening nowadays, lead us to the following questions: what happens to people and organisations in this ever-changing contemporary society? How can we cope with change in our institutions? Providing some plausible answers to these enquiries will be the purpose of the present paper.

Resistance to Change

It seems true that sometimes it is not easy to adapt to physical changes and technological improvements; nevertheless, social and methodological changes are much more difficult to face. It has been said that it is easier to take a space shuttle millions of kilometres away into outer space than to change a single habit, an attitude or a belief someone might have preserved for a long time. During our professional experience, we have found much truth in this statement as people generally do not like and even despise changes.

Some trivial examples to illustrate this point may happen even at home. For instance, we are not always willing to accept or adapt to a new distribution of our pieces of furniture. Sometimes, we might even receive a bitter accusation "you have changed" as if changing were something terrible or undesirable.

Other examples of this resistance to change may also be found in our professional life. When facing change, we have realised that my colleagues or co-workers find it easier to adapt to a new building or location than to adopt new working procedures or methods. The latter conveys the idea of building a new mentality, something far more difficult to achieve.

Rodríguez (2011) makes a significant contribution to the study topic by stating:

Resistance to change comes a) from the need for security which Maslow proved may turn into a preference for the known as opposed to the unknown. b) From particular interests which may seem threatened. c)

From the lack of vision and clarity regarding the eventual benefits of change. d) From inertia which prefers to keep the same rhythm rather than doing an additional effort to change it. e). From contradictory interpretations concerning the change, its scope, objectives, etc.). From the absence of resources which can make innovation difficult or impossible to maintain. e) From internal envy and bad dispositions which make people and departments in an organization opposed to innovations that come from other people and departments. (p.217)

Having a clear idea of what produces this resistance may help us to develop a series of strategies to face and overcome it. Before facing this task, it is necessary to know some other authors' opinions about this topic, as a means to enlarge our horizons and find proper support.

Robbins & Judge (2019) have also tried to explain this resistance to change. In his view, the reasons for this resistance are found in basic human features such as perceptions, personalities and needs. The authors establish five types of reasons why people might resist change. They are habits, security, economic factors, fear of the unknown and selective information processing.

Habits are a part of our lives; they can be considered programmed answers which help us to face a complex society. Robbins and Judge (2019) consider that when someone faces change, one will tend to respond in accustomed ways thus becoming a source of resistance." This is a very powerful concept that one should keep in mind when deciding how to introduce some change in any organisation.

Security is another influential concept when related to change. People need to feel safe, if change threatens their security, they will tend to resist it.

Economic factors are also to be considered. In Robbins' and Judge's (2019) opinion, individuals will resist change if they perceive that it might diminish their income.

Fear of the unknown. Many people consider that a given change may bring uncertainty as it will replace something we know and manage for something new and difficult to understand and cope with. As a result, they will develop negative attitudes towards the intended change.

Selective information processing. According to Robbins and Judge (2019), this is another important factor which leads to resistance to change. They emphasize that "individuals are guilty of selectively processing information to keep their perceptions intact. They hear what they want to hear, and they ignore information that challenges the world they've created." (p. 628)

All these concepts developed by Robbins and Judge (2019) have the merit of being understandable and applicable to almost every individual. Knowing them will be of great help when the moment comes to design a plan to introduce changes in our organisation. We will deal with managing change further on in this paper.

Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2017) also try to explain why people resist change. The reasons they provide may seem not as complete as Robbins' and, in many ways, they share many elements in common; however, they are simple and direct.

According to the authors, people fear and resist the unknown. In their own words: "An organizational restructuring may produce uncertainty concerning the effects on the job. People want to feel secure and to have some control over the change. Organizational restructuring can leave a person unsure about the consequences at work." (2017: 374)

Another reason for resisting change is not knowing or understanding the reason for it. Usually, people do not perceive why changes are necessary.

The last reason Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2017) present for resistance to change is that individuals may also think that change can make their power decrease and their benefits reduced.

So far, we have tried to demonstrate how change is resisted by individuals; notwithstanding, as we are all part of multiple organisations and they are formed by people, we can easily infer that what affects people will also affect organisations. As a result, we can anticipate that there exists an organisational resistance to change, as well as an individual one. We will now refer to organisational resistance.

Organisations, especially those which have developed a formal structure, tend to be conservative and resist change. Once again, Robbins and Judge (2016) offer six interesting sources for organisational resistance to change.

The first one is *structural inertia*. Organizations pose different mechanisms to produce stability. Robbins and Judge (2019) explain, "Organizations have built-in mechanisms—such as their selection processes and formalized regulations—to produce stability. When an organization is confronted with change, this structural inertia acts as a counterbalance to sustain stability." (p.628)

The second source of resistance is a *limited approach to change*. When you want to introduce a

certain change, you need to alter the whole organisational structure; otherwise, the change is not going to be accepted. Changes which are applied just to subsystems will end up being annulled by the bigger systems.

Group inertia is a third source. Regulations and rules may be a restriction for change, even when individuals are willing to change and convinced of its benefits. For example, many employees who want to accept a new performance evaluation method proposed by managers may have a very difficult time if the union they belong to does not like the idea.

A *threat to expertise* is in Robbins' and Judge's (2019) opinion another source of resistance. When changes in organizational patterns are introduced the specialised groups could feel threatened. To illustrate this point, we can refer to a great deal of accounting work which not long ago was done manually by groups of experts and that nowadays is carried out by only a few individuals through computerised methods. Inevitably, this situation tends to create strong resistance.

Another aspect worth considering is a *threat to the established power relationships*. Any change, in the ways decisions are taken, may be felt as dangerous by managers, especially, if it implies a new distribution of power or a more participative decision-making process.

A *threat to the established power relationships* is the last source of resistance listed by Robbins and Judge (2019). Their words provide a clear vision of this concept, "Any redistribution of decision-making authority can threaten long-established power relationships within the organization." (p. 628)

In this section, we have attempted to review some of the main sources that produce resistance to change, both at an individual and organisational level. This information will prove essential when trying to determine the best ways to reduce resistance before intending to introduce any change in your organisation.

What can be changed?

Before reviewing the main ideas of authors who have studied change management and before trying to provide some hints to manage change, it seems prudent to devote a few lines to the most important aspects that can be changed within an organisation. Knowing them will help us to make better decisions when having to introduce organisational changes.

Cao, Clarke and Lehany (2000) develop a classification of four types of organisational change. They focus on their interactions and interrelatedness. Before presenting the different kinds of change, they point out that "Organisational change exhibits a diversity which relates to all the different but interrelated dimensions of an organisation, including the interaction of technical activities, of the organisation with its environment, and the organisational design and management style" (2000: 3). Having this concept in mind, will help us to identify the most important dimensions of organisational change.

According to the authors, the different kinds of organizational change are: (i) changes in organisational processes, (ii) changes in organisational functions, their organisation, coordination and control; (iii) changes in values, beliefs and human behaviour in terms of relationships to social rules and practices, and (iv) changes in power distribution and the way organisational issues are influenced.

The names given to the four types of change are highly descriptive, hence they do not require further explanation. Nevertheless, we would like to make the following precision. These four types of organisational change are classified and described on a theoretical basis; consequently, in practical terms, you will very rarely find them in a pure form. You can easily expect them to appear in a mixed way. This implies being able to identify and manage all four types and their interrelations at the same time.

Another author who provides a classification of change worth considering is Chiavenato (2012). When referring to organisational change, he states

It arises when new attitudes, values and behaviours are discovered and adopted. The agent of change leads individuals, groups, or the whole organization to promote new values, attitudes and behaviours through processes of identification and internalization. The members of the organization identify themselves with the values, attitudes and behaviours of the change agent to then internalize them since they perceive their effectiveness in their performance. Change is the stage of learning new ideas and practices that people think and execute in a new way. (p. 322)

Once again, we can see how different kinds of changes are interrelated. Chiavenato (2012) also presents four types of alterations: (i) changes in organisational structure; (ii) changes in technology; (iii) changes in products or services, and (iv) changes in organisational culture.

The first type is related, for example, to new organisational designs or changes in the work structure. The second deals with new equipment and processes. The third refers to new products services and clients, while the last one is connected to new attitudes, perceptions, expectations, skills, and results. As we will see, these changes need to be managed by the organisation if you expect the alterations you are planning to introduce to be successful.

Coincidently, Robbins and Judge (2016) also present four different types of changes. These categories are changes in structure, changes in technology, changes in physical location and changes in the people. As one may realise, the first two coincide with the ones Chiavenato (2012) includes in his classification.

Changes in structure refer to altering the authority relationships, and coordination mechanisms, aiming to redesign the job or similar structural variables.

Changes in technology are nowadays led by the introduction of new equipment and computers. Naturally, this will affect the way things are done at work. These kinds of changes usually seek to increase production and improve efficiency.

Changes in the physical location include aspects such as alterations in buildings and offices and new distribution arrangements at the different working places.

Finally, *changes in the people* can be described as new attitudes, skills, expectations and behaviours to be developed by the individuals who form an organisation. Despite being named differently; this type of change is very similar to the one Chiavenato (2012) refers to as changes in organisational culture. In brief, we can conclude that Robbins and Judge's (2019) and Chiavenato's (2012) classifications have very much in common since they share three out of four elements. This common ground will become important information when considering what to change and how to do it.

Managing change

In this section, we will review and analyse some strategies experts suggest to manage change efficiently. By including several authors' opinions, we want to demonstrate that there may be more than one approach to introducing and administrating change properly.

Denton (1996) suggests four direct guidelines for change. His first rule is what are you trying to do? He establishes the following steps within this rule. Firstly, identify what area or issue needs to be changed and then select an affordable goal. Nevertheless, one has to be careful. The author warns us, "What is clear is that any problem or issue has many factors to consider. Any system has numerous interconnected parts and subsystems. Everyone needs to know specifically what you are trying to change." (1996: 7) What will probably happen is that one alteration will lead to another; consequently, after something is changed many other alterations might occur. A way to handle this phenomenon is to establish an objective after you have asked all those people that are going to be affected or

involved in the process. This will help to create a stronger level of commitment and thus increase the chances of the desired change being successful by making the established objective more easily available.

The second rule Denton (1996) describes is creating trust and buy-in. To achieve it one needs to be fully convinced of the benefits change will carry. As a change agent, one should talk about it as if it were the most desired goal to fulfil and use every opportunity to give proof of its importance. When problems arise, one should not lose interest but show commitment at all times. A leader should make every attempt to maintain open communication. People will follow their leaders and accept change if they perceive it is positive for the organisation as well as for themselves. Being flexible and accepting feedback is also highly recommendable.

Denton's (1996) third rule is creating disciples and followers. One has to get everyone on board. Try to get agreements on what changes need to be introduced. Focus all your efforts on those changes. Create teams formed by people who will be involved in the changes. Make them your followers. They will help you to reduce resistance and hence make changes more affordable.

Measure and monitoring the change implementation process is Denton's fourth and last rule. One has to make sure change is working and the best way to do so is through outcome measurement. This will allow correcting some methods or processes if the change is not occurring the way it was designed. As a result of an opportune problem or deviation detection, one will save energy, time and money. Denton (1996) affirms:

When it comes to establishing measurements make sure the right things are measured (e.g. measure quality, not the number of people attending quality meetings). Perhaps just as important, maybe more important, is the owner of those measures of performance. Have employees become actively involved in creating their measurement and numbers systems. Encourage them to create incentives for positive behaviour and disincentives for negative behaviour. (p. 7).

In addition, it is also important to consider that one needs valid measures of performance. One has to set baselines and standards as a means to determine whether changes are having an impact or not.

Models for organisational change usually consist of five phases: needs analysis, strategy design, development, implementation, and maintenance.

Needs analysis this first phase is formed mainly by gathering information to have enough elements to decide on what changes are needed. To collect the data, one can use bibliographical references,

interviews, questionnaires, and other information-gathering tools.

The second phase, *strategy design* is characterised by the goals which have to be established. These objectives not only shape one's change process but also help to distinguish how changes will occur. The strategy to select should be flexible enough to last in time. Strategies tend to be more effective when they are a result of teamwork.

Development to achieve the objectives already identified, one needs to develop specific interventions and strategies. The intervention one plans should consider the possible impact of external input, impact on people within the organisation, impact that affects work tasks and structures, and impact on policies, systems, and practices in the organisation.

Implementation it helps to know how the interventions are going to be implemented by providing a detailed plan. When developing it, one should know who is going to be involved, when, where, and how the interventions will be accomplished.

Finally, *maintenance* is a critical phase. To be able to maintain change effectively, one has to create a plan to support and sustain change. Such a plan should answer the following guiding questions, how to ensure broad-based participation, how to ensure ongoing communication, how to obtain feedback, when and how to conduct audits, how and when one will conduct reviews, and how to reward efforts on an ongoing basis, who is responsible for monitoring and managing the bigger picture, and how to ensure that harm reduction philosophy becomes part of an ongoing process of improvement rather than a short term project.

Koontz, Weihrich, Cannice and Koontz (2017) also suggest some techniques to introduce change in the organisation. In their opinion, a change process consists of three main steps: defrost, change, and refreezing.

The first phase aims to create a positive attitude towards change. People who are not a hundred per cent satisfied with the present situation may help you to develop a favourable disposition.

The second step is characterised by change itself. It can be achieved through new information learning, acquiring new concepts and getting new perspectives or points of view.

Change achieves stability in the third phase. The change one must be trying to introduce fits in well with the organisational objectives, values, and behaviours. Otherwise, one risks losing acceptance and thus efficiency.

Going back Robbins and Judge (2019), also offer some approaches to administrate change.

Probably, the most interesting one is action research. The authors define it as "A change process based on systematic collection of data and then selection of a change action based on what the analyzed data indicate." (p. 633). Through this method, one can manage change scientifically, following five related steps: diagnosis, analysis, feedback, action, and evaluation.

Diagnosis, in this step one, gathers information about what worries people who work at an organisation, their problems and needs. *Analysis*, one analysis collected data trying to establish priorities, dimension problems, and design possible action courses. *Feedback*, people who are involved in the change process should help to determine the problems and offer possible solutions. Consequently, share with them what one has discovered, and let them assist the leader in developing action plans. *Action* and teamwork are required to carry out specific actions to solve the problems that have been identified. *Evaluation*, one has to evaluate the impact of the change introduced regularly, as a means to determine whether they have been efficient and up to what extent or degree. Use the information one has collected to establish standards and reference points.

According to Robbins and Judge (2019), action research offers two important benefits. The first one is that it allows focusing on the problem. Once one has determined it, one plans the best manner to face and overcome it. Secondly, action research involves a lot of people; consequently, they will develop a strong commitment that will lead to a significant resistance to change reduction.

Hampton (1991) also shows his concern regarding change management. He is aware that changes have increased both in their frequency and diversity, so new skills to plan and introduce changes are required. He offers a model formed by five basic steps which may serve as a tool to guide action. He emphasizes that some of these steps may be omitted or conducted superficially or intuitively.

The five steps in a change process he presents are to discover a gap between the objective and the performance, to diagnose the problem, to plan the change, to implant it, and finally to evaluate it. The way each step is executed will depend on the context and the circumstances.

Hampton (1991) also includes the description of a change experiment conducted at Xerox which may help to illustrate how a change process can be developed. These changes were planned and executed through a ten-step process.

The first step was *to choose a job* where attitudes have deteriorated and whose improvement would lead to performance enhancement. The second

phase was *to obtain the management's approval and support*. To do so, a representative presented the top executives with the project. After that, *the project team was defined.* It included professionals from different areas and divisions. Fourthly, *the job was measured.* Through a questionnaire the attitudes to be improved were evaluated, both before the changes were applied and after six months of being introduced. A fifth step was *a working session* to obtain ideas. During this activity theoretical models were studied, work was described, division of authority and decisions were taken, the data collected in the previous step were analysed and possible solutions were studied. After that, *an evaluation session* was conducted to choose the final changes to be adopted. *Planning and carrying out the alterations* was the seventh step. Each change was discussed with the management to obtain the corresponding authorisation. Then the best time to introduce them was selected and changes were implanted gradually. The eighth step consisted of *attitudes and performance measurements*. To continue, *findings were presented* and the senior managers were informed, finally, *the most important results and implications were expanded* to other areas of the company.

The example, we have just summarised, offers many possibilities and may be a good source of inspiration. Although no experience is directly applicable to other realities, many of the steps described may prove useful, if properly adapted, at the moment of planning a change process. In our opinion, the main value of this experiment conducted at Xerox is that it was highly participative, which reduces resistance to change significantly, and very carefully planned and executed. All these are key concepts that may lead any change project to success.

CONCLUSION

As seen, reasons for resisting change may be multiple. Usually, they will vary depending on the circumstances. They often include a perception which implies a good chance of losing certain or given level, unfair treatment or having to adopt new methods or technologies difficult to cope with.

We have also included a revision of some strategies presented by well-known authors, simple suggestions to deal with resistance, and possible ways to introduce desired changes adequately.

A few words about facing resistance. Experience and common sense indicate that every effort to put down individual and organisational barriers should try to create the right environment. To achieve

it, leaders or managers ought to calm down their employees as much as possible. This can be reached by clarifying which are the areas they should not worry about and those where benefits are expected. Moreover, change agents should set realistic expectations about the difficulties they will have to face.

All these recommendations will assist any person in designing and implementing a change process; nevertheless, one does not have to forget that the best recipe for successful change management is learning through experience. As long as employees and other staff members discover by themselves that they can adapt to change and obtain some benefits from it, they will become convinced that things are going to improve. As a result, the changes one is trying to introduce will have a higher probability of being successful.

Introducing changes will normally imply a good deal of thinking, effort, and sacrifices. One has to let people know that all implications and benefits are going to be shared by every member of the organisation, regardless of the position they may hold. Then, one has to persuade everyone that the various potential benefits are going to be worth the effort and that everyone will obtain their share of fulfilment.

We strongly believe that well-planned changes, once resistance is overcome, will achieve a better working atmosphere, an improvement in the communication system, and a positive impact on organisational efficiency.

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