



EMPLOYEE REACTION TO CHANGE

A CASE OF THE DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC WORKS IN ALBANIA

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Abstract—Present trends in change and change management in Albania reflect a sense of urgency on the part of governments to invigorate a public sector that is able to maintain continuity and change. However, this means that public sector employees, who play a key role in the implementation of change, are now called upon to adjust their thinking and practices to respond to the changing needs and expectations demanded of them by governments. The paper is the theoretical and empirical study of the concept of change and change management and its connection with issues of resistance to change on behalf of the employees. The results of a statistical study conducted using questionnaire, answered by 115 employees of Central Directorate of Public Works in Albania, showed quite low openness to change and low degree of recognizing motives of resistance to change.

Keywords—Change, employee resistance, change management in public sector, employee reaction

I. INTRODUCTION

Present trends in change and change management in Albania reflect a sense of urgency on the part of governments to invigorate a Public Service that is able to maintain continuity and change. However, this means that public sector employees, who play a key role in the implementation of change, are now called upon to adjust their thinking and practices to respond to the changing needs and expectations demanded of them by governments. In an organization, resistance is opposition or withholding of support for specific plans or ideas. It can be intentional or unintentional, covert or overt. The issue of resistance on the part of employees is also discussed because resistance and change are intertwined. It must be stressed out that resistance to change is a major concern of management overall in public or private organization of today. In addition, because the 'process of change is present, employee resistance has been seen as a critical contributor to the failure of many well-planned efforts to initiate change within the organization.

II. Organizational Change, Change Management and Resistance to Change

A. Basic Concepts

A nation's well-being depends a great deal on the quality and performance of its education, government and business sectors. Before the 1980s, most public organizations worked in an environment illustrated as protected against a backdrop of relative security, stability and predictability. Thus, most public

and private sector organizations saw no particular reason to contribute to a particular goal of change. On the other hand, it is preserved that many public sector organizations, were judged to be inefficient and ineffective. In order for these organizations to be effective and to improve performance, it became important for both employers and employees to have a shared perception of change. Additionally, it became necessary for both parties to commit to change when it was required.

What is change? One of the many definition of change is the involvement of the "crystallization of new possibilities (new policies, new behaviors, new patterns, new methodologies, new products or new market ideas) based on the reconceptualised patterns in the institution. The architecture of change involves the design and construction of new patterns, or the reconceptualisation of old ones, to make new, and hopefully more productive actions possible".

Lending support to the above view, it is also important that employees be given key opportunities to participate in change initiatives. Employees should always be the key players in the facilitation, implementation and management of effective change since employees in some form or the other, are directly involved in the process of change. It is just as important, to recognize that employees can also be the main obstacle to implementing change.

B. Reasons for Change

Why change? It is argued that many of the present approaches to organizational change are from a world view that is no longer compliant with the early twenty-first century. Currently, most organizations because of globalization and modern technology are faced with uncertainties. In addition, some factors responsible for the changes are described: new technologies, globalization, new change processes and practices, speed, and complexity and paradox which are increasing as a result of all these changes and are making more and more difficult demands. Based on the factors outlined above, it must be noted that change can occur as a result of either external or internal forces or a combination of both.

External forces may still be influenced by political factors in the past and present at the current time. For example, the government in power might adopt new policies that will impact upon the types of change chosen. Economic environment also has a key influence on the type and nature of change; social factors as well as technological forces also play an influential



role regarding change. In addition, to highlight the importance of internal factors in the change process, Thus, organizations need to consider the reasons for wanting change and when to implement change taking into consideration the models or approaches that will ensure successful change in that particular public sector organization.

C. *Models of change management*

Many change models and theories exist in the literature for implementing change in public sector and private sector organizations. Coupled with models of change is the issue of approaches to change. In this discussion, four models of change that demonstrate the fundamental approaches that aid an understanding of the nature of change processes and the basis for successful change implementation is presented. Models of change, as opposed to strategies of change, are best presented as basic frameworks that guide the strategies for change to be implemented in the organization.

The use of the term “model” refers to a set of assumptions and beliefs which together represent reality. Stemming from this definition, two key traditional models of change are discussed. Lewin’s planned approach to organizational change work resulted in a model that views change as a three-step procedure: unfreezing, moving (initiate the change), refreezing. Kotter’s model of change involves eight steps in the change process: increasing urgency, build the guiding team, developing a vision, communicating the change vision, empower action, create short term wins, generate short-term wins, make change stick.

D. *The nature and causes of resistance to change*

Often change is done to adapt to the changing environment condition in local government. Resistance to change by employees is a common phenomenon, which takes place in both private and public sector organizations. Employees often respond negatively toward change, because with change comes stress and uncertainty for employees. The reasons for the failure range from a lack of understanding surrounding an organization’s capacity for change to other factors, for instance employee resistance toward change. Resistance to change is seen as the most common problem faced by management in implementing change. In addition to that change is a resistance itself is a defense mechanism to maintain the status quo or when employees status quo is threaten. It is suggested that even though change effort could be to the benefit of the employees, some employees are predisposed to resist change. Resistance is described as a multifaceted phenomenon due to costs, unexpected delays, and instabilities into the process of change. In addition, resistance is seen as a slow motion reply to meet agreement or disagreement to change.

Resistance to change in employee behavior falls into two categories: active and passive resistance. Active resistance is seen when employees engage in behaviors related with manipulation, fault-finding and fear. While on the other hand, passive resistance is linked with ignorance, withdrawal of information and lack of action following verbal compliance.

Many writers, in the literature on resistance to change, have concluded that employees resist change because they are afraid to lose something that is of value to them. In addition to that, they do not believe that the change will make sense in the organization, they do not understand the change and its implications, or they find it difficult to manage the level or practice of change. Here are six common causes that grow employee resistance to change.

Resistance is present when the nature of the change is not made understandable to the employees who are directly influenced by the change; employees influenced feel strong forces discourage them from changing; the change is made on personal grounds: employees influenced by the change have pressure put on them to act in accordance with instead of having an input in the nature of the change; the change pays no attention to the already established institutions in the group, and the change is open to many interpretations. In addition, resistance to change can be linked with the leadership styles, employees being skeptical to the value of change, the uncertainty of change, the internal dynamics of the organization; and an unfavorable work environment.

E. *Resistance to change in public sector*

Within the context of public sector organizations, the following reasons why public service employees resist change are identified: dedication to bureaucratic practices related to legalism, procedural regulation, delegation; the need for caution and security; complexity due to multiple levels of authority, responsibility and reporting; decision-making pushed upwards; affairs are lead by the interests of many stakeholders; conflicting values, interests, alliances agendas, reward structures; difficult to gain financial support for change management.

Some literature suggests that public sector organization continue to in a structured fashion, increasing resistance to change. In addition, managers in public sector overstate the outcomes of the changes they have initiated resulting in greater resistance to change by employees. It should be mentioned that not all public sector employees resisted change. Some common forms of resistance displayed employees that are most prone to resist change are employees with limited educational qualifications, who fear that they are too old to learn, doubt their value to the organization and are influenced by older employees to resist change, who’s status quo is challenged . Based on these authors, here are some common forms of resistance displayed through the behaviors of public sector employees: embarrassing leaks to press and media, lateness, indifference, sabotage, absence, sick leave, procrastination, working slowly, undermining behind-the-back criticism.

In essence, change management requires employees to reorganize the way in which they undertake their roles within a public department. In order to manage change effectively in public sector organizations, change initiators should first stand back and analyze the organization before applying any sort of change. It is also maintained that for public sector employees to understand and accept organizational change, they need to



engage in its process. To sum up, resistance to change is one of the most frequent employees' reactions to change. In addition, it is viewed as a normal and inevitable course of action because of fear of the unknown and uncertainty. Resistance to change has been recognized as an important factor that impacts the success of a public organizational change effort. Thus, it is critical to identify the main causes of employees' resistance to change, highlighting the benefits of change.

III. METHODOLOGY

The population on whom the research was based is the employees of Central Directorate of Public Works in Albania. This research was a descriptive one and with the use of quantitative data to measure employee reaction towards change. For the purpose of this research, 180 questionnaires were distributed and the study sample was amounted to 120 employees. A number of research questions helped analyze the issues of this study, based on literature review and on this thesis aims and objectives: What is the degree of openness of the employees to change? What are the main motives of employee resistance to change? What are the main reasons of employee resistance to change? What is the impact of employee demographic characteristics toward their reactions to change?

Based on the above, the corresponding research hypotheses of the research are:

- H1 - There is a negative relationship between "openness to change" and "motives of resistance to change" factors.
- H2 - There is a negative relationship between "openness to change" and "reasons for resistance to change" factors.
- H3 - There is a positive and relationship between "reasons for resistance to change" and "motives of resistance to change" factors.

The statistical research was conducted based on a Likert - scale questionnaire which was created for the research and distributed to employees via email and in person. It was divided into three categories: Openness to change, Motives of resistance to change, Reasons for resistance to change. People were asked to rate their agreement with a series of involvement statements on a seven point scale where 1 _ strongly disagree and 7 _ strongly agree.

To test the internal consistency and reliability of the responses a-Cronbach's coefficient was calculated. By testing the reliability coefficients of Cronbach for the individual factors of the questionnaire but also for the whole research tool, it was found that it is satisfactory in each case. A pilot test was done responses of the research were processed and the results were: Openness to change were (Cronbach's $\alpha = .0903$ respectively). Motives of resistance to change (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.705$ respectively). Reasons for resistance to change were (Cronbach's $\alpha = .0805$ respectively).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to research results, it was at original documented that employee openness to change is quite high, though the

most major motives of resistance to change are feeling of insecurity for loss of their position in the organization and sense of testing their status quo. It is important for managers to communicate with their employees about the needs for change, otherwise fear and uncertainty will remain an existing element that can damage morale and prevent successful implementation of organizational change. However, it is normal for an employee during change to resist since resistance itself is a defense mechanism to preserve their status quo.

In addition, the difficulty of managing change is often exacerbated by the mismanagement of employee resistance. On the other hand, employees with the moderate degree of resistance to change feel that they have the necessary information to being open to organizational changes and they understand the change objectives. Early communication can decrease uncertainty, neutralize rumors before spreading all through the organization. Employees should be informed on how the change will influence their jobs, when the change will take place, what is expected of them, how the change will be implemented, and how the company will support and motivate them to be more committed to the change.

Table1. Mean scores of Openness to change

QUESTIONS	MEAN	SD
When changing the way things are done in the work place, resistance would be my first reaction	2.44	0.881
I am open to change in workplace	3.81	0.710
When introduced, I accept changes in work	3.63	0.845
I resist change in work	2.09	0.821
Change in the work place improves the quality of my work	3.75	0.778
Change improves productivity and efficiency in the workplace	3.69	0.891
I trust manager when introducing changes in the workplace	3.25	0.798
I feel quite confident when changes are introduced	3.15	0.812
I trust my organization that will treat me fairly during changes	3.44	0.981
Openness to change	3.62	0.893

Regarding research's hypotheses, it is observed that H1 & H2 are not accepted, as the correlation between "openness to change" and "reasons and motives of resistance to change" factors is negative but not statistically significant. Hence, the research's results show that the level of openness to change is not determined by Reasons and Motives for resistance to change. The explanation behind this is due to the fact that in this research, while employees showed a quite satisfactory degree of "openness to change" factor, the degrees of Motives of resistance to change" and "Reasons for resistance to change" factors were low. As many writers argued, even though the main reason why employees resist change is their personal interest, but most of them usually understand the need for change and believe that it will make sense for the organization. H3 of this research is also accepted as the correlation between "reasons for resistance to change" and "motives of resistance to change" factors is positive and statistically significant, proving



an close relationship between this two factors regarding employees reactions towards organizational change. Thus, with a logical approach, higher motives of employees lead to higher reasons for resistance to change.

Finally, it was observed that none demographic factor influences employees' resistance to change, except from education level as less educated employees showed stronger motives of resistance to change. Thus, change management should focus on less educated employees in order to alleviate negative attitudes towards organizational change, providing more training. To sum up, employees are quite open and adaptive to public organizational change in the Central Directorate of Public Works in Albania, though specific motives and reasons behind resistance to change require explicit attention, including clear planning, communication, empowerment, training, and involvement.

Table 2. Resistance to change factors correlations

		Openness to change	Motives of resistance to change	Reasons for resistance to change
Openness to change	rho	1		
	p	.		
Motives of resistance to change	rho	-0.067	1	
	p	0.484	.	
Reasons for resistance to change	rho	-0.047	0.433	1
	p	0.625	0.000	.

V. LIMITATIONS

As in any research, this one also has some limitations. Further research should be conducted in a larger sample in order to generalize the results. In addition more parameters of the sample can be examined such as salary and job position in order to generalize or extract more specific results and conclusions.

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