

Organizational Changes: Identifying Factors Creating Resistance among Employees

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Abstract

Organizational change is an essential aspect of the organizational life cycle. Changes in external environments impel organizations to frequently implement changes. However, employees may resist such changes. This study aims to identify the influence of various essential variables on employees' tendency to resist organizational change. This study applied a quantitative methodology, and collected data through a survey distributed to 121 full-time employees working in various American organizations. The findings show that employees' approaches toward resolving problems and work experience influence their tendency to resist organizational change. Males and married employees tend to resist organizational change more than females and unmarried employees. However, employees' loyalty to the organization, the strength of their relationships with their employers, and age have no effect. This study assists in understanding resistance toward organizational change, thus aiding in avoiding confrontation and conflict in the workplace when changes are implemented.

Keywords: Organizational change, Resistance, Problem-solving approach, Experience, Loyalty, External environment

Introduction

Organizations experience instability due to frequent changes in their external environments. The external environment includes different economic, social, and technological; in any of these aspects, new threats and opportunities emerge for organizations (Elearn, 2009; Pitt & Koufopoulos, 2012). When changes occur, top management are impelled to implement changes either to capitalize on new opportunities or resist new threats. Organizational change effectuates organizational development as organizations cannot develop without enforcing necessary changes that improve their current work environment (Samara & Garoufallou, 2023).

However, implementing organizational change is difficult and complex. Employees may resist change because of concerns regarding its consequences (van Dijk & van Dick, 2009; Kim et al., 2023). Such

resistance may persist for a long time, affecting the performance and progress of the work. Moreover, a confrontation may erupt between employees and management when both sides become rigid regarding their stance. Therefore, managers must understand the nature and factors influencing resistance to change to approach resistance issues successfully and effectively.

This study focuses on essential factors that influence employee resistance: employees' experience, loyalty to employers, employees' approaches to problem-solving, and strength of the relationship between employees and management. Furthermore, it considers demographic variables, such as age, gender, and marital status, and provides a comprehensive understanding of the association between these demographic variables and resistance to organizational change.

Literature review

Every organization has both internal and external environments. An organization's external environment involves demographic, economic, cultural, and technological aspects, whereas the internal environment includes aspects within organizations such as human resources, technological resources, and organizational culture (Hellriegel & Jackson, 2008; Hatten, 2016). Organizations are mainly affected by their external environments because they are considered open systems, whereas the effect between organizations and their external environments is mutual. Threats and opportunities stem from the external environment, whereas the internal environment provides either strengths or weaknesses for an organization (Fox & Walt, 2007). Managers create strategic plans by analyzing their organizations' environments (Sarsby, 2016).

Organizational change: Definition and concepts

Organizational change refers to the transformation within an organization to a better state to tackle difficulties and improve its abilities and performance (Cawsey et al., 2012). Every organization experiences changes (either technical or structural), as it is a part of every organization's life cycle (Helms-Mills et al., 2008). The nature of changes is contingent on an organization and changes occurring in its

external environment. For example, when technological production means are developed in an industry, an organization must develop and enhance its production lines to compete with rivals.

Organizational change can be radical or minor, depending on the current status of organizations (Jacobsen, 2021). For example, when an organization faces bankruptcy, the management introduces comprehensive and radical changes to rescue the organization. However, an organization's management may make minor changes related to departments or units whose performance is weak or requires development when no serious issue exists. The allocated resources, plans, and strategies used for organizational change vary according to the type of implemented changes (radical change vs. minor changes). Organizational change is classified as developing, transitional, and transformational according to the goals that must be achieved (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010).

In developing change, an organization tries to improve its performance by developing current procedures, means of production, and work mechanisms (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). It is suitable for organizations with satisfactory performance but needs improvements and recognition. Organizations resort to transitional change when facing critical issues influencing their productivity. They incorporate changes to resolve these issues to improve their performance and avoid additional losses (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). When an organization's profits decrease owing to weak sales, it undertakes actions such as closing some production lines or releasing new products. Transformational change refers to the creation of radical and inclusive changes in an organization (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). It is used to address issues affecting organizational survival. For example, when organizations encounter bankruptcy threats, they may change their markets or fields to survive.

Improvement and development are primary drivers of organizational change. Organizational change is essential for achieving development and prosperity (Samara & Garoufallou, 2023). In today's world, many organizations have made frequent changes that reflect their competitive

positions in the market. However, organizations that ignore or do not focus on changes and transformations in their external environments may lag behind their rivals. Organizational change is necessary to confront challenges resulting from the external environment (Senior & Fleming, 2005). For example, in the past, organizations used traditional marketing methods such as releasing advertisements in newspapers, TV, and salespersons. Today, with technological advancements in the business world, organizations adopt e-marketing as a marketing strategy owing to their effectiveness instead of traditional marketing (Senior & Fleming, 2005).

Organizational change is implemented through various steps. Lewin's module demonstrates three stages of change in organizations: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). The unfreezing stage disposes an organization's present state to prepare its employees to adapt and accept changes that help prevent resistance. In the changing stage, organizational change is conducted and becomes a tangible reality. In the refreezing stage, organizational change is reinforced to prevent returning to earlier situations before making changes.

Causes of organizational change

Employees resist changes for various reasons. Cheraghi et al. (2023) analyze why nurses resist changes in the workplace and show that nurses resist changes for various reasons, classified as individual, interpersonal, and organizational. Individual factors mainly emanate from nurses' personalities and perspectives on organizational change. Culture and trustworthiness of others influence nurses' tendencies to resist change (interpersonal factors). Organizational factors relate to the organizational culture (such as norms and values) and provide support during the organizational change process by management. An analysis of organizational resistance in Saudi hospitals reveals various reasons, such as fear of losing jobs, extra workload, and lack of related skills, as driving employees to resist the organizational change process (Alomair, 2011).

When employees feel that organizational justice prevails, they do not resist change (AlDossari, 2016). Moreover, the results show a negative association between age and resistance to organizational change. The most effective way

to limit or prevent organizational change is to persuade employees about the goals and advantages of change to dispel fear among employees. A study on organizational change among Liberians in Greece reveals that resistance to organizational change can be prevented using persuasion strategy by management (Samara & Garoufallou, 2023).

Adeyemi (2017) has conducted research on employees of nursing colleges at Colorado University, revealing that a lack of information regarding the advantages of organizational change effectuates resistance to organizational change. Therefore, management should inform employees regarding the goals and benefits of adopting such changes to avoid resistance. Moreover, this study demonstrates that excluding employees from participating in the change process increases the possibility of resistance. Organizations can avoid resistance to change by clarifying the goals and benefits of change (Connor et al., 2016). Lack of participation in the process of organizational change can affect resistance among employees (Lines, 2004). When managers involve employees in discussions regarding the change's goals and benefits, it provides employees with an opportunity to deliver their perspectives and ideas about these changes, assuring them that they are valuable to their organization.

Van Dijk and van Dick (2009) analyze Australian organizational change cases and find that resistance to organizational change stems from employees' feelings of threat to their work identities. As organizational work follows certain procedures and patterns, any change may induce employee discomfort. In the hospitality sector, a study on employees' resistance to changes regarding existing information systems reveals that anxiety drives employees to resist changes (Kim et al., 2023). Employees are concerned that they may not be adept at new work, affecting their performance. Moreover, an association exists between employees' perspectives on organizational change and their attitudes toward changes (Demirci, 2016). Employees believe that organizational change may negatively affect their jobs. Thus, organizations must conduct meetings with employees to explain the purpose of organizational change and answer their queries. Their interpretations and perceptions of things affect individuals'

behaviors and attitudes (Mustafa, 2013). Thus, understanding employees' perspectives regarding changes as a proactive step to deal with situations before applying changes is necessary (Schraeder, 2001).

In 2021, Apple employees resisted changes in work related to re-joining the office in September (BW Online Bureau, 2021). The main drive to adopt this attitude was their belief in the influence of changes in their interests. Employees explore the potential benefits of organizational change (Cambon, 2021). Unfortunately, some organizations disregard potential employees' reactions to organizational change. This causes negative consequences, as the issue may shift to a conflict between employees and their employers.

Shala et al. (2023) investigate the causes of resistance to organizational change in business organizations in Kosovo. They observe that employees' resistance to organizational change stems from various factors, such as a threat to their jobs, positions, and power. They suggest communicating with employees effectively to clarify the purpose of changes to reduce their resistance, convincing them, and gaining support for the change process. Persuading employees assists in decreasing the intensity of employees' resistance and convinces them to accept changes (Mutambik & Almuqrin, 2024). Employees in the workplace may resist organizational change (Dexter, 2013). However, this resistance can be prevented by opening effective communication channels between employees and management. Furthermore, delivering clear and meaningful messages to receivers is essential to avoid misunderstandings (LaBelle & Waldeck, 2020).

In the healthcare sector, there are various reasons for resistance among employees (Curtis & White, 2002). For example, resistance may stem from employees' feelings that changes may jeopardize their own interests and ambiguity concerning organizational change regarding purposes and effects. Additionally, as employees and managers may have different perspectives and viewpoints about organizational change regarding importance and benefits, it can cause misunderstanding between them. Resistance to organizational change can be prevented by educating employees about changes regarding the

objectives and advantages, providing support to employees, and allowing them to participate in the change process (Curtis & White, 2002). Management can play a significant role in preventing resistance to organizational change by supporting employees throughout the process of change (Mutambik & Almuqrin, 2024).

A study on resistance to technological change among employees working in libraries at the University of Tehran reveals that employees may not have a clear understanding of the change process regarding benefits, which is attributed to a lack of education of employees by management (Nakhoda & Tajik, 2017). Additionally, employees feel that they are not motivated to accept changes. This demonstrates the significant role that management must play in advance by conducting meetings with employees to explain the goals of the change process. Preparing employees for changes assists in overcoming resistance later (Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). This can be achieved by building trust between managers and employees.

Research problem

The literature provides different causes that may engender resistance to organizational change, such as fear of losing a job or position, uncertainty, lack of participation, lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of changes, and lack of readiness for change. It primarily focuses on the influence of demographic variables on organizational change, which are mainly considered remarkable factors in scientific research and assist in understanding issues comprehensively. Individuals behave differently owing to differences in their demographic variables, such as age, gender, personality, culture, and position (Chandan, 2005). However, research focusing on the impact of essential variables such as employees' work experience, problem-solving approaches, loyalty to employers, and strength of the relationships between employees and management on employees' tendency to resist organizational change is limited.

Experienced employees cooperate with their organizations (Srividya, 2023). They are highly concerned about their organizations' goals and avoid confrontations that influence work performance. Furthermore, long-term employment in organizations leads to developing psychological, ethical,

and social attachment. A correlation exists between organizational attachment and work experience (Chiu, 2024). Employees' organizational commitment reduces resistance to organizational change (Zulkarnain et al., 2024). Additionally, experienced employees have a sense of psychological well-being that reflects positively on their behavior and emotions toward achieving work goals (Lee & Kim, 2023). Thus, experienced employees cooperate with their organizations during organizational change.

H1: An association exists between work experience and resistance to organizational change.

Furthermore, employees resist organizational change because of various concerns, such as job security and unknown goals. However, individual differences may influence their tendency to resist organizational change. Some employees approach problems constructively, while others adopt competitive approaches. Individuals adopting a competitive style usually focus on their own needs in contrast to their counterparts adopting a cooperative approach (Saeed et al., 2014). Furthermore, those who adopt a cooperative style are more flexible than those who adopt a competitive style (McCollum, 2009). Accordingly, the former may accept organizational change more than the latter. The problem-solving approach (cooperation vs. competition) either positively or negatively influences employees' behaviors in the workplace (Donohue & Kolt, 1992).

H2: Employees' approaches to resolving problems affect their tendency to resist organizational change.

Organizational loyalty positively affects employees' behaviors in terms of sincerity, cooperation, and understanding (Bayer & Çankaya, 2022). Organizational loyalty enforces a sense of feeling among employees that they perform all possible tasks for the sake of the success of their organizations. Employee loyalty reflects positively on organizations (Guillon & Cezanne, 2014). Loyal employees consider themselves part of their organizations. The role of organizational loyalty is paramount in enforcing workers' support for their organizations (Hidayati et al., 2019). This indicates that loyalty to employers may lead employees to accept organizational change.

H3: Employees' loyalty to their employers assists in reducing resistance to organizational change.

Finally, understanding and harmony between employees and management engenders smooth work operation and creates an agreement between both sides in different aspects of the organization. When managers deal with employees positively, it strengthens the relationship between them, encouraging employees to work efficiently to achieve the goals of their organizations (Bruce, 2002). Moreover, employees treated fairly by their managers have a strong relationship with them that encourages them to cooperate. According to Maslow's theory, employees who are supported and respected by their employers are satisfied and cooperate with their employers (Sahni & Vayunandan, 2010). Additionally, according to the reciprocity principle, people do their best to return favors to those who have done favors and are nice to them (Cialdini, 2021). Employees cooperate with managers who treat them well and share a strong relationship as a form of reciprocity. This indicates that a positive relationship between managers and employees reduces employees' resistance to organizational change.

H4: The strength of the relationship between employees and their management reduces employees' tendency to resist organizational change.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative methodology in which data were gathered through a survey and analyzed using the SPSS program.

Instruments

The survey comprises two parts. The first part identifies the participants' demographic information, in addition to other variables. It covers various aspects: gender, age, work experience, qualification, marital status, approach to the problem-solving module, loyalty to the organization, and strength of the relationship between employees and their managers. The second part measures participants' attitudes about resistance to organizational change using 5-point Likert scale. Their attitudes are measured by focusing on the following comprehensive aspects: job security, interests of employees, managers' self-interests, potential conflicts, impact on productivity, changing work routines, and costs of changing. The survey was tested for validity and

reliability before being distributed to participants. The survey's validity was measured using Pearson's correlation. Table 1 shows that the survey is valid. Reliability was tested

using Cronbach's alpha. Table 2 shows that the survey is reliable, with a value of 0.918. A Cronbach's alpha value is considered high and acceptable when it is 0.8 and above (Meyer, 2010).

Table 1: Validity of the survey using Pearson's correlation test

Q1	Pearson Correlation	.813**
	N	57
Q2	Pearson Correlation	.773**
	N	57
Q3	Pearson correlation	.715**
	N	57
Q4	Pearson correlation	.784**
	N	57
Q5	Pearson correlation	.842**
	N	57
Q6	Pearson correlation	.769**
	N	57
Q7	Pearson correlation	.794**
	N	57
Q8	Pearson correlation	.798**
	N	57
Q9	Pearson correlation	.686**
	N	57
Q10	Pearson correlation	.641**
	N	57
TOT	Pearson correlation	1
	N	57

** indicates that the correlation is significant (0.01 level - 2-tailed).

* indicates that the correlation is significant (0.05 level - 2-tailed).

Table 2: Test of survey reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.918*	10

* > 0.7 (which indicates that the reliability of the survey is high).

Sample

The survey was randomly distributed (via link hosted by SurveyMonkey) to full-time employees in different states of the United States of America. Of the 121 participants, 55% were males and 45% were females. The participants

had different ages, educational backgrounds, and experiences (Tables 3–5). Participation was completely voluntary, and participants' identities were confidential. Names or other forms of identities were not required to be stated in the survey.

Table 3: Participants' ages

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 30 years	20	16.5
30 to less than 40 years	41	33.9
40 to less than 50 years	33	27.3
50 years and above	26	21.5
Missing	1	0,8
Total	121	100,0

Table 4: Participants' qualifications

	Frequency	Percent
High school	15	12,4
Diploma (two years certificate)	11	9,1
Bachelor	9	7,4
Master	49	40,5
Doctorate	37	30,6
Total	121	100,0

Table 5: Participants' experiences

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5 years	16	13.2
5 to less than 10 years	24	19.8
10 years and older	68	56.2
Missing	13	10,7
Total	121	100,0

Results and discussion

Table 6 supports H1. Long-term employment reduces the likelihood of resistance to organizational change. Employees with longer work experience tend to cooperate

with their employers in terms of work (Srividya, 2023; Chiu, 2024). Furthermore, experienced employees usually have the skills to deal with issues in the workplace as they face many issues throughout their work lives, making them cooperate more than compete.

Table 6: Relationship between experience and resistance to organizational change

		Total
Experience	Pearson correlation	-.286**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.003
	N	108

** indicates that correlation is significant (0.01 level -2-tailed).

Tables 7a and 7b support H2. Employees who are competitive in approaching problems in the workplace (e.g., conflict with colleagues) tend to resist organizational change more than those using cooperative approaches. People using cooperative approaches are more flexible when dealing with others, and vice versa (McCollum,

2009). Employees who approach problems in their workplace destructively become more aggressive and tend to confront their employers over issues. These employees must be persuaded and educated about the goals and benefits of organizational change. These strategies are effective in reducing organizational resistance (Mutambik & Almuqrin, 2024; Curtis & White, 2002).

Table 7a: Association between problem-solving approach and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	24.682	3	8.227	23.071	0.01
Within groups	41.722	117	.357		
Total	66.403	120			

Table 7b: Relationship between problem-solving approach and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test–post hoc test)
Post hoc tests

(I) PSM	(J) PSM	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Significance
Very competitive	Competitive	,75067*	,14896	0.01
	Cooperative	,97193*	,13156	0.01
	Very cooperative	1,05897*	,18803	0.01

Tables 8a and 8b reject H3. Employees with high loyalty to their organizations tend to resist organizational change more than those with a middle level of loyalty. Employees with high loyalty to their employers tend to cooperate with them to achieve organizational goals (Bayer & Çankaya,

2014). However, this study demonstrates that employees with high organizational loyalty resist implementing organizational change and negatively perceive it. For example, they believe that organizational change affects their interests, work, and productivity.

Table 8a: Association between organizational loyalty and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Between groups	3,38	2	1,69	3,162	0,045
Within groups	63,02	118	,53		
Total	66,40	120			

Table 8b: Association between organizational loyalty and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test–Post hoc test)

(I) LO	(J) LO	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Significance
High	Middle	,33065*	,13724	,018

Tables 9a and 9b reject H4. The analysis proves that the strength of the relationship between employees and their managers does not reduces employees' tendency to resist organizational change. As shown in Table 9b, employees who feel that they have excellent relationship with their employers tend to resist organizational changes more than employees whose relationship with their employers is moderated. A good relationship between employees and their managers makes employees more cooperative (Bruce,

2002). However, the strength of the relationship is not sufficiently influential to make employees accept organizational change. Participants who describe their relationship with management as excellent show a tendency to resist organizational change because they believe that organizational change is costly, serves the interests of managers, threatens their own interests, and fails to achieve organizational goals.

Table 9a: Association between the strength of the relationship between employees and their management and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Between groups	10,303	2	5,152	10,836	0,01
Within groups	56,100	118	,475		
Total	66,403	120			

Table 9b: Association between the strength of the relationship between employees and their management and resistance to organizational change (ANOVA test–Post hoc test)

(I) RM	(J) RM	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Significance
Excellent	Good	,73533*	,17076	0.01
	Very good	,44702*	,14075	0.01

Other demographic variables include gender, marital status, and age. The results show that males demonstrate a higher tendency toward organizational change resistance than females (Table 10). Women are generally less aggressive than men (Eysenck, 2012). Regarding marital

status, married employees tend to resist organizational change more than unmarried employees (Table 11). No association exists between age and resistance to organizational change (Table 12).

Table 10: Relationship between gender and resistance to organizational change (T-test)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Significance
Male	66	4,1227	,71914	3,949	0.01*
Female	55	3,6164	,68171		

* Difference is significant at 0.05.

Table 11: Relationship between marital status and resistance to organizational change (T-test)

Marital status	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Significance
Married	97	4,0474	,72860	7,069	0.01*
Unmarried (single - divorced)	24	3,2667	,40181		

* Difference is significant at 0.05.

Table 12: Relationship between age and resistance to organizational change

		Total
Age (in years)	Pearson correlation	,091*
	Significance (2-tailed)	,325
	N	120

* No significant correlation is observed.

Conceptual and practical implications

This study has important practical and theoretical implications in the field of management. Regarding practical implications, it aids in comprehending employee behaviors when implementing organizational change, helping managers understand resistance in organizational change and dealing with it more effectively. This reduces the possibility of confrontation between employees and employers. Regarding the theoretical implications, this

study provides an understanding of the concept of resistance to organizational change. The literature lacks focus on some essential factors that influence organizational resistance among employees. This study fills this gap by demonstrating that employees' problem-solving approaches, work experience, marital status, and gender influence their tendency to resist organizational change.

Conclusion

This study focuses on resistance to organizational change, which is an essential aspect of the organizational life cycle. Every organization undergoes changes owing to changes in its external environment. This study reveals essential findings that contribute to the management literature. It presents significant results regarding how different variables influence employees' tendencies toward resistance to organizational change. However, understanding employees' perspectives of the impact of organizational resistance on work productivity in the long term is still required. This assists in understanding organizational change resistance from various aspects. Therefore, future research must be conducted on this topic.

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