The Significance of Resistance to Changes in the Process of Change Management.

“All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves.

... We must die to one life before we can enter another.”

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Introduction.

Two basic forces always conflict in the process of changes: the drive towards the change and resistance to it.\(^2\) The simplest definition of resistance encompasses conscious opposition to what is imposed by the environment, opposition to what is brought about by change. It is an indispensable element of every change and regardless of the way, methods and tools and the precision with which the change is managed, it will inevitably occur. It is so because everything that is new and different to the present situation evokes anxiety, fear and so-called cognitive dissonance, meaning the condition occurring between what is well-known and what is new and uncertain.

Resistance appearing as a result of the change being introduced complicates the whole process and sometimes makes it necessary to redesign and redefine the process, so potential resistance should be assumed as early as at the planning stage of an economic change, not at the implementation stage. Thus, what is especially important in the process of effective change management is the realization of resistance towards changes, the reasons for them and the methods of reducing or eliminating that phenomenon.

This study discusses the basic issues referring to resistance to changes, i.e. it enumerates the basic sources of resistance to changes, the forms and kinds of opposing important changes and the methods (techniques) of overcoming or at least reducing the intensity of the occurring resistance.

1. Sources of resistance to changes.

As it was already mentioned in the introduction, resistance is an individual's or organization's hostile attitude towards a necessary change of its status quo; put simply, it is aversion to whatever is new and as a result uncertain. There are a number of reasons for resistance to change. In literature on the topic, there are many different classifications of such reasons, but all of them come down to four basic ones, namely.\(^3\)

\(^2\) *Ekonomia społeczna w praktyce.*, p. 22

— uncertainty (anxiety and nervousness resulting from an unclear situation);
— the feeling of fear, mainly of what is new and unknown but also of the consequences of the introduced change;
— different perception of problems and ways of solving them by particular stakeholders of the process of change (especially by the change leader and those directly affected by the change);
— danger to personal interests, mainly regarding the influence and scope of one's authority.

Obviously, this is a very general catalogue of sources of resistance to changes, so a little more complex list of the reasons for the occurrence of resistance to changes is presented below, with consideration of particular problem areas arising from the discussed phenomenon.  

a. the area related to broadly understood disinformation:
   — lack of information concerning the causes, course, applied tools and methods, the goal and the desired target of the initiated change;
   — failure to inform the participants of the change process of the influence of the change on their current personal, social and economic situation;
   — failure to notice either individual or general benefits of the process being implemented;
   — inaccurate analysis and evaluation of the situation due to lack of professional (expert) support for the change initiators;
   — disturbances in information flow causing many misunderstandings.

b. the area related to lack of trust and improper intra-organizational relationships:
   — lack of trust towards persons and entities initiating the change as well as those implementing and managing it;
   — lack of belief in the proper course and effectiveness of the implemented changes;
   — general mood of distrust and improper interpersonal relations between the participants of the change process.

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4 R. Wendt, Zarządzanie zmianą w polskiej firmie. Jak w praktyce wykorzystać szansę na rozwój bez porażek., Dom Wydawniczy Zacharek, Warszawa 2010, p. 86
c. the area related to the personality of participants of the change process (those subject to change or directly involved in it):
   — lack of tolerance or very low tolerance to any changes;
   — small-town mentality and caring only about one's own good, failure to notice the higher good;
   — broadly understood conformism;
   — the attitude “why change anything when everything is good”.

d. the area related to fear:
   — fear resulting from danger to one's competences, position or scope of authority;
   — fear of anything that is unknown and new, fear of failure or embarrassment.

Of course the list of reasons for resistance to implementation and management of changes is not complete. Each organization, just like each individual, is unique, so depending on the kind of change being introduced, the stage of development or internal or external conditions, sources of resistance to changes in the organization may vary.

The occurring resistance to changes should not be treated as something bad, improper, disturbing the normal and often already scheduled process of change management. To the contrary. The occurrence of any aversion to change is a signal that some problems are beginning in the process of change management. Hence, it becomes clear that certain circumstances have not been taken into consideration at the planning stage but become manifest at the unfreezing stage (the 1st stage of the change process according to Lewin). Therefore, the correct identification of causes of resistance to the change being introduced may be very constructive for the organization: it will allow to identify the bottlenecks of the change management process and thus improve its effectiveness.

2. Types and forms of resistance to change.

When resistance to changes occurs within an organization, one should not forget that it may assume various forms. Depending on conditions and sources as well as on the psycho-social qualities of the entities expressing resistance, it may be either active or passive. Special attention should be paid to passive resistance, as because it is not expansive, it is very often
overlooked at the initial stages of change management and becomes manifest, usually “with a bang”, at the least expected moment, when its elimination is virtually impossible.

Another classification mentions the following kinds of resistance to changes: 5

- rational (the reason for resistance is logical and precise);
- emotional (connected with the emotional sphere, based on feelings of the participants of the change process);
- political (mainly referring to the way of managing the organization, the adopted strategy and the applied methods and tools).

Due to the fact that the process of change management mostly refers to people (the stakeholders of the change process), particular forms of resistance to changes and its specific types and attitudes of the process participants will be presented in that spirit.

Individual participants of the change management process may have different approaches to the ongoing process of changes, expressed first of all in their attitudes. The following attitudes of the participants of the change process may be listed: 6

- acceptance, expressed with a high level of involvement and motivation in the process;
- indifference – lack of involvement;
- passive resistance arising from lack (loss) of motivation to action, manifested in general discouragement and frustration;
- active resistance, manifested in aggression, combativeness and the will to escape from the difficult situation.

Another classification involves a slightly different system of differentiating between attitudes towards change and indicates that resistance to changes may assume the following forms: 7

- conformism – yielding to the change so as to enjoy peace;
- withdrawal – abandoning undertaken actions when faced with the first obstacle;
- ritualism – so-called triumph of form over content, emphasizing the external signs of the change and forgetting the essence of the whole process;
- rejection – open and clear resistance to change;

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5 R. Wendt, Zarządzanie zmianą w polskiej firmie..., p. 86
6 J. Penc, Innowacje i zmiany w firmie Transformacja i sterowanie rozwojem przedsiębiorstwa., Agencja Wydawnicza Placet, Warszawa 1999, p. 262
7 E. Drabek, Źródła oporu wobec zmian oraz sposoby jego przezwyciężania., p. 14
— contortion – transforming the change so that it meets particular needs of the individual or organization, not the generally adopted goal of the change.

Still another typology, based on a matrix with parameters: overt and covert resistance as well as conscious and unconscious resistance, takes into account the reactions of participants of the change management process and indicates the following attitudes related to the manifested resistance to changes:8

— a saboteur – characterized by covert but conscious resistance, believes that ignoring the change will prevent its occurrence;
— a zombie – displays overt but unconscious resistance, which means that he or she seemingly agrees to the change but is not motivated to implement it, hence he or she returns to their former habits, failing to perceive themselves as displaying any resistance to changes;
— an opponent – displays overt and conscious resistance using rational arguments, their views are independent to a certain extent;
— a person sticking at the present situation – manifests covert and unconscious resistance, as he or she is not aware of the ongoing process of change and thus unconsciously “undermines” the occurring changes.

There are many different forms and attitudes of resistance to changes. But whatever kind of resistance and whatever attitude we are facing on the part of an organization member, we must not ignore it. We should try to understand each form of resistance, see its advantages and disadvantages, and first of all, be able to reach its core.

3. Methods of overcoming resistance to changes.

Knowing the reason for resistance to changes, it is much easier to choose the effective method of its reduction or even elimination. The selection of the appropriate technique definitely depends on many factors, including, among others, the situation of the entity subject to

8 E. Maksymowska, O czym warto pamiętać wprowadzając znaczącą zmianę w zarządzanej placówce., Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, p. 6.
change and the circumstances accompanying the change, as well as the results of studies and analyses carried out – if there are some, of course.\(^9\)

There are many different attitudes in the area of overcoming resistance to changes. Approaches of the most recognized change management specialists are presented below. First, the approaches are grouped most generally into four basic groups:\(^10\)

- manipulation methods
- methods connected with implementing the change
- participation methods
- methods of intentional (long-term) influencing people, aimed at changing their views and attitudes.

Applying a more detailed approach, taking into account the reason for resistance, we can list the following techniques of prevention and elimination of resistance to changes:\(^11\)

- learning the reasons for the occurrence of fears and attitudes of all the participants of the process;
- improving or even repairing the information flow, including in particular the process of communication;
- actively involving all the interested entities in the process of changes – its planning and implementation – so that they could feel that they are an indispensable element of the change;
- managers of the organization supporting the whole process of change management;
- using negotiation to introduce the attitudes complying to the logic of changes;
- overt or covert use of force;
- impelling and using manipulation techniques;
- providing education before and during the process of change management.

The above range of methods of overcoming resistance to changes may be additionally extended with techniques proposed by Koppter and Schlezingier. According to them, resistance to changes may also be overcome by means of:\(^12\)


\[^11\]\ B. Kożuch, *Wstęp do teorii...,* p. 188

\[^12\]\ S. Sokołowska, *Organizacja i zarządzanie...,* pp. 231-232
— training and communication in the case of unclear or incomplete message;
— participation and involvement of people constituting the organization, as it is them who are the “soul” of the organization and it is with respect to them that the changes are introduced;
— facilitation and support, effective when there are difficulties with adjusting to the change;
— negotiations and arrangements become useful when the individual or group exhibiting strong resistance faces painful consequences as a result of the change;
— manipulation and co-opting, used when all other techniques prove ineffective or are too expensive;
— overt or covert forcing when the time for implementation is vital and the change initiators have significant power.

Definitely, the catalogue of methods is not complete; it could be complemented by methods such as direct use and information, feedback, peer group influence, group discussion, changing informal norms, the appropriate management style or the methods of training, triggering crisis, diverting attention from the subject of change, influencing the indecisive people not integrated with the group or influencing the informal leaders.

The range of available methods of prevention of resistance to changes is extremely rich. It gives an opportunity to choose the best method for a given situation. It must be remembered that the method of prevention of resistance to changes cannot be selected without thorough analysis of the whole situation, thinking over the whole process properly and – first of all – without taking into consideration the needs of the whole organization and its particular members.

Conclusion.

Resistance is a natural condition occurring at the level of individuals, groups, whole organizations or societies in the face of a change. It is simply an almost inherent part of the change management process. That is why fighting with it or avoiding it seems to be pointless; it is better to try to understand the phenomenon – to learn its reasons, symptoms and possible solutions to overcome it. That will help to effectively and efficiently locate the occurring
situation in the process of change management and draw constructive conclusions, and with time it will also enhance the effectiveness of the whole process.

To sum up, resistance to changes should not be perceived as a negative phenomenon but as an opportunity for increasing the effectiveness of change process management.

Bibliography.