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Resistance to change and ways of reducing resistance in educational organizations

Derya Yılmaz [a] and Gökhan Kılıçoğlu [b] *

[a]Res. Ass., Osmangazi University Faculty of Education, Eskişehir, Turkey
[b]Phd.Can., Osmangazi University Institute of Educational Science, Eskişehir, Turkey

Abstract

This study aims to handle the concepts regarding pressures for organizational change, resisting forces and causes of resistance to change, and ways for school administrators to overcome resisting forces. Continuous developments and range of triggers force school organizations towards change initiatives. Even though change is implemented for positive reasons like adapting to volatile environment conditions and remaining competitive, organization members often react to change efforts negatively and resist change. Some common reasons for resistance to change within school organizations include interference with need fulfilment, selective perception, habit, inconvenience or loss of freedom, economic implications, security in the past, fear of the unknown, threats to power or influence, knowledge and skill obsolescence, organizational structure and limited resources. Six specific methods helping in overcoming resistance to change that school administrator can use are education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and co-optation, explicit and implicit coercion.
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1. Introduction

Educational organizations change overtime due to external pressures by the volatile environment around them. Indeed, it is essential to sustain stability of schools and give place to effective education. Hence, it is vital to contribute continuous improvement practices with changing conditions to achieve school effectiveness. Change practices in schools actually include different approaches to curriculum, management structures, educational programs, students and teachers having various backgrounds. In order to adjust these changes, schools are necessary to be flexible; be able to propose organizational strategies while facing with change (Rosenblatt, 2004).

Changing nature of technology and economy pose pressures on educational organizations to change their structural and functional characteristics. In parallel with global developments especially in the last quarter of the last century, changes concerning content and presentation of educational programs, educational technologies, learning-teaching process and the roles of teachers and students come forward. In fact, schools need to create more effective learning environments with responding to educational needs, generating knowledge, skills, attitudes and developing organizational strategies in order to ensure development of the individual and sustainability of social life for getting individuals ready for change considering the needs from outside or inside the education system (Gökçe, 2005; Rosenblatt, 2004).

Pressures on educational organizations to change exist presently and members of the schools are demanded for some responses. More specifically, attempts to change in schools lead to different responses from organization

members. One of the typical responses towards change in school organizations is resistance and many of the problems related to change concerns the forces resisting it while maintaining of the equilibrium in schools. The major issues concerning resistance to change are driving forces for organizational change, causes of resistance to change and ways of reducing resistance (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Hence, this study aims to cover the concepts regarding resistance to change in schools: pressures for organizational change, resisting forces or factors acting to inhibit change originated in internal and external environment of the school organization, causes of resistance to change and ways for school administrators as change agents to overcome resisting forces.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pressures for organizational change in schools

Due to complexity of events and rapidity of technologies in the environment, organizations are subject to many pressures for change. Continuous developments and range of triggers force organizations towards change initiatives. Indeed, these pressures on organizations to change emanate from external and internal environment of the organizations.

Forces encountered in turbulent external environment and dynamic internal environment are equally valid forces for educational organizations as well because non-profit organizations (e.g., schools) also undergo technological, structural, social and financial changes like the case of profit organizations (Levin, 1993). Globalization, developments in information and communication technology, economic crises, demographic changes dramatically forces human beings to change (Ragsdell, 2000). Actually, some main external triggers originated outside the organization can be ranked as law and regulations of the government, globalization of markets with adopting standards and values, demographic characteristics, social and political pressures created by main political and social events, and improvements in technology (Dawson, 2003; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

Internal forces come from inside the organization that encourage organizational change proposed by Leavitt (1964) are technology (e.g. plant, machinery and tools), primary task (e.g. the major field of business), people (e.g. human resources constituting the organization) and administrative structures (e.g. formalized lines of communication, formation of working procedures, managerial hierarchies, reward systems and disciplinary procedures). Therefore, it can be stated that internal forces for change come from both human resources and managerial behaviour or decisions (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). These external and internal factors are all related to speed, direction and outcomes of change in organizations (Dawson, 2003).

In school organizations, government intervention, society's values, changing technology, administrative processes and fulfilment of school members' needs are pressures on schools to change. Specifically, government has an important role in educational matters. That is, government's intervention in educational policy making through legislation which deals with right for education, equal educational opportunity, educational justice and agenda of the government for handicapped and economically disadvantaged. Moreover, society's values and school members' educational needs affect government legislation and in turn influence school organizations with updating coordination mechanisms and organizational design in education system, updating job designs for individuals and administrative processes in school organizations. Changing technology, improved equipment and facilities also improve productivity and competitiveness in schools (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). However, main purposes of change in schools come from external forces. In order to ensure the survival and future success of educational organizations, it is necessary to be readily adaptable to the external demands placed upon these organizations. Actually, schools should be properly prepared to face the demands of a changing environment and responsive to needs of the environment for change.

2.2. Resistance to organizational change

No matter how successfully or administratively perfect a proposed change may be, individuals in an organization implement or break the change due to representing a form of influence. Even though organizational change

generally can be initiated by managers or imposed by specific changes in policy and procedures or arose through external pressures; organizational change is management's attempt to have organization members to think, behave and perform differently (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). However, people differ with regard to their perception towards change; some of them may consider change with a lower tolerance (Carnall, 1999). That is, some organizational members embrace change initiatives readily and move it while others fight the change to the death with denying its necessity (Burke, 2008).

In organizations, resistance to change which concerns thought of the implications about change appears to be any attitude or behaviour indicating willingness to support or make a desired change (Mullins, 2005; Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2005). In fact, resistance to change is a resistance to loss of something that is valuable or loss of the known by moving to the unknown. Sometimes, people resist the imposition of change that is accepted as a universal truth (Burke, 2008). Nonetheless, resistance can be passive resignation or deliberate sabotage (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

In schools, resistance to change can also be faced when a change is introduced and school members are forced to practice this new state of being or acting with lack of choice. Furthermore, schools have to adapt to their environment and need to comfortably operate with the structures, policies and procedures that have been introduced by the environment. However, to ensure effectiveness, individuals in school organizations may prefer to focus on the routine things that they perform well and set up defences against change by resisting it. In addition, school members may reject change due to the fact that they believe it is not worth their time, effort and attention.

In order to understand the logic behind resistance to change performed in educational organizations, it is necessary to consider the kind of resistance proposed by Hambrick and Cannella (1989; cited in Burke, 2008). Specifically, resistance may be blind, political or ideological:

2.2.1. Blind resistance

A few people in an organization are afraid and intolerant of change regardless of what it may be with having knee-jerk reaction to change. In educational organizations, school members can also react defensively at first and not get used to the idea of change due to the fact that unknown is being discomforting. It is best to provide reassurance these individuals and let time to pass without putting pressure on them are two kinds of response that may be useful here. Therefore, getting used to new idea of change in school organization needs time.

2.2.2. Political resistance

Organization members having political resistance think that they will lose something of value to when the change is implemented, like loss of one's power base, position, and role in the organization, status, size of budget, even personal compensation. In these instances, change agent becomes a negotiator and the negotiation begins; that is, trading something of value with something else of value. Besides, some people also argue that change provide long term loss gain versus short term loss. In schools, teachers or school principals may think that implemented change will lead to loss of their position, power and/or role within other school members.

2.2.3. Ideological resistance.

Intellectually honest people can disagree about organizational change. Some may genuinely believe that the proposed change is ill-timed, will simply not work, and/or will cause more damage than improvement. That is to say, resistance to change results from intellectual differences in genuine beliefs, feelings or philosophies. To illustrate, teachers may feel that the proposed changes in the schools are wrong thing to do and violate their deeply held values. When they feel that the planned change is ill fated, they provide their logical reasons why they feel just like that and resist change. Under these circumstances, the change agent's strategy here is to gather more data, more facts to bolster the case for change and to attempt once again to persuade those. In this category of resistance, intellectually honest people can be influenced through building one's case with further documentation and sound reasoning.

2.3. Causes of resistance to change

Even though resistance to change can take many forms, it is difficult to identify the reasons for the resistance. The forces against change in work organizations include disregarding the needs and expectations of the organization members; providing insufficient information about the nature of change and not acknowledging the need for change. Therefore, people may exhibit fear and anxiety over such matters like job security, employment levels, loss of job satisfaction, different wage rates, loss of individual control over work and changes to working conditions (Mullins, 2005).

Despite the fact that change is implemented for positive reasons like adapting to volatile environment conditions and remaining competitive, organization members often react to change efforts negatively and resist change (Boohene & Williams, 2012). The main reason behind this negative reaction is due to pressure, stress and uncertainty coming with change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Some common reasons for resistance to change within organizations include interference with need fulfilment, selective perception, habit, inconvenience or loss of freedom, economic implications, security in the past, fear of the unknown, threats to power or influence, knowledge and skill obsolescence, organizational structure and limited resources (Gattiker, 1990; cited in Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Mullins, 2005; Powell & Posner, 1977; Robbins & Judge, 2009).

2.3.1. Interference with need fulfilment
Changes preventing people from fulfilment of economic, social, esteem and other needs may encounter with resistance. Thus, people resist changes that lower their income, job status and social relationships.

2.3.2. Selective perception
People process the provided information selectively in order not to change their point of view. Indeed, people hear what they want to hear and disregard any information threatening their perspective. In other words, people interpret an image of the real world with their own perception of reality which gives birth to a biased view of a particular situation and resistance to change occurs.

2.3.3. Habit
When changes are faced with, individuals may tend to re-act these changes due to accustom to their usual manner of behaving. Actually, people tend to respond situations in an accustomed manner. Since habits serve as means of security and comfort, proposed changes to habits may be resisted.

2.3.4. Inconvenience or loss of freedom
When change is seen as troublesome and reduce freedom of action with increased control, organization members may resist change implementations.

2.3.5. Economic implications
If change is perceived as reducing pay or other rewards, individuals are likely to resist change. People may want to maintain the status quo by establishing the patterns of working.

2.3.6. Security in the past
Individuals who have higher security needs resist change more than others because change threatens their sense of security. When people face with new and unfamiliar methods or difficult and frustrated occasions, they may reflect on past with a wish to retain old ways.

2.3.7. Fear of the unknown

If innovative or radical changes introduced without giving information about the nature of change, the organization members become fearful and anxious about change implications. In fact, change takes place of doubt and uncertainty because people like stability.

2.3.8. Threats to power or influence

Administrative and technological changes threatening power bases in the organization may lead to trigger resistance due to being seen as a threat to power or influence of certain groups in controlling over decisions, resources and information concepts. Specifically, intimidating changes may menace specialized groups in the organization. Reallocation of decision making authority could threaten long term power relations.

2.3.9. Knowledge and skill obsolescence

Organization members resist organizational changes when their knowledge and skills are obsolete. It is essential to state that knowledge is related to management while skills can be applied to any member of the organization.

2.3.10. Organizational structure

In organizations which have ideal bureaucracy with hierarchy of authority; division of labour and specialization, regulations and rules, some degree of structure are given to groups for fulfilling the organization's goals. However, this need would be dysfunctional to the organization with serving as a main factor for resistance to change.

2.3.11. Limited resources

Organizations not having available resources prefer to maintain their status quo since change requires resources like capital and people having appropriate skills and time. Inadequate resources may lead to abandon the desired changes.

2.4. Overcoming resistance to change

Even though organizational change is considered as alterations in technology, hierarchy or in structures in the organization, it is obvious that change has tremendous impact on individuals in the organization (Schein, 1980). However, the reason why many organizations fail to accomplish change initiatives is associated with underestimating the influence of change on the individual (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Therefore, neglecting psychological perceptions of employees toward change lead to failure of change initiatives in organizations (Devos, Buelens & Bouckenooghe 2007). Though, for successful change implementations, it is necessary to manage psychological transition of employees effectively (Armenakis & Bedian, 1999; Martin, Jones & Callan, 2005).

It is essential to realize that effective management of change is based on clear understanding of human behaviour in the organization. Due to the challenge of change, individuals may react with some emotions like uncertainty, frustration or fear and feel threatened and disoriented. Therefore, people often exhibit a defensive and negative attitude and resist to change initiatives. Because of being complex and psychological event, the power of change needs to be respected and managed effectively. In order to be successful, dedicated workforce and effective management of change are necessary in organizations. Besides, different impact of change on each person and nature of change should be considered (Mullins, 2005).

In school settings, defensive and negative attitudes may be displayed by school members and people may show uncertainty, fear and frustration about change initiatives. That is, change may influence individuals in educational organizations differently. Therefore, successful implementation of change demands positive action from school principals, and administrators are advised to prefer a contingency approach involving situational factors as in the following while dealing with resistance to change.

Six specific methods helping in overcoming resistance to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) that school administrators can use are education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and co-optation, explicit and implicit coercion.

2.4.1. Education and communication

Individuals in the school organization are objected to be educated about the nature of and need for change before implementing and the logic of change needs to be explained. When resistance is based on inaccurate and lack of information, this strategy seems work best.

2.4.2. Participation and involvement

Allowing people to planning, designing and implementing the changes provide school members to contribute ideas and advices that lead change. This strategy is useful when change initiators do not have all the information they need to design the changes and other members have important information and considerable power to resist.

2.4.3. Facilitation and support

With the goal of helping to deal with resistance by emotional and material help; people having hardships of change are actively listened by school administrators about their ideas, problems and complaints with using their ideas that have merit. That is, supportive principals make the work environment more pleasant and enjoyable for change process. This strategy is essentially utilized when school members are frustrated by work constraints and difficulties that are encountered in change process and have adjustment problems.

2.4.4. Negotiation and agreement

Incentives to actual or potential change resistors in the schools are offered in negotiation and agreement method. In fact, trade-offs for special benefits are arranged with these resistors and unblocking of the change initiatives is assured. This approach is preferred when someone in the school organization clearly loses something of value in change process and has power to resist.

2.4.5. Manipulation and co-optation

In order to reach the desired change, influencing other people in organization is attempted, the necessary information is provided and the required events for change are structured. When aforementioned tactics do not work and are seen as expensive, manipulation and co-optation approach is common.

2.4.6. Explicit and implicit coercion

Change initiators employ the force of their authority for acceptance of the change by people in organization. Resistors in the schools are threatened with undesirable situations if they do not go along the proposed changes. When speed is essential like in crisis situations and change agents have considerable power, this method may be used. However, it should be kept in mind that there are negative effects of using coercion such as frustration, fear, revenge and alienation which in turn may give birth to poor performance, dissatisfaction and turnover (Woodman & Pasmore, 1988).

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Changing nature of technology and economy force educational organizations to change as regards structural and functional aspects. Indeed, some major external triggers originated outside the school organizations can be ranked as law and regulations of the government, society's standards and values, changing technology, demographic characteristics, improvements in technology, administrative processes and school members' needs (Dawson, 2003; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). On the other hand, internal forces stem from inside the organizations fostering change proposed by Leavitt (1964) are technology, primary task, people and administrative structures. However, it is clear that main purposes of change in schools are from external forces. Specifically, government has a significant role in educational issues. Therefore, it is necessary to be readily adaptable to external demands placed upon schools in order to ensure the survival and future success.

Pressures on educational organizations for change lead members of the organizations to exhibit different responses. Indeed, individuals unconsciously respond to threats of change and develop habitual defence mechanisms to protect themselves from change and feelings of anxiety (O'Connor, 1993; Odham & Kleiner, 1990). Due to

involving going from the known to unknown and individuals' seeking a comfortable level of arousal and trying to maintain the state (Nadler, 1981), people differ as regards their ability and willingness to adapt organizational change (Darling, 1993). This is in turn leads to experiencing change in different ways with presentation of resistance to change in organizations (Carnall, 1986; Coghlan, 1993; Steinburg, 1992; Myers & Robbins, 1991).

The main reasons behind resistance to change within organizations, as well as in schools, include interference with need fulfilment, selective perception, habit, inconvenience or loss of freedom, economic implications, security in the past, fear of the unknown, threats to power or influence, knowledge and skill obsolescence, organizational structure and limited resources (Gattiker, 1990; cited in Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Mullins, 2005; Powell & Posner, 1977; Robbins & Judge, 2009).

It is significant to mention that effective management of change in school organizations is based on understanding of human behaviours with giving attention to psychological perceptions of organization members. Therefore, it is necessary to manage psychological transition of organization members effectively in order to attain successful change initiatives (Armenakis & Bedian, 1999; Martin, Jones & Callan, 2005). In addition, various impact of change on each person in schools and nature of change should be taken into account (Mullins, 2005).

In school settings, defensive and negative attitudes displayed by school members should be handled by school principals and administrators as change agents. Therefore, school administrators are advised to use specific methods, based on the situation, in order to overcome resistance to change in schools. Six specific methods helping in reducing resistance to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979) that school administrators can use are education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, negotiation and agreement, manipulation and co-optation, explicit and implicit coercion.

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